

The Shining Star Above The Heaven

Chapter 801 - 801: Investigation 2

[1,602 words]

The elf's eyes instantly became blank, and his body relaxed as he leaned against his seat. The moment the hypnotic technique successfully took control of the elf's mind, Aldrian asked him,

"Are you Frelix?"

"Yes," the elf answered without hesitation.

"Are you the one responsible for checking any food and drinks that come out from the kitchen, including those served to Empress Sylphia?"

"Yes."

"Did you put poison specifically in her drink?"

"No."

Aldrian narrowed his eyes. If the one responsible for the food and drinks was not the one who put in the poison, then the number of suspects became much wider. The poison could have been added by the person who directly made Sylphia's drink. It could also have been placed by someone outside the kitchen after the drink was prepared.

The possibilities were many, but he would look for the answer until the end of the night.

"Do you have any connection with the devils? Have you ever interacted with them in any form in the past?" the avatar asked again.

"I don't have any connection with the devils. I had a few encounters with them in the past, and every time I fought them. That is the only interaction I have ever had with the devils."

Aldrian nodded. "Do you know who personally brewed the tea for Empress Sylphia this morning and who prepared the wine for her at the banquet?"

"The one who brewed the tea was a maid named Loriene, and the one who prepared the wine specifically for Empress Sylphia at the banquet was Butler Elka. In fact, he is

the one responsible for the department that prepares all the wine for the banquet before I come for inspection, before the drinks are served to the guests."

"Could you bring the two of them here?"

"Yes." After that, Frelix took out a communication artifact from his drawer and spoke to the other side, asking for Lorie and Elka to be called. Aldrian also created a gap in his spatial barrier so the two incoming guests could enter. Two minutes later, two elves finally entered—one man and one woman.

The moment they entered, they were stunned when they saw another figure already inside the room.

"Excuse me, Sir Frelix, did you call us—" the male elf said, but before he could finish, both he and the female elf were already under Aldrian's hypnosis. Their gazes became blank, and they stood still as if they were puppets waiting for someone to move them.

The avatar turned his head toward them. "Come here," he said while pointing to the place beside him. Both of them walked over and stood at his side.

"Are your names Lorie and Elka?" the avatar asked.

"Yes, I'm Elka."

"Yes, I'm Lorie."

Both of them answered. Aldrian nodded and immediately asked the key question.

"Did you put poison into the drink specifically prepared for Empress Sylphia today?"

"No."

"Yes."

Aldrian's gaze turned to the butler, Elka, who had answered yes. Now that he already had his answer, he could focus on this man.

"Why did you do it, Elka? Do you work for someone else?"

"I did it because of an order from the higher-ups. They told me to put a thousand year black lily poison inside Empress Sylphia's drink. I work for one of the noble families, the Reinclad family, because my origin is from their territory. All this time, I have been their eyes and ears inside the imperial palace."

The avatar nodded in understanding. The Reinclad family was one of the families in the opposition faction. If this man was simply following orders from his superiors, then it was

almost certain that the opposition faction was behind all of this. No, he could say with certainty that they were, based on Grand Duke Freindor's feeling at the banquet.

"Do you have any collaborators inside the imperial palace? Others who act as spies for the opposition faction? Do any of them hold important positions?" the avatar asked again.

"There are several of them, but none hold high positions. In fact, I have the highest status among those from the opposition faction in the palace."

The avatar nodded, then took out an information crystal and directed it at Elka before giving the order.

"Reveal to me your name, your occupation, your real origin, what you did to the wine specifically prepared for Empress Sylphia, how you did it, and the reason you did it. Also, reveal the identities of all your friends or collaborators inside the imperial palace who act as spies for the opposition faction."

Elka then began to do as he was ordered, speaking without reservation. He revealed everything in detail, and all of the information he provided became valuable evidence.

After Elka finished giving all the information, the avatar took the information crystal and said to Elka and Lориene,

"Elka and Lориene, you may leave this room. Once you are outside, you will forget about our meeting here. You will forget that you entered this room and were called by Frelix. You will remember nothing about what we discussed."

After that, they walked out of the room, and the avatar turned to Frelix.

"Frelix, the same applies to you. You will forget about our meeting here and you will remember nothing about what we discussed after I disappear."

A split second later, he was already gone, and moments later Frelix's eyes regained clarity as he blinked a few times.

He turned his head left and right in confusion. He felt something strange, but he did not know what it was. After a few moments, he shrugged and returned to thinking about the other problems he had been considering before meeting the avatar, mainly regarding the banquet. The strangeness in his mind and heart slowly faded and was forgotten, buried by the strong hypnotic technique that had overwritten his memory.

Lориene and Elka outside felt the same. At first, they were confused about why they were in front of Frelix's room. However, their confusion quickly turned to normal, and they continued their own business without thinking about what had just happened to them.

They did not even question why they were standing in front of Frelix's room. They simply assumed they must have passed by and forgotten what they were about to do.

At this moment, the avatar had already returned to the main palace building. He was now searching for another place, the location where Baron Stargis was being held.

However, finding that place was not something he could simply ask anyone about. The location was likely known only to a few people. The one who might know for certain was, of course, the Empress herself.

Since he did not want to waste any time and it was the easiest way, he decided to meet her directly.

He decided to cancel his stealth technique and walked toward the Empress's private room, the place where she discussed matters with Sylphia this morning.

When he arrived in front of the room and met the two imperial guards, he asked one of them,

"Is Her Majesty, Empress Vilena, inside?"

The two guards knew that he was Empress Sylphia's guardian, and since he was looking for Empress Vilena, it was likely related to the incident at the banquet. One of them replied,

"My apologies, but Her Majesty has not yet returned here, sir."

"Do you know where Her Majesty might be?" the avatar asked.

The guard seemed hesitant as he looked at his companion. Seeing the hesitation, the avatar understood that she was probably somewhere the guard was reluctant to mention. Realizing this, he decided to press further.

"I was ordered to investigate the incident tonight under Empress Sylphia's command, and Empress Vilena has already given her approval. So, could you please help me by telling me where Empress Vilena might be?"

The guard finally nodded in understanding before answering.

"Although I don't know exactly where Her Majesty is, since I haven't heard anything about her location since the banquet, I can make a guess. I think at this moment, she is in the dungeon where Baron Stargis is being held."

The avatar nodded. "Could you take me there?"

The guard nodded. "I can, sir."

After that, the guard guided Aldrian to the deeper part of the palace. They walked for quite some time, leaving the main palace and passing through several separate buildings before finally arriving near a dark cave located in a rather remote area, far from any other structures.

The cave was guarded by several imperial guards, and one of them was even someone at the low pseudo immortal stage!

The strongest among them, an elf with a burn scar on his face, looked at the avatar and the guard leading him. As they approached, he decided to stop them.

"Stop. What is your purpose for coming to this restricted area?"

He did not recognize the avatar, as he had never seen him or Empress Sylphia directly. Because of that, he assumed the guard had brought a stranger to this place.

The guard bowed his head toward the man.

"My apologies, Sir Barmun, but this is Empress Sylphia's personal guardian, and he is looking for Her Majesty. I thought she might be here, so I brought him. He came with the intent to assist in the investigation, and Her Majesty has already given her approval based on this sir's explanation."

The elf named Barmun raised his eyebrows and looked at the avatar. He observed him for a moment, and to his surprise, he could not sense any cultivation from him. However, as the Empress's guardian, this man had to be strong.

The fact that he could not sense anything from him likely meant that the avatar had concealed his cultivation so completely that even a pseudo-immortal cultivator like him could not detect it.

After thinking for a moment, he nodded.

"Alright. Follow me. You may return to your post," he said to the avatar and the guard.

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Chapter 802 - 802: Investigation 3

[1,525 words]

Aldrian's avatar then followed Barmun inside the cave, and as they stepped deeper, they only had the illumination crystal as the source of light on one side of the passage. The path was wide enough for three people to stand side by side, and the height was about three meters.

The avatar observing the path knew that this cave was artificially created as they continued walking downward. The deeper they went, the stuffier the air became, which was quite strange because this place was right under the World Tree, where the environment should have been rich in oxygen and freshness.

It was because of the formation's barrier at the entrance that the air was like this, as it also acted as a seal to prevent anyone inside from escaping. After walking for more than a kilometre and passing several guards and trap formations, they finally arrived at a pair of double doors guarded by another two guards.

The two guards, upon seeing Barmun, straightened their bodies as he gave his order.

"Open the door."

The guards did not waste any time and instantly touched the cave wall beside them, injecting their energy into it. This was the mechanism to open the doors, and after they channeled their energy, the double doors slowly opened.

The sound of the opening doors was soon followed by a foul smell from inside, mixed with the strong iron stench of blood. The avatar could also hear groaning voices coming from within, and he knew what kind of place this was.

Barmun continued walking as the double doors opened. They passed many small cells filled with prisoners from different races.

"This is a special place for specific offenses. It is the worst place for those who have committed capital crimes, for once they enter this place, death is almost certain. Besides being caged, they must also endure torture every day," Barmun said.

The avatar said nothing, and they kept walking until they reached another passage with several doors on both sides of the cave walls. The avatar could hear the screams of a few figures from behind those doors, but they ignored them and continued until Barmun stopped in front of one door.

Dong, dong, dong.

"Excuse me, Your Majesty. My apologies if I disturbed your time, but I brought Empress Sylphia's guardian here. He said that he was looking for you," Barmun said after lightly knocking on the door a few times.

There was a brief silence before the door finally opened. It was opened by a masked man whose cultivation was at the low pseudo-immortal stage, the same as Barmun's. He was the one responsible for interrogating and torturing prisoners.

"Come in," the masked man said.

Barmun then turned his head to the avatar.

"You can enter by yourself. I will go back to my post," he said before leaving. The avatar did not hesitate to enter the room.

Once inside, the masked man closed the door. The avatar finally saw Empress Vilena, who looked completely different from her elegant and refined self. At this moment, she wore a black dress that accentuated her body, and her long hair was tied in a bun, making her look extremely alluring. There were bloodstains on her face, and he thought the black dress was also meant to hide the stains on her clothes.

She no longer looked like an empress but rather a punisher. In front of her, Baron Stargis was already in a pitiful state. His face was covered with injuries, and blood trickled from his forehead, lips, and cheeks. His chest was bare, and several spikes were stabbed into his body, carefully placed to avoid his vital parts. A pool of blood had already formed beneath him as it kept dripping from those wounds.

However, despite the gruesome sight, the avatar's expression behind the mask did not change. He had already seen far worse scenes from the memories of his real body. Empress Vilena, seeing him approach, finally let out a sigh.

"Did Her Majesty, Empress Sylphia, send you here, or is this your own initiative? Because I don't recall asking for Her Majesty's help yet," she asked.

"This is my own initiative. Tonight's incident is a major conspiracy that has crossed the red line of His Majesty Aldrian the Great, and I intend to resolve it tonight. This comes after what I discovered within Her Majesty's body, and I hope that Empress Vilena can assist me," the avatar replied, causing Empress Vilena to frown in confusion.

"Inside Empress Sylphia's body? Is there something wrong with her? What did you discover within Her Majesty?"

"Empress Sylphia has been poisoned with a Thousand Year Black Lily poison."

His answer shocked both the empress and the masked man. A chill ran through their hearts as horror filled their expressions. The Thousand Year Black Lily poison was an odourless, deadly toxin with a mortality rate of ninety five percent once consumed.

Once someone consumes it, the poison spreads throughout the body, especially to the victim's vital organs, regardless of dose. The toxin acts like a virus that replicates inside

the victim, but unlike a virus it is a deadly substance that destroys the victim's internal organs without their awareness.

The poison also contains an anesthetic property that prevents victims from realizing they have been poisoned. Its effect is not immediate, the time it takes to activate depends on the dose consumed. The larger the dose, the faster the poison takes effect.

By the time the victim's internal organs are destroyed beyond repair, it is already too late to save them. The anesthetic effect then disappears, and they finally feel agonizing pain until they die.

Because of these properties, combined with its odourless and traceless nature, this poison is a favored weapon among assassins on the elven continent. The delayed effect makes investigation and detection extremely difficult.

Fortunately, the black lily that serves as the main ingredient for this poison only grows on this continent, and it is quite rare. However, because of that, the cure for this poison is also difficult to find and just as rare. The imperial family possesses only a limited supply of the antidote, but even then, if the victims are already in the fatal phase, they still have no way to save them.

"What?! She was poisoned by a Thousand Year Black Lily poison?! Quick, we have to cure her as fast as possible before it's too late! I will look into—"

"Calm down, Your Majesty. Fortunately, I have already removed the poison from her body completely. There is no danger anymore, so Your Majesty doesn't need to worry," the avatar said to calm the panicked empress.

Empress Vilena was stunned for a moment before letting out a long sigh of relief. Still, she looked at the avatar with concern.

"Are you sure there's no poison left in her body? That poison is truly tricky and deadly to remove, and its nature is troublesome since it completely mixes with the bloodstream," she asked.

"I'm sure. I have my own way to cure any poison, and I have already checked Empress Sylphia's body thoroughly."

Empress Vilena sighed again and nodded. "Alright, if you say so."

She wanted to say more about the poison, but Aldrian spoke before she could.

"So, what about Your Majesty's investigation? What did you get from this person?" the avatar asked as he looked at Baron Stargis. The empress turned to the baron and frowned.

"We tried to search his memories, but it seems someone put a mind seal on him. The seal is quite fragile and will take time to break, so we chose traditional methods. However, he really did not want to tell anything. He has a strong will to keep information even after several torture methods. It is still too early to conclude that we got nothing, as we have only tried a few methods and still have many more to try on him."

"We will see if he can hold on until tomorrow before we use other mental techniques like hypnotism, although that might break his mind and turn him into a fool, leaving us with nothing. That is the last choice, however," she said.

Aldrian nodded and walked toward Baron Stargis. The baron's expression blank as if he no longer cared about anything. It was as though he had already given up, and even death now would not trouble him.

However, how could he die right now? He was an important piece of evidence, after all.

"Well, let's use my method then. It will be much quicker," the avatar said before placing his hand on Baron Stargis's forehead. He stayed like that for a few seconds.

Empress Vilena, knowing what Aldrian intended to do, wanted to warn him not to be too forceful, but she was stunned when he suddenly lifted his hand from the baron's forehead.

'Did he give up breaking the seal, or...?' She was unsure, but then she saw Baron Stargis finally react and turn his gaze toward Aldrian. At the same time, she noticed Aldrian walking toward the nearby table. The avatar took out an information crystal before placed it on the table, directed it toward Baron Stargis, and then returned to the baron's side.

Finally, he cast his hypnotic technique, and the effect became immediately visible to both the empress and the masked man, leaving them in shock.

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Chapter 803 - 803: Investigation 4

[1,489 words]

Baron Stargis already lifted his head to look at the avatar as he could sense that the mind seal inside his brain had actually broken. However, he remained silent as he

watched the avatar seem to prepare for something before returning to him and suddenly casting a hypnotic technique.

As Aldrian's hypnotic technique took over, Baron Stargis, who could also feel the change, showed a slight shift in expression as his gaze trembled for a moment before becoming blank again.

Empress Vilena and the masked man looked at Baron Stargis in astonishment. Did he use a kind of hypnotic technique that easily? Did that mean he managed to break the mind seal inside Baron Stargis? That mind seal was also the thing that made using hypnosis risky, as the seal itself could be affected by the hypnotic process.

The fragile seal inside Baron Stargis might have been triggered, which could result in several possibilities, the worst being death, something the Empress had tried to prevent by destroying the seal. However, they were still working on it and needed more time because of how fragile the seal was.

Even if they destroyed the seal, their hypnotic method would still face a side effect, as their hypnosis could damage the target's brain.

The elves did not have high compatibility with mental techniques such as illusion or hypnosis. That was why, most of the time, if they wanted to use hypnosis, they had to rely on external means like an artifact.

The imperial family had a way to hypnotize someone using a mixed of spiritual herbs that could affect and even control a person's mind. However, their method had a major risk when used on strong willed individuals, because such people could resist the hypnosis with all their strength.

If they kept fighting the hypnotic effect, their minds could break down and they could be left permanently retard.

That is why they chose more traditional methods after learning there was a mind seal inside Baron Stargis's brain while also working to destroy it. Although the traditional approach was more troublesome, it was much safer for keeping Baron Stargis alive. They could simply administer a healing elixir if the baron neared death and then continue to torture him.

"Why did you try to kill Empress Sylphia?" the avatar asked directly. Empress Vilena and the masked man no longer focused on the hypnosis; they concentrated on the answer Baron Stargis would give.

"I had to do it because my family was being held hostage by a group of mysterious figures. My wife and my daughter were in their hands, and to free them I had no choice," he replied in a flat tone.

Hearing the answer, Empress Vilena widened her eyes in shock before gritting her teeth. Fury rose in her heart, for it confirmed her suspicion that Baron Stargis had been ordered by someone else. Yet to learn that his family had been kidnapped truly shocked her, as there had been no news about it at all.

'No wonder he came to the banquet alone without his wife. Usually, he would attend such occasions with her,' she thought.

"What happened to your family? Explain it in detail," the avatar ordered.

"Today, my family was suddenly attacked by a group of mysterious figures. They killed many of my men before taking my wife and daughter. My wife tried to resist, which made one of them break her hand."

"We were powerless against them, as they were much stronger than any of us. One of them then explained that if I wanted to get my family back, I had to do what they told me. They ordered me to stab Empress Sylphia using a dagger they had already prepared for the banquet.

"That was the only order he gave before placing the mind seal inside me. They disappeared afterward without giving any further information."

Baron Stargis then stopped speaking.

Aldrian nodded. "Do you have any clue to the identity of that group of mysterious figures? Did anything appear in your mind when they attacked your family?"

"The clues I could gather are that the members of that group used varied elements, but some among them could use darkness laws. I also recognized a few of them from their attack styles." Baron Stargis replied.

The avatar raised his eyebrows while Empress Vilena narrowed her eyes.

"Darkness laws? Dark elves? But the dark elves did not involve themselves in the conflict between the imperial and the opposition factions. They keep to their territory in the south." Vilena said.

The avatar considered this and looked at the Empress. "That may be only what appears on the surface. Who knows what is happening behind the scenes? Right now, the side that stands to gain the most from this conspiracy is the opposition faction. I suspect the dark elves are already in league with Grand Duke Freindor. Even if their relationship is only transactional, their actions have already drawn them into this matter." But then he shrugged.

"But whatever the case, I will gather all the evidence tonight so we can sweep the opposition faction away in one fell swoop. The sooner this is resolved, the sooner Grand

Duke Freindor and his lackeys can be brought to judgment." His words made the Empress raise her eyebrows.

"Excuse me, Sir Guardian, but don't you think you are being too hasty in wanting to gather all the evidence tonight? As much as I want Grand Duke Freindor to be punished as soon as possible, he still has plenty of support, and he may have many hidden cards he has yet to play. If we are not careful, we might be the ones harmed by our own carelessness," she said.

"Also, you seem eager to pursue Grand Duke Freindor as quickly as possible. Is this entire conspiracy his doing? Do you know something we don't, Sir Guardian?"

"I have already discovered who gave the poison to Empress Sylphia and their connection to the opposition faction," the avatar replied. "I have to say, Your Majesty, your palace has some rats lurking without your knowledge. With that in mind, there is no way Grand Duke Freindor is unaware of it. All of this conspiracy appears to be connected to him."

Empress Viena was stunned. She could not help but feel astonished. He already knew who had poisoned Sylphia?!

That was also the very matter she had wanted to discuss earlier. If the poison had entered Sylphia's body, then it likely came through a drink prepared in the palace kitchen. If that was the case, then there truly were traitors among them.

She had long suspected that there might be spies from the opposition faction within the palace due to certain past circumstances, but she had yet to uncover the rats. They seemed extremely careful, ensuring they were never discovered by her surveillance.

Now, this man—who had not even spent a full day in the empire—had already found the traitors?

She took a deep breath, feeling genuinely fortunate to have someone like him as an ally. She did not know how he managed to do it so easily, but the most important thing was that they could finally solve this problem. If he could handle it more effectively, how could she possibly refuse his methods and assistance?

The avatar then turned to Baron Stargis once again and continued his questioning.

"You said you recognized some of the group's attack styles. Who were they?"

"What I know are the hammer roots techniques of the Bailan family, the wind-element movement of the Rudien family, and the wind arrows of the Verdume family. After thinking it through, I believe this is all part of a larger plan orchestrated by Grand Duke Freindor. He is likely the mastermind behind the attack on my family."

Empress Vilena nodded in understanding, letting out a sigh before saying to the avatar, "Now I no longer doubt that this is indeed the work of the opposition faction. Those families all follow Grand Duke Freindor. With all the pieces connected, I understand now what he has in mind, and why he targeted Empress Sylphia."

The avatar nodded, then he asked Baron Stargis again, "Why do you feel such fury toward Empress Sylphia? Shouldn't your anger be directed at those who hurt your family?"

"I couldn't help but blame Empress Sylphia's visit for the misfortune that befell me. I know that because of her visit, it triggered Grand Duke Freindor to act. He used me as his pawn to get rid of the imperial family I had chosen to serve. I truly fear what is about to come, the fate of my family, and I regret that I am powerless to do anything."

"My family is in their hands, and I can only trade my life for theirs, if they keep their word to return my wife and daughter."

The avatar then looked at the Empress. "For me, this is enough. With the plan I have in mind, at most by the day after tomorrow Grand Duke Freindor's reputation will fall across the empire, and we can punish the entire opposition faction in one go."

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Empress Vilena raised her eyebrows at how confident this guardian was.

"What is your plan, Sir Guardian? To make that bastard lose his reputation the day after tomorrow is quite ambitious, I have to say," she asked.

"I know that Your Majesty is already suspicious about the opposition faction's connection with the devils. Well, actually, that is true. The opposition faction indeed has connections with the devils, especially Grand Duke Freindor. He has been working with them all this time, and most of his actions were carried out with their help," the avatar said.

Empress Vilena was stunned, but her face turned solemn. "Do you have strong proof that they are working with the devils? I have been suspicious of their connection with the devils, but I have not found any strong proof of it."

"However, recently my troops started uncovering the devils' connections hidden in the capital, and we found some clues that might lead to the connection between some

nobles and the devils. We just need more time to unveil it before we can drag those involved to the execution platform." Empress Vilena then narrowed her eyes.

"That's why, what kind of proof have you found? We might share the same view that they have connections with the devils, but it is still only our verbal conjecture. We do not have any solid proof to show to the populace about the devils."

The avatar smirked behind his mask. "If we don't have any solid proof to show the populace, we could just create one. One that will make the populace hate Grand Duke Freindor or anyone who helped him."

Empress Vilena looked confused. "How?"

"I will tell Your Majesty after we get out of this place. First we need to release Baron Stargis. I will not place the blame on him for trying to kill my empress given his circumstances. He could serve as solid proof to show the world." But then the avatar shook his head as if disappointed.

"Grand Duke Freindor's plan this time revealed too many flaws we can take advantage of. It only shows how desperate he is right now. For him to send so many attackers to Baron Stargis's manor is essentially equivalent to revealing their identities because of the technique they used. That is why the only way for them to block any information about themselves is to place a mind seal inside Baron Stargis."

"It seems Grand Duke Freindor did not care even if his plan was exposed. The only thing he needed to accomplish was one purpose when he attended the banquet, to create an alibi, but behind that was his true goal: to kill Empress Sylphia. He wants to turn public opinion and even many powers across the world against the imperial family. Even if we discovered that Grand Duke Freindor was behind all of this, it would already be too late."

"We could do nothing to flip the situation around because public opinion is already against us and even hostile because of the death of Empress Sylphia. If we try to put the blame on him then, others will see that we are only trying to find an excuse and evade responsibility." After the avatar finished his analysis, he smiled.

"However, the higher Grand Duke Freindor flies, the harder he will fall. He will not know what will come to him the day after, as he must think we are still busy investigating the assassination attempt. He has surely already prepared to spread the news of Empress Sylphia's death the moment he hears of her passing."

Empress Vilena nodded and sighed again. "Still, my family will suffer quite a backlash tomorrow for the assassination attempt alone, even if Empress Sylphia's poisoning plan failed. Because the attacker was from the imperial faction, the populace will see that I did not do a good job keeping Her Majesty Sylphia safe. I can already imagine that

Grand Duke Freindor will take full advantage of it once he realizes he could not kill Empress Sylphia."

"Not for long. He will fall from the height, and he will not realize it until it is too late. For now, Your Majesty can act as if you are still investigating the assassination attempt. Give Grand Duke Freindor and the opposition faction a false sense of accomplishment, and we will hit them hard later," the avatar replied.

After that, Aldrian's avatar and Empress Vilena left the dungeon while Baron Stargis was treated. He had already lost consciousness after Aldrian released his hypnosis. The avatar and Empress Vilena then discussed what they needed to do the next day.

While they discussed plans for tomorrow, Grand Duke Freindor was on his way back to his territory. Inside the carriage moving toward the warp gate, Brein, his son who sat beside him, asked, "Father, is this okay? I mean, is it truly okay to bet everything on this plan? What if they somehow uncover everything and what we did tonight backfires on us? Our punishment could be worse because we killed Aldrian the Great's fiancée."

Grand Duke Freindor smiled as he looked at the passing scenery.

"If that time comes, it will already be too late for them. At that point, whatever they say will be nothing more than an attempt to escape their situation. Aldrian the Great himself will see it as the imperial family's failure to keep his fiancée safe. Although he might be suspicious of me or the opposition faction, as long as there is no evidence, there is nothing to worry about," he replied.

Brein nodded, but he still wore an uncertain expression.

"I see," he said. He was not sure because there were many flaws in their plan. He could only hope it would work according to what his father had in mind.

"Just do not think too much about it. As long as the plan works, we can breathe a sigh of relief. Do your duty and do not speak of this matter to anyone, not even your mother," Grand Duke Freindor said.

Brein nodded, and his expression relaxed as he forced himself into positive thinking. Just as his father had said, if their plan worked everything the imperial family did would be for naught.

Grand Duke Freindor also did not dwell on the possibility of failure. He believed his plan was clever enough that even Aldrian the Great would not do anything to him. The assassination attempt on Empress Sylphia was only a cover for something far bigger.

The true show was the poison that was already inside her body. The poison would take effect at midnight, and with her low cultivation she would surely die. When the news of her death broke, populace hostility toward the imperial family would explode..

This would be seen as another plot by Baron Stargis that had failed to kill Empress Sylphia at the banquet, and the imperial family would be judged for failing to keep her safe.

The imperial faction would suffer a devastating blow because the ones who killed Empress Sylphia came from their own faction, and the family would have great difficulty explaining themselves to the populace.

Once she was dead, his plan would be complete and what came next would be much easier. He would ride the wave and make it grow until even the imperial family could do nothing.

What they could do, however, was relent their position as the sovereign family of the Verdyn Empire under heavy pressure from many sides. Even Aldrian the Great himself would be unable to do anything but follow the tide of public opinion.

With him losing his fiancée, even if he somehow sensed a hidden conspiracy behind her death and pointed the blame toward him, Aldrian the Great still could not act. All the evidence would still point to the imperial family's faction, and he would not make a move based on empty assumptions.

Thinking that way, Grand Duke Freindor did not worry too much. He would simply enjoy each passing hour until the next morning, imagining the imperial family in chaos. They would try their best to hide the fact that Empress Sylphia had been poisoned, but in the end, their efforts would be futile.

Empress Sylphia's death was not something that could be hidden. It would come out soon enough, for he had his own eyes and ears inside the palace. The moment he received word that the imperial family was in turmoil over Empress Sylphia's death, he would be the one to spread the news further.

He could hardly wait for tomorrow to come.

As Grand Duke Freindor imagined his future and his carriage moved through the street, unbeknown to him, a group of people in black robes stood at the side of the street, observing. Once the carriage passed, they followed naturally, without arousing suspicion.

The next day, just as many had predicted, news of what had happened at the banquet caused an uproar in the capital. The news soon spread across the empire, and even other powers heard of it.

The game was on.

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Chapter 805 - 805: Odd

[1,534 words]

The news about what happened at the banquet had already spread across the entire empire by noon, and people were already talking about it. The news, of course, was fueled by the opposition faction, who even added exaggerated details to make the imperial family look bad while making Grand Duke Freindor appear good.

The populace, who believed that the imperial family could gain the support of Aldrian the Great, began to criticize them harshly, even those who had previously remained neutral. The reputation of Aldrian the Great as a hero was not small; everyone wanted the best for their hero, especially for those he loved.

Most elves on the Continent of Elves felt honoured that Aldrian the Great had chosen an elf to become his main wife and empress. They also felt proud that the first continent Empress Sylphia visited outside the Barisan Continent was the Continent of Elves. With her visit, their empire's reputation would soar, showing the world that Aldrian the Great regarded them as special.

However, hearing that she had almost been killed at the banquet by someone from the imperial faction truly shocked and infuriated them. How could anyone dare to do such a thing? For something like this to happen during her first visit outside the continent, and inside the imperial palace no less, made many question the imperial family's competence.

How could someone from the imperial faction attempt to assassinate Empress Sylphia? What had really happened? With the story of Grand Duke Freindor saving her spreading alongside the incident, the effect on the populace became even greater than before. Even now, the matter had begun to draw reactions from foreign powers.

Since many wanted to maintain a good image before Aldrian the Great, they also voiced their opinions, which naturally went against the Silvarin imperial family. Some were even prepared to abandon the Verdyn Empire if Aldrian the Great decided to act against them.

The pressure on the imperial family grew heavier within just a few hours, far worse than anything in the past. Many conversations today ended with the same conclusion: the

imperial family was incompetent, and Grand Duke Freindor was the one worthy to replace them.

Inside the imperial palace, Empress Vilena was with Sylphia and Aldrian's avatar in her private workroom. Despite her powerful cultivation, Empress Vilena looked tired as she read the report given to her by her informant. The effect of last night's incident was truly immense, and the pressure she now faced was even greater than when she had only needed to deal with the opposition faction.

She looked at Sylphia and let out a sigh.

"All this pressure comes from a single assassination attempt, yet its effect is overwhelming. The number of people criticizing me keeps growing, and even some foreign powers that once maintained good relations with me are now showing that they will remain silent if Aldrian the Great decides to act against us."

"I must say, His Majesty Aldrian the Great's influence is truly extraordinary at this moment. Many have turned their backs on me, and I can hardly find a way out of this situation."

"If the poison plot had succeeded, I cannot imagine how chaotic the empire would have become, or what my own fate would be. Perhaps it would be better to step down from the throne today, though that would mean giving that bastard exactly what he wants."

She then turned her gaze toward the avatar.

"Well, that would be the case under normal circumstances, of course. Fortunately, Your Majesty's guardian here is helping me handle the problem. It is true that the pressure from this incident makes it difficult for me to concentrate on how to resolve the assassination attempt and the growing unrest. I know we would keep losing support by the hour without an appropriate way to escape it."

Sylphia smiled and took a sip of her hot tea. The tea had already been checked for poison. After last night's event, they did not want to be caught off guard twice.

"Like I said, my guardian here can solve many problems. I'm glad that we can assist Your Majesty in handling this matter. The pressure might be heavy for now, but Your Majesty must endure at least for today." Sylphia then turned to look at the avatar.

"Is there any problem with your plan at this moment?" she asked.

"No, Your Majesty. Everything is still going according to plan. The Dark Saber group has already completed their part, and now we just have to wait for the next event to unfold. Tonight, the empire will be in another uproar," the avatar replied, earning a nod from Sylphia.

Empress Vilena looked at the avatar and felt thankful for his help. Even though he was only at the pseudo-immortal establishment stage, his resourcefulness made him a great help to her.

While Empress Vilena endured the pressure from the many opinions against her, elsewhere, Grand Duke Freindor sat inside his study in his manor. After returning to his territory last night, he had done nothing specific except wait for morning to come.

He was also waiting for information from his spies within the imperial family, news that would confirm Empress Sylphia's death. He had already prepared his next move for the moment that confirmation arrived.

However, strangely, the message he received was not what he had expected. Instead, he was told that Empress Sylphia appeared perfectly fine, as if nothing had happened to her. This made him question the reliability of his spy inside the palace. Had the spy failed his mission, or was there something else going on?

Although news of the assassination attempt had already spread across the empire, the effect was still not what he wanted or expected. If Empress Sylphia had truly died, he was certain the impact would have been far greater. He was confident that if his spy had done the job properly, there was no way Sylphia could have survived.

All this time, the spies inside the imperial palace had been reliable. Thanks to them, the opposition faction always knew what was happening within the palace and even managed to slip devils inside. That was how they had once created an incident in which devils killed several people within the palace.

The spies had worked for the opposition faction for a long time and had always done their jobs well. That was why it truly confused him that Empress Sylphia was still alive. They should have already placed the poison in her drink, and he had personally seen her drink her wine at the banquet without the slightest hint of suspicion.

Since he did not know what was really happening inside the imperial palace or Sylphia's true condition, there was no way he could spread news of her death. Doing so would be suicide, because spreading such a rumor would be the same as painting a target on his back.

If he spread the rumor while Empress Sylphia was still alive, she would know that someone had deliberately prepared the rumor beforehand. And if she decided to investigate seriously, with the support of Aldrian the Great, he would be discovered in no time.

'Did the spies betray us and give false information?' the grand duke thought.

Betrayal was something normal to him, so it was also a possibility. But if that were the case, it would cause serious trouble. It would mean that the imperial family already knew about his schemes and could make a move against him.

However, the problem was that the imperial family seemed quite passive at the moment and had not done anything to him. That contradicted what they were supposed to do if they had truly discovered his plan.

'Is the imperial family planning something? Is that why they haven't made a move yet?' As he thought about it seriously, he suddenly heard a knock on the door.

"Come in," he said before the door opened, revealing his butler entering the room in a hurry. Seeing his usually composed butler so rushed made him wonder what had happened. The butler leaned in and whispered something in his ear for a few seconds, causing Freindor's expression to tighten.

"What? Are you sure about that?" he asked, frowning as he looked at his butler.

"I'm not mistaken, my lord. I've already verified it myself, and it's true. Right now, many people are coming to those places to confirm it on their own. I've sent some of our men to control the situation, but I don't think it will be enough. Word has already spread, and more people keep gathering there as we speak," the butler replied.

Without another word, Grand Duke Freindor stood and walked out of the manor. He took to the sky with his butler, heading toward the outskirts of the city where the Freindor family's manor was located. As they flew, he noticed several others flying in the same direction, which made him grit his teeth.

After a few moments, they arrived at a forested area near the city, where a large crowd had already gathered. Everyone was surrounding a quite big, hole like underground cave. Many people seems were trying to enter a cave, but the Freindor family's guards were blocking the entrance. Even so, they seemed overwhelmed, and the crowd pressing forward looked furious.

Seeing this, Grand Duke Freindor clenched his jaw and approached them.

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Chapter 806 - 806: Found Out?

[1,568 words]

As Grand Duke Freindor landed not far from the crowd that seemed to be trying to break into the cave, many people turned their heads toward him. Normally, they would look at him with respect and even lower themselves. However, at this moment, there was nothing on their faces that showed respect toward him.

Instead, they appeared tense, angry, and uncertain, wondering if what they saw and heard about this place was true, just as the information had said.

"What is the reason so many people have gathered here? I heard there was a commotion," Grand Duke Freindor asked.

One of them decided to take a step forward, and the moment Grand Duke Freindor saw this figure, he raised his eyebrows.

"To think that the leader of the dark elves is here. As expected, even I couldn't truly sense your presence. But why would you be here?" he said as a black-robed elf revealed his face—a middle-aged elf with dark skin and the cultivation of a middle pseudo-immortal stage. He was the leader of the dark elf tribe located in the southern region of the continent.

Regnor Ian Revinver.

"I just wanted to visit you personally to discuss some matters. But after I arrived in the city, I heard something interesting instead, and I would like Grand Duke Freindor to enlighten us so there will be no speculation among the populace," Leader Regnor said.

"What is it that the leader wants me to enlighten?" Grand Duke Freindor asked. At this moment, he tried to compose himself, hoping that this dark elf would not ask about the matter he feared most.

"This cave here..." Leader Regnor pointed toward the cave on the ground. "Are you aware that this place was actually a hideout of the devils? I heard information that the devils' hideout had been discovered from an unknown source. Because this is not a trivial matter, as it concerns the devils, I decided to check it myself. And I have to say, Grand Duke Freindor, that I had some questions arise in my mind after entering this cave."

Leader Regnor then took another step forward. "I found this inside..." He took out a scroll from his storage ring and showed it to the grand duke. "This scroll contains records of the dealings the devils conducted within the empire, including the nobles who worked with them so they could establish a foundation here."

"From this scroll, I also discovered that your family, in fact, has a hidden connection with the devils."

The Valian family's guards, who had been blocking anyone from entering the cave, were stunned when they saw Leader Regnor holding something taken from inside.

In fact, they had not even known that this robed man was the leader of the dark elves. Using the excuse of danger and claiming that the matter was the family's responsibility, they had successfully driven out the people who had entered the cave to inspect it.

They were certain that no one had taken anything from the cave, so how could this happen?

The people nearby, who had just arrived, showed expressions of shock when they heard what was said.

Grand Duke Freindor had a connection with the devils?!

Grand Duke Freindor's heart turned cold the moment he heard what the scroll contained. Even now, this was the first time he had heard that the devils possessed something like that. Of course, he knew this place was a hidden den of the devils, as he had dealings with them himself.

He would close his eyes to their operations within the empire, and in return, they would help him seize the throne. It was a win-win situation.

However, his mind was in chaos at this moment because—

'How could there be something left in this place? I already swept this cave clean of the devils' traces and even destroyed it, so how?!' the grand duke shouted inside his head.

Since the disappearance of the devils across the continent, he had visited several of their hideouts to meet them, but he had found none. He then concluded that, because of the strange heavenly lightning that struck at that time, all the devils who had helped him might have already died.

He then decided to erase all traces of the devils from the hidden places he knew about. But unfortunately, he had not been fast enough to reach them all.

Some of their hideouts had already been discovered, including by the imperial family. The lightning that struck at that time had been too conspicuous and powerful, after all. He could only hope that nothing in the devils' possession would make the imperial family point their fingers toward him.

However, at this moment, he truly could not understand how the cave that was supposed to have been cleared of any devil traces and destroyed could now appear restored. It did not make any sense.

"And a few interesting things that normally belong to the devils, those items are indeed authentic, as they still contain remnants of devil energy," Leader Regnor continued, his expression turning irritated.

"Care to explain it to us now?"

At this moment, he felt completely infuriated by the situation. He did not know whether the information inside the scroll was true or not, but if it was, his entire family would be implicated.

His dark elf tribe had a transactional relationship with Grand Duke Freindor because the duke had promised him and his tribe a much higher status. Although their tribe led a secluded life, the offer from Grand Duke Freindor was tempting, and he eventually decided to accept it.

However, he had known nothing about the devils working together with certain noble families. When he read the contents of the scroll earlier, he was shocked to discover that the noble families mentioned in it all belonged to the opposition faction. It would be a nightmare if that kind of information were to spread.

He did not even know if this scroll was the only one, as he had heard there were several other places like this one across the city. Because of the uncertainty of the situation and the grim consequences that might follow, he decided to take a radical step, to sever all past connections with Grand Duke Freindor.

To do that, he had to put on quite a show in front of all these people. Many of those who had entered the cave with him had already seen what was inside anyway. Even if the opposition faction were to fall today, he hoped that his performance would at least lessen his punishment if he were implicated.

"What are you talking about, Leader Regnor? Are you accusing me of working with the devils all this time? Even if that scroll says something about me or my family, do you just believe it? Even now, I didn't know that there was a place like this here," Grand Duke Freindor retorted.

Although what was written in the scroll was true, he had to deny it with everything he had. He had already come this far, and he would not allow himself to fail because of this incomprehensible situation.

"Is that so? You claim you only just learned about this place, but from what I see, your family already knew about it." Leader Regnor said.

"If that's not the case, then it should be fine if we check everything inside the cave, right? Why would your family's cultivators block these people from entering and checking for themselves? Are you afraid of something, Grand Duke Freindor?"

"Of course not. We blocked the area because this is under my responsibility, and we don't know if there is anything down there that could be dangerous. I only wanted to prevent any of you from falling into danger within my territory, as it would cause problems if something happened here," the grand duke replied.

Leader Regnor snorted, then smirked.

"Well, if that's the case, then there should be no problem if I check whether everything written in this scroll is correct, right? If you say you're not involved, then you shouldn't have any issue with it, I suppose? Even if I have to hand this scroll over to the imperial family."

Grand Duke Freindor forced a smile.

"Of course, you can. If I say I have nothing to do with the devils, then there is nothing to hide. You may check it yourself," he replied.

"Alright, then." Leader Regnor vanished from sight.

Grand Duke Freindor, who watched Leader Regnor disappear, was fuming inside. How dare he abandon him the moment things turned against him! Yet, at this moment, his heart was filled with anxiety.

He did not know what was written inside that scroll, which made him unsure whether letting Regnor go had been the right decision, but he had no other choice. If he had stopped him, it would have made him appear even more suspicious in the eyes of the crowd.

He looked at the people who were still watching him with doubtful eyes.

"Please leave this place. My family will handle this case. We will investigate it thoroughly and ensure that there are no devils here, nor any danger to this city," he said firmly.

With the leader of the dark elves gone, the others had no choice but to disperse as well. After all, the grand duke had spoken personally, and no one here could oppose him.

Once the people had left, Grand Duke Freindor could no longer contain his fury. His expression darkened, and his aura began to leak uncontrollably.

'Who is it? Who is the one who knows about my connection with the devils and created this entire mess?!

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Chapter 807 - 807: An Uproar

[1,584 words]

At this time, the entire city where the Valian family's manor was located was in an uproar as information spread among the populace. The devils had been hiding among them all this time, and they were actually in places that no one would ever expect.

There were devil hideouts not far outside the city, and even some within the city disguised as business properties. The information spread from an unknown source, but because it concerned the devils, many took it seriously and came to check for themselves.

What they found truly shocked them, as everything turned out to be true. Although they did not find any devils, they discovered many traces of them—artifacts and even more shocking evidence showing that they had dealings with noble families.

Because there were so many places scattered across the city, many people managed to inspect them before the Valian family's cultivators could block access. By the time they acted, it was already too late for the Valian family, as many had already seen what was inside those places and the evidence that pointed toward them.

The devils were actually able to live in this city and operate freely because the Valian family covered for them. There had been several strange, unsolvable cases in the past related to the devils, which made many wonder if the devils were hiding in the city. The most notable was the kidnapping case, where even until this moment, the victims have still not been found.

However, with the situation now, they could finally connect the dots, and everything began to make sense. It was no wonder those cases were never solved, since the noble family here had also been covering for the devils.

The worst part was that today, many figures from outside the empire had come to visit with the intent to meet Grand Duke Freindor. They wanted to build a good relationship, sensing that the grand duke had great potential to replace Empress Vilena because of his growing popularity and the support of other noble families.

Because of their presence, the headquarters of their powers also heard about this news and had to reconsider whether to build a relationship with the Valian family.

Although it was still too early to conclude that the Valian family was connected to the devils, the evidence strongly pointed against them. It was safer not to form any ties for now. They needed to look deeper into the matter and see how it would unfold.

At one place in the city, three robed figures gathered. One of them was Vars, and the other two were his subordinates from the Dark Saber group. They had just regrouped after spreading out to different locations.

"Done. We can leave now," reported one of the figures, a woman from the Dark Saber group, through voice transmission.

"I'm also done. Mission complete," another subordinate reported. Vars nodded.

"Alright, let's get out of here and move to the next place. There's still work to do," he said before walking away, followed closely by the other two.

Who else could it be, if not them, who caused the uproar at this moment? They were the ones who spread the information about the devils and released the evidence for everyone to see.

Where did they get all of it? Of course, it came from the materials they had swept from the devils' hideouts that had yet to be inspected by anyone in the capital. Their master's information was precise, and even the hideouts located in the most hidden corners of the capital were known to him. They only needed to check those places, take everything inside, and copy items such as scrolls so that others could find them.

Just as Aldrian's avatar had said, if there was no solid proof to show the people, then let them see it for themselves. Create the evidence and let others form their own conclusions.

The avatar gave details about several hideouts within the Valian grand duchy and made Vars and his subordinates memorize them. They needed to reach those places before sunrise and carry out what Aldrian had already planned—to spread the evidence.

It was true that some of the hideouts had already been destroyed by the Valian family, but they could simply rebuild them and place bits of evidence here and there to make it believable. They recreated the destroyed caves using earth laws.

How did they know the shape of the cave interiors?

Well, they just shaped whatever came to mind, as long as it looked convincing. That was why anyone who had ever entered the cave in the past would now be utterly confused. They would find the cave paths different. If someone inspected them closely, they would also notice that the caves had been recently constructed.

However, Vars and the others did not care. Even if the Valian family discovered that this was the case, their mission here was already complete. They only needed to draw people's attention to these places and let chaos unfold. The people themselves would handle the next course of action.

At this moment, they intended to move on to the next locations. They needed to carry out the same plan against other noble families who were in cahoots with the devils. Today was truly a busy day for them, and they intended to follow the avatar's orders until the very end.

Just as Vars and the others expected, at this moment, the grand duke who was inspecting the cave that once served as the devils' hideout wore a fuming expression. He had visited this place in the past, and of course, he knew the cave's path. But the moment he stepped inside, he realized that the entire layout was different.

The reconstruction was done well enough to fool many into thinking that the cave had always been like this.

But none of that mattered anymore, as evidence of his involvement with the devils, evidence that appeared out of nowhere had already been discovered. He also heard that the devils' former hideouts within the city had been found by many people, and he assumed those places must also contain similar evidence.

Because of this, he became even more certain that someone already knew about his connection with the devils and had even gotten hold of their belongings. Whoever it was, they were now toying with him. The damage from today's events would be devastating for him, and the only perpetrator he could think of was the imperial family.

But then he grew confused. If this was the work of the imperial family, why would they wait until now? Why strike at this moment, when they themselves were being criticized by so many people?

If they had known about his connection with the devils for a long time and even possessed the evidence, they would likely have acted against him long before last night's assassination attempt.

He did not believe that they could have planned all of this overnight after what happened last night. This kind of scheme must have been prepared for a long time, calculated precisely to inflict the greatest damage on his reputation.

There was no way out for him now, as many would begin to question his integrity and credibility.

He gritted his teeth in frustration. Whether it was the imperial family or some unknown force behind this, he no longer cared. The only thing that mattered now was finding a way to repair his reputation and dispel the growing doubt among the people.

With news like this likely spreading to other territories, he might find himself standing on the execution platform before gaining anything at all.

"My lord, I think it's better if you make an announcement and clearly deny everything to reduce the damage. Although the scroll in Leader Regnor's hand contains the truth about our connection to the devils, we can find an excuse and even put the blame on someone else. Perhaps we could say that this is part of the imperial family's plan to destroy your reputation," the grand duke's butler said from behind him.

Grand Duke Freindor thought for a moment, then walked outside.

"That is also what I have in mind and the only thing that comes to mind right now. We must calm the uproar first," he said, his expression filled with anger.

Later, while the city was still in turmoil over the revelations about the devils' hideouts and the suspected connection between the grand duke and the devils, the grand duke himself finally made an official statement.

He denied any connection with the devils and claimed that everything the people had heard about him and the devils was a lie or a fabricated story meant to smear his name. He told the populace that this might be the work of someone who wanted his downfall, or perhaps part of a larger conspiracy meant to conceal something far greater.

Those who heard the grand duke's words understood that he was referring to the imperial family. It was true that the ones who would benefit most from this situation were them.

After all, the grand duke, who had the highest chance of becoming the next ruler with strong support from many, would instantly fall. No matter how popular someone was, once they were linked to the devils, they were finished.

However, not everyone immediately believed what Grand Duke Freindor said. Many chose to wait and observe how the situation developed. With the information spreading and uncertainty rising, no one wanted to stand on the wrong side.

Then, only a few hours later, another piece of information released, causing yet another uproar—one that would ignite fury across the empire and direct it toward Grand Duke Freindor and the opposition faction.

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Chapter 808 - 808: Like a Verdict

[1,527 words]

Later that afternoon, information about other noble families' relationships with the devils was also confirmed by some people who came to check for themselves. All of them discovered several hideouts and connections that could be proven, which caused turmoil in some of the noble territories.

All of that was further intensified by an announcement, adding fuel to the hatred toward the opposition faction.

The imperial family finally revealed the results of their investigation following the assassination attempt. With a platform built in the city square of the capital under the shadow of the World Tree, the Empress herself, accompanied by Empress Sylphia, stood side by side to announce it to the world.

Empress Vilena stated that, with the help of Empress Sylphia, the imperial family had uncovered the truth behind the assassination attempt the previous night. They even brought the perpetrator himself, Baron Stargis, to give his testimony, which pointed toward the opposition faction as the mastermind the assassination attempt.

On this occasion, Empress Vilena also stated that she had received information regarding the involvement of several noble families with the devils. The imperial family declared that they would investigate the matter to the end and punish anyone proven to have worked with the devils.

This caused many to be shocked and thrown into an uproar. The only reason they did not immediately dismiss the announcement as nonsense or as an excuse for the imperial family to shift blame was because Empress Sylphia herself supported the results of the investigation.

As the one who had almost become the victim the previous night, she had the most right to speak on the matter. If she agreed with the results, then it must mean she also believed the findings were true. When they brought Baron Stargis before everyone and he explained what had happened to him and his family, the people grew truly furious.

Furious that the blame had been directed the wrong way. Furious that they had been made to look like fools. Furious that someone had betrayed their expectations and trust. Furious that the Grand Duke, who had seemed like a breath of fresh air for change in the empire, was in fact a rotten being responsible for it all.

Grand Duke Freindor, who heard the report about the imperial family's announcement from his manor, was truly enraged. To think that Empress Sylphia was still alive, and, moreover, that Baron Stargis was still breathing and well!

Worse, he had given testimony against him, which made his already difficult position even more pressured. He truly couldn't understand how the imperial family had done it, and now he believed that the spies inside the imperial palace had betrayed the opposition faction.

'How dare he go against me when I still have his wife and daughter,' Grand Duke Freindor thought as he gritted his teeth before walking out of the main building of the manor.

On his way, he met his son, Brein, who approached him with a panicked expression.

"Father, what is this about? Why are we suddenly the ones at a disadvantage? How could they know about—" Brein stopped talking the moment he saw his father's fierce eyes turn toward him.

He knew his father was truly enraged at that moment and had no intention of listening to any of his complaints.

However, how could he not panic when the entire city now seemed hostile toward their family? Their connection with the devils had suddenly been revealed with undeniable evidence. He knew this was like a death sentence for their entire family.

Even if they didn't end up dead, their lives would never be the same.

The image of traitors would always be embedded in them, and it would remain that way for the rest of their lives.

He stayed silent as he watched his father walk farther away, seeming to be in a hurry.

Grand Duke Freindor said nothing as he continued walking until he finally arrived at the dungeon where he kept his prisoners. Like any proper dungeon, the place was heavily guarded to ensure nothing went wrong.

As he entered, he was followed by the commander of the guards, who was responsible for everything that happened within the dungeon.

They eventually arrived in front of a door, a special cell guarded by two guards.

"Open the door," Grand Duke Freindor ordered. The guards immediately obeyed, and the Grand Duke stepped inside at once.

The moment he entered, he froze. In fact, not only him, the guard commander who followed was also stunned. What they were supposed to see was not there.

Inside this cell were supposed to be Baron Stargis's wife and daughter, who had been held here. However, the moment they entered, what they saw was—nothing. There was no one inside the cell.

The Grand Duke's stunned expression darkened as he turned to the commander behind him.

"Where are they?"

The commander, still shocked and confused, quickly answered.

"I don't know, my lord. I'm certain this cell hasn't been opened since the day they were brought in. I swear upon—Uokh!"

Before he could finish, Grand Duke Freindor suddenly grabbed him by the neck and lifted him off the ground.

The two guards outside, hearing the disturbance, looked into the cell and froze when they saw that it was empty. The two prisoners were gone.

"Are you telling me they just disappeared without you knowing? They escaped from someone at the pseudo immortal stage?!" Grand Duke Freindor roared in fury. He turned toward the guards standing at the door, who were trembling as his gaze fell on them.

"Where are they?!" he shouted.

"We don't know, I swear, my lord! We never opened this door after the prisoners were placed inside. We didn't even take a peek or communicate with them," one of the guards answered in fear.

Grand Duke Freindor's eyes remained cold, his expression darkening as he turned his gaze back to the commander. He released his grip from the man's throat and looked around the cell once more.

From the looks of it, these people were telling the truth, which only fueled his anger. If they truly didn't know how the prisoners had disappeared, then it meant the two had escaped through some means that even a pseudo-immortal stage cultivator could not detect.

He neither saw nor sensed any sign of change inside the cell. It was as if the two prisoners had vanished into thin air.

'Someone must have saved them, but who could do it? This place was secured deep underground and surrounded by numerous detection and trap formations. Any movement without authorization would be detected instantly. Not even someone at the pseudo-immortal stage could completely evade these formations, especially since another pseudo-immortal was stationed here.' Grand Duke Freindor's thoughts churned.

'Whoever it was, they must have been working for the imperial family. No wonder Stargis wasn't afraid to reveal everything without thinking of the consequences. He must have already known that his wife and daughter had been saved.' He gritted his teeth in frustration.

He had wanted to get rid of Baron Stargis's wife and daughter for daring to defy him. He no longer saw any purpose in keeping them alive anyway.

But to think he had been outplayed and left a step behind, he didn't even know how they had escaped.

Without saying anything, he decided to walk outside. He needed to think of another way to turn the situation around. He knew that with each passing second, his head was getting closer to the execution platform. The situation was so grim that he still couldn't find any way to escape from it.

And things became even worse a few hours later. The event that turned everyone completely hostile toward the opposition faction, especially Grand Duke Freindor.

Aldrian the Great himself made an announcement. His voice echoed across the entire continent of the elves.

"Based on the investigation conducted throughout the continent of elves and after verifying every piece of information, I support the Silvarin Imperial Family in judging the crimes committed by the opposition faction against the people of the Verdyn Empire and against my fiancée. For them to work with the devils and even attempt to kill my fiancée."

"Although I would prefer to deliver punishment myself, I believe the Silvarin Imperial Family will give the appropriate judgment to the perpetrators."

This announcement was like the strike of a hammer delivering a verdict. The moment many people heard it, they knew it was over. The opposition faction and Grand Duke Freindor were finished. Whether they lost their status or their lives.

His announcement was all people needed to set aside their doubts and decide to act against the opposition faction. The populace and other powers moved to aid the imperial family in rooting out traitors, as they began gathering around the manors of several noble families to deliver judgment.

The imperial family had dispatched their troops to apprehend many noble houses almost simultaneously. Some families tried to resist, but they were no match for the combined strength of the imperial forces and the people who rose to support them.

Some realized resistance was futile and surrendered. Scenes of nobles being arrested and marched away in chains could be seen across the empire.

The Valian family, too, had their manor surrounded by the imperial army and many people.

"Grand Duke Freindor, we have come under Her Majesty's order to arrest you. Surrender to avoid any unnecessary bloodshed!"

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Chapter 809 - 809: Apprehended

[1,670 words]

As the voice of the imperial army's commander resounded across the Valian family manor, the family guards tensed upon recognizing that it came from the strongest imperial troop commander, Clarin Lenavis. She was the commander of the most powerful battalion of the imperial family and a cultivator at the middle pseudo-immortal stage.

She had arrived with her entire battalion of more than six hundred troops, surrounding the manor, while other powers stood behind them to offer support or to show allegiance.

"Get out, you traitor!"

"Drag him out! Kill that traitor!"

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

Shouts and screams from the angry mob echoed outside, reaching into the manor.

Inside, everyone had already fallen into despair and panic. They all knew that today might mark the end of the Valian family. None of them knew what would happen next or what they should do as they waited for the grand duke's order for their next course of action.

Brein also panicked as he looked at his father when his mother came to meet him with an angry expression.

"Where is your father? How could I not see him since earlier when the situation is already out of control?" she asked with twisted anger. Her beautiful face at this moment had turned ugly with rage.

"I don't know, Mother. I also could not find him since earlier," Brein replied as he opened a door to a room, hoping to find his father. Strangely, they had not seen any sign of him, even though this was the most important time for him to show himself.

"Did he escape by himself? I knew it! That coward would leave us the moment things go south!" his mother said fiercely, making Brein's heart tremble. If that was the case, then there was nothing they could do except surrender. It was already futile to do anything anyway. Their reputation and status had already crumbled, and the people outside had already branded their family as traitors.

Unbeknown to the many members of the Valian family still searching for the grand duke, the man himself was in another place—a place they would never have expected.

He was actually on the Barisan continent. His body stood before Aldrian in the dungeon of Aldrian's palace, completely unable to move. Sweat drenched his face and body, and his blank expression looked exhausted, as if he had just gone through something horrifying. A pool of blood had formed beneath him, and several severed arms could be seen nearby.

This scene was just like when Aldrian tortured Prince Wilmar, Cardinal Carsius, and Carlson, the leader of the Golden Swan Commerce. He cut off their limbs before healing them again and again using his golden energy.

Even though he had announced earlier that he believed the Silvarin imperial family would give people like Grand Duke Freindor the punishment they deserved, he still needed to release some steam after what this man had tried to do to Sylphia.

"Please... have... mercy. Please... kill me," Grand Duke Freindor said weakly.

But there was no response from Aldrian, and his expression barely changed as he continued the torture.

Aldrian, who had been paying attention to what was happening on the continent of elves, decided to give a little help to resolve the problem there. The matter on the elven continent had already crossed his red line, with someone actually attempting to kill Sylphia. There was no way he could simply sit back and watch.

Fortunately, his avatar had always been protecting her, so she was still safe. He could not imagine what would have happened if his avatar had not been there as her

guardian. The poison plot would certainly have succeeded, and his Sylphia would have died during her first visit outside the continent.

That was why his hand itched for action against Grand Duke Freindor, the man who had thought of killing her. Aldrian was the one who had saved Baron Stargis's wife and daughter after his avatar reported everything that had happened, including his plan to solve the problem. The avatar knew that only his true body could save the baron's family with ease.

Aldrian just needed to teleport them to the baron's side and it was done. Grand Duke Freindor would no longer have anything to bind Baron Stargis, and the baron could give his testimony freely. No one from the Valian family would know that the baron's wife and daughter had already vanished before sunrise today.

An hour ago, before the imperial troops arrived at the Valian family's manor, Grand Duke Freindor had actually tried to escape on his own. It seemed he already knew that any resistance was futile, especially after Aldrian's announcement.

However, before he could even leave his manor, Aldrian had already teleported his body directly in front of him in the dungeon. Grand Duke Freindor was completely shocked by the sudden change in his surroundings, and when he saw Aldrian, he could not help but show an expression of horror.

He instantly tried to escape from wherever he was, but Aldrian did not allow it, trapping him with a spatial lock. From that moment, Aldrian began to deliver punishment to the man who had become the mastermind behind Sylphia's assassination attempt.

He had used his illusion laws, lightning laws, and several torture methods on him during the past hour. He knew his time was limited, and it seemed it was already up when he sensed that the grand duke's manor had been surrounded by the troops of the Silvarin imperial family. They were on the verge of storming the manor and apprehending the Valian family.

Aldrian sighed as he looked at the grand duke and tapped his cheek a few times.

"You are lucky that you still need to be humiliated in front of countless people and punished by the Silvarin imperial family. If not for that, I would have liked to torture you until the fury inside my heart disappeared," he said, making the grand duke tremble.

"Please... have... mercy," the grand duke replied weakly, but Aldrian did not respond. Instead, he looked into the grand duke's memories, wanting to make sure there was no one behind him or another mastermind.

After confirming there was nothing suspicious and nothing worth his attention, he healed Grand Duke Freindor's body to the bare minimum and teleported him back to his manor.

By this time, the imperial troops had already stormed into the manor, sweeping through every corner and arresting anyone who tried to resist.

They did not offer much resistance. Even when the troops found Brein and the grand duke's wife, they did not resist and simply allowed the imperial soldiers to apprehend them. The troops continued searching for Grand Duke Freindor as they swept through every room and corridor. They thought he might have already escaped, until they finally found him in one of the rooms.

However, the imperial troops who discovered him were stunned by his condition. Clarin, who led the battalion, narrowed her eyes as she looked at the grand duke.

His state was dreadful. His blank eyes showed no awareness, saliva dripped from his lips, and bruises and bloodstains covered his face. His attire was in disarray, and clear signs of torture marked his body.

She did not understand how he had ended up like this, but she did not care. She stepped forward and spoke firmly.

"Grand Duke Freindor, you are under arrest by the order of Her Majesty for working with the devils and endangering the stability of the empire. I hope you do not do anything foolish, for your own good."

She gestured to two soldiers, who stepped forward and approached the grand duke.

Grand Duke Freindor did not say anything and simply allowed himself to be dragged outside. Clarin looked at the grand duke for a moment, then inspected the room. She wanted to make sure there was nothing strange there.

After she found nothing unusual, she left the manor. The moment many people saw Grand Duke Freindor being dragged by the imperial troops, they began to shout at him.

"You traitor! We put our trust in you, but all this time you worked with the devils! Die!"

"Because of you my daughter is still missing! Die a horrible death, you traitor!"

"Kill him right now!"

Curses and humiliating words rained down on him. Many also began to throw objects, like pebbles. The imperial troops tasked with crowd control were quite overwhelmed by the angry mob, which seemed intent on breaching the lines to kill Grand Duke Freindor themselves.

However, Grand Duke Freindor did not react at all. His expression did not change along the way as if he were already broken inside. He simply surrendered himself.

Not long after Grand Duke Freindor was captured and dragged to the capital, news spread that the imperial family had successfully apprehended most of the main members of the opposition faction.

Some of them had managed to escape, and the imperial family was still pursuing them.

The imperial family had also blocked all cruisers and interstellar vessels from leaving the continent, preventing anyone from escaping the continent. As long as those fugitives remained within the continent, it was only a matter of time before all of them were caught.

Before sunset, the imperial family had already arrested more than three hundred people from the opposition faction. Most of them were awaiting trial, except for a few whose names had already spread and were proven to have direct connections with the devils and to have actively worked with them.

They were scheduled to be executed tomorrow in front of the masses.

As those who would be executed tomorrow were gathered inside special cells, Empress Vilena, Princess Vaelir, and Sylphia came to one of the cells and looked inside. Grand Duke Freindor was there, but he looked more like a corpse than a living man. He said nothing, his head lowered as he sat leaning against the cell wall.

Empress Vilena frowned as she looked at his condition.

"I heard the report that when the troops arrived, he was already in that state. It's as if someone had just tortured him," she said.

Sylphia narrowed her eyes as she observed the grand duke for a moment. After a few seconds, she suddenly smiled, finally understanding what had happened.

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Chapter 810 - 810: The Execution

[1,569 words]

Empress Vilena raised her eyebrows in wonder upon hearing Sylphia. Did she find something just by observing Grand Duke Freindor?

He clearly had traces of torture on his body, but how did he get them? Who could have done such a thing to someone at the middle pseudo-immortal stage like Grand Duke Freindor?

"Is it your majesty? What really happened to him?" Empress Vilena asked.

"Well, this is Aldrian's doing, so Your Majesty does not have to be confused or think too much about it," Sylphia replied, which left Empress Vilena astonished.

"Is His Majesty Aldrian the Great in the continent at this moment?"

Sylphia smiled as she shook her head. "No, but what I can say is that he could do something like this even without leaving the Barisan Continent."

Empress Vilena's heart trembled at those words. Aldrian the Great could do that from the Barisan Continent? How could that be?

She wanted to know, but she felt it was not appropriate, which left her only able to look speechlessly at Sylphia before turning back to Grand Duke Freindor. She could not help but suddenly think that Aldrian might be able to see what was happening here from the Barisan Continent, which made her feel as if she had gone crazy.

What kind of technique could do that?

Then she remembered that Aldrian the Great could protect the entire world by himself. The surprise attack of the devils was proof of how absurd his ability was, and he might really be able to see what happened here from the Barisan Continent.

Empress Vilena sighed and decided not to think too much about him. They did not stay long in that place before returning to the main palace. There were still many things Empress Vilena needed to do today.

After many noble families were apprehended by the imperial family during the purge operation, they needed to rebuild order in the nobles' territories.

With the power vacuum, anything could happen, as the Verdyn Empire was in turmoil and greatly weakened by these events. She did not want the Verdyn Empire to fall into disorder and chaos because some unknown and irresponsible figures might take advantage of the situation.

On the next day, the execution platform was erected in the city's plaza, and the place was crowded with many people who wanted to see the execution themselves. Around fifty people were chained and lined up as they approached the platform. These were elves of high status in the past, and wherever they went, they would always garner attention and respect.

However, at this moment, the only thing they drew was the fury of the people after their crimes were revealed. No matter how respectable they once were, once they worked with the devils, this was the end.

Curses and boos rained down upon them, and some of the nobles still refused to give up as they shouted for mercy. They hoped to gain the Empress's compassion, claiming that they would never make the same mistake again.

However, Empress Vilena and Sylphia, who were watching the scene from the balcony of a building beside the plaza, did not say anything. They continued observing the execution procession, and after the nobles reached the base of the platform, the first ten to be executed stepped onto the raised stage.

Among these people were Grand Duke Freindor and his son. The grand duke himself seemed to have already given up on everything and lost all of his spirit. He just wanted all of this to end quickly so he could die in peace. Aldrian's torture still left deep trauma in him, and he no longer wanted to live with it.

His son, Brein, also appeared to have given up, but he was more expressive as he cried while being dragged onto the platform. He had thought he still had a long life ahead, yet in the end, it all had to end here.

He knew about his father's connection with the devils and had supported him, which in the eyes of the Empress was the same as being in cahoots with the devils.

His mother was the only person from their main family spared from the death sentence because she had no knowledge of her husband's connection with the devils. Still, she also had to receive punishment for her involvement in helping Grand Duke Freindor with certain matters related to his rebellion.

She lost all of her status and was forced to live as a commoner, with all her belongings confiscated. She was also sentenced to live as a slave of the imperial family for more than ten thousand years.

This kind of punishment was not much different from the one that befell the leader of the dark elf tribe. He, along with some of his tribe's elders, had to work as forced labor in one of the energy crystal mines for more than ten thousand years. Their tribe, which held special status and great autonomy in their own territory, also had its privileges taken away by the imperial family.

Their involvement in the past, helping the opposition faction with its dirty work was what led to their punishment. The reason they did not receive the instant death penalty was because they had no knowledge of the devils' connection with the opposition faction.

Initially, they were also going to be included in the execution list for another matter. They had already killed their fellow elves in cold blood during the attack on Baron

Stargis's manor. However, Empress Vilena changed her mind after realizing they would be more useful as forced labor, given the empire's shortage of manpower in its energy stone mines.

As the prisoners on death row stood atop the execution platform, a few of them tried to resist, but with their cultivation sealed, they could do nothing. The imperial troops continued dragging and forcing them to kneel and place their heads on the beheading blocks.

Their heads were locked in place so they could not move. Ten executioners were already in position, each with a special sword designed specifically for executions.

Once everything was ready, one of the imperial family's staff stepped forward onto the platform and began reading from the scroll in his hand.

"At this moment, we will begin the execution of the prisoners on death row, those who have betrayed our kind for their own selfish greed, going so far as to work with the devils. All of these prisoners have been convincingly proven to be in cahoots with the devils in their attempt to destabilize our empire."

"Because of their grave sins, let justice befall them, and let all people witness as they receive their deserved punishment. Let this be engraved in everyone's mind that we will not tolerate anyone who betrays our kind or creates disharmony among us. Let this serve as a warning to anyone who dares to think they can do the same in the future."

He then stopped, rolled up the scroll, and turned his head to nod, giving the signal to the executioners.

The ten executioners lifted their swords at the same time as the prisoners continued begging for mercy. A second later—

Slash!

A swift motion severed the heads of ten prisoners at once. Their heads fell into the special baskets below the platform, and blood flowed from their necks. The crowd shouted in excitement, their spirits lifted as if satisfied by the sight before them. A few prominent figures, once respected by many, perished in an instant.

After the first ten prisoners were executed, the imperial staff carried the headless bodies to a special wagon behind the platform.

Without waiting long, the next ten prisoners were brought up. This time, Luren was among them, his face already wet with tears.

He tried to resist, but a punch to his gut silenced him. The staff dragged him to the bloodstained beheading block. Forced to his knees and made to lower his head, he tried to look into the distance where the imperial family was watching.

"Please, have mercy on me! I did not do anything wrong! I only did what I was ordered to do! How was I supposed to act against my own family?" he shouted, hoping his voice would reach them, not only their ears but also their hearts. He prayed for mercy.

But alas, his fate was already sealed. The executioners swung their swords, severing his and the other prisoners' heads at the same time. His face still carried a pleading expression, tears frozen in place as his head rolled into the special basket.

Princess Vaeril watched it with a cold expression. She finally saw this bastard's death. She had disliked him for a long time, never feeling comfortable whenever he was near, as she could sense his desire for her. She had wanted to kill him herself, but the complicated situation in the past had made it impossible.

The execution proceeded without issue. The people cheered for the imperial family for bringing justice and maintaining order in the empire. They chanted the great name of Empress Vilena across the plaza to show their support for the imperial family.

Empress Vilena, who watched all of this, smiled. She felt as if she were dreaming at that moment. The matter that had troubled her for years had been resolved in just two days, thanks to the help of Aldrian's avatar.

She was truly glad that fate had brought fortune after all the misfortune of the past.

This execution also marked the resolution of the troubles within the Verdyn Empire, signifying that the empire could now develop more effectively in the future without further disturbance.

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