

From Outcast to Overlord The Unyielding Heir (Leander Ashcroft)

Chapter 371

The two men sat in silence, wide-eyed.

The International Combat Units list was the ultimate scale of power. It was the summit of the martial world.

Fifth place. It didn't sound like much at first. But this was a ranking of the strongest fighters on the planet. Every name on that list had spent decades bleeding for their power.

Even the ones near the bottom had trained for seventy years or more. Some were nearly a hundred. The top ten? Definitely even more.

Anyone who could make the list in their sixties were hailed as prodigies. Geniuses of their era. The Dragon Emperor himself had entered the list at sixty. Never in history had anyone under sixty made it in.

And now, Leander Jeff Ashcroft-had done it at nineteen. Fifth in the world. It didn't feel real.

Gareth scrolled down again. His heart sank. Ares' name wasn't there.

That day at the Southern Ocean, Ares had used lightning to fake his death and flee. Everyone saw it. With his strength, his place on this new list should have been guaranteed.

But he was gone. There was only one explanation. He was dead. And if the International Martial Network said he was gone, then there was no doubt about it.

Reginald remembered the fiery arrow Leander had unleashed. The truth hit him hard. Ares hadn't escaped that day. He'd been burned out of existence.

Reginald leaned back into the couch, staring blankly at the ceiling.

"We had to cut him loose so he could become what he is now. And he did. But he's no longer one of us. The universe really has a cruel sense of humor."

Gareth stayed quiet. His gaze was distant, filled with pride and regret.

With Leander, the Ashcroft family could have ruled for centuries. Without him, they would stand, but never rise again. Gareth was strong, but he alone could not do much to help the family.

The whole martial world was in an uproar. Every country buzzed with disbelief. Every fighter fell silent. The news of Leander making the list was unbelievable.

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Meanwhile, at the Florian family of Highcliffe's estate, Leander leaned back on a soft couch, a cup of rare tea in his hand. The scent filled the room like mist.

Daphne sat close beside him, her smile soft and warm. Across from them, Wesley and Raphael sat grinning, their faces bright with pride.

Wesley used to look down on Leander without hesitation. To him, Leander was a dull, forgotten relic-once sharp, now covered in rust. But what he saw now turned that belief to dust. Leander wasn't an old blade. He was something reborn, forged from fire and fury, gleaming with divine light.

He had defeated eleven Transcendent Realm masters on his own. He had torn apart the joint might of the Arbitration Office and the War God Sanctum. He had crushed two warriors from the International Combat Units as if they were nothing. Across Astria, across the world itself, no one close to his age could come near his level of power.

Wesley's pride crumbled. The longer he stared at Leander, the more his admiration grew. His eyes lit up like a man seeing a living legend. Even Raphael, the elder patriarch of the Florian family, treated Leander with rare respect. He sat with him as an equal, discussing the essence of combat and strength. The entire Florian family regarded Leander as one of their own.

If they could have, they would have married him to Daphne that very night. Losing a man like him was something none of them could risk.

"Leander," Wesley said, his voice filled with excitement. "I just saw the new International Combat Units rankings on the network. You're fifth. After the Southern Ocean battle, your name is everywhere. The whole world's talking about you."

He looked at Leander with a strange blend of awe and jealousy.

Leander gave a small smile. "You give me too much credit, Mr. Florian. Rankings mean little. There are too many hidden monsters out there. The real masters never bother showing up on any list."

Raphael nodded slowly. His expression carried weight.

"You're right. The Dragon Emperor once sat at the very top of that same list. Yet even he was forced back to Astria when the Supreme Arbiters of the Arbitration Office came for him. The true giants never care about fame.

"Think about Mount Martial's Inner Circle, or the Twinfang Sect's House of Exorcists, or Ancient Lingster. They've stood for centuries, some for nearly a thousand years. Their depth runs too deep to measure."

He fell silent for a moment. His tone grew heavy as he looked straight at Leander.

"Leander, what you did at the Southern Ocean shook the world. But the Arbitration Office isn't just made up of elite Arbiters.

"Above them are the Chief Arbiters. They're on another level. Thirty years ago, the fighter ranked third in the International Combat Units went up against one of them.

"Within fifty strikes, he was crippled. His power never returned. You're strong, but you need to stay alert."

Wesley leaned forward, his brow furrowed with worry.

"There's more. The War God Sanctum didn't act alone. They had the Aster Communion behind them.

"You've heard of it. They were tied to

Brundela, the old empire that nearly conquered the world back in the eighteenth century. Even after Brundela fell and Agylae took its place, the Aster Communion's power never faded."

He sighed, his tone dark. "If they decide to come for you because of what happened at the Southern Ocean, you'll be facing two world powers at once."

Daphne's hand trembled slightly. Her eyes glistened with worry as she looked at Leander.

He was strong, but the Arbitration Office and the Aster Communion had existed for hundreds of years. Their reach spanned continents. Facing both was like fighting the entire history of mankind itself.

Leander's eyes stayed calm. He rested his chin on his hand, deep in thought. "The Aster Communion and the Arbitration Office. Quite the pairing."

His voice was quiet, but his mind was already moving.

Far across the sea, in a black marble palace buried deep within Europe, footsteps echoed through the dim hall.

A man stepped into the light. He wore a crimson coat that rippled faintly as he moved. His face was plain, forgettable, the kind you could lose in a crowd. But his eyes were different. They were sharp and cold, glowing with predatory focus

no met that gaze would

feel their blood freeze.

His name was Reefus, known to the world as Hawkeye. He was one of the eighteen Chief Arbiters of the Arbitration Office.

Before him, sixteen frozen thrones stood in a half-circle, towering over the hall. Each one held a shadowed figure. Their faces were hidden by mist, their presence heavy enough to bend the air.

"Reefus," said a deep, rasping voice from one of the thrones. "You have something to report?"

Reefus bowed. "Yes, Your Highness. Two days ago, five of our elite Arbiters were killed in Astria, near the Southern Ocean."

"Who was responsible?" The same voice spoke again. There was no anger, no emotion at all. It was as if he had been told the weather.

"Jeff Ashcroft," Reefus said simply. THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY

He went on to describe everything that had happened the battle at the Southern Ocean, the deaths, the destruction, the unstoppable rise of the man now known as Iron Sovereign.

"So, it's him again," another voice growled from the shadows. "The Astrian boy who's killed twelve of our people. Seven Arbiters. Five elites. Bold little thing."

A ripple of disdain spread across the thrones. "He thinks we've gone soft. He thinks we're scared. All just because we've not sent our real trump cards after him."

Cold laughter filled the air. The sound scraped across the walls like blades on stone. Leander's name meant nothing here. To these beings, he was just a flicker of light waiting to be snuffed out.

Reefus lifted his head. His eyes were calm but fierce. "I've already assembled our best Arbiters. I'm ready to lead them myself. Give the order, and I'll erase him."

Silence stretched for a long moment.

Then, a low chuckle echoed through the room. "An assault?"

"Reefus," one of the shadowed figures said, amused. "You're thinking too small. You want to send our best after a boy? He is not worth the effort."

The laughter died, replaced by an eerie stillness.

"Cancel your strike. We'll deal with Jeff Ashcroft differently."

The air vibrated with power as the voice deepened. "The world needs to be reminded of what true power looks like. If Jeff thinks he's touched the top, then we'll show him the sky is far higher than he can see."

A different voice spoke then, smooth and cold. "You forget, the Son of Judgment is about to awaken."

Reefus' face twitched. He turned his head sharply.

"The Son of Judgment?"

His eyes drifted to the far end of the hall, where a faint red glow flickered in the dark.

A glass chamber stood there, filled

with thick crimson liquid that

shimmered like molten fire. Inside a young man floated, suspended in stillness. His skin was pale his body unmoving, but his eyelids trembled every few seconds, as if he were fighting to wake.

From one of the icy thrones, a deep voice thundered softly.

"Reefus, leave Jeff Ashcroft to him.

"He will awaken soon. He will rise by crushing Jeff beneath his feet. He will become the storm that makes the world remember who rules it."

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Chapter 372

Inside the glass tank, a young man floated motionless. His chest was bare, his muscles tight and sculpted like carved stone.

The crimson liquid around him shimmered faintly, pulsing like it was alive. It flowed into his skin and out again, over and over, as if the fluid itself breathed with him.

His face was striking and unnervingly perfect. Every feature looked carved by purpose, too symmetrical to be human. His eyes stayed closed, his expression empty, like he was lost in a dream too deep to escape.

"Son of Judgment."

Reefus muttered the words under his breath. Inside the Arbitration Office, countless ranks existed, far beyond what the world knew.

There were thirty-six Chief Arbiters like him. Above them sat sixteen Supreme Arbiters. Yet between them stood something rarer—a being beyond comparison, known only as the Son of Judgment.

Each Son of Judgment was chosen personally by the Chief Arbitrator. Once chosen, he underwent a rebirth that no ordinary human could endure. He was submerged in a mixture of Doomlight and the blood of three hundred sacrificed children, his body reforged until it became a living weapon.

The last Son of Judgment had died years ago, struck down in battle against Astria's Dragon Emperor. The young man floating now was his successor. This update is available on

Reefus had heard of him three years ago. Out of hundreds of candidates trained from childhood, this one had stood above all others. His talent was terrifying.

At an age when most men were still students, he had already entered the Martial Sovereign stage, thanks to the help of Doomlight and all Supreme Arbiters. Soon after, he had volunteered for the ritual, the one where he would bathe in the blood of sacrificed children.

He had been in that chamber ever since. Three years of silence. Three years of blood and light.

Reefus turned away from the tank and looked toward the sixteen thrones of ice lined up across the dark hall.

"Your Highnesses," he said quietly, "the Son of Judgment still sleeps. He hasn't absorbed all the power within the blood. Shouldn't we wait before sending him against Jeff?"

A low laugh came from the shadows.

"Reefus, there is nothing to fear.

"He has already taken in most of the blood's power. Only the last spark remains."

A dark figure on one of the thrones leaned forward. The light from his black robe flickered like fire trapped under ice.

"He was supposed to awaken in another month. But since this Jeff Ashcroft keeps testing our patience, we'll bring his awakening forward."

The man raised his hand.

A deep rumble filled the air.

The liquid inside the tank began to surge. It bubbled and twisted violently, glowing brighter as it churned. Steam rolled across the floor.

The red liquid thinned with every pulse, burning away until only a thin layer was left. Then, all at once, the young man's eyes snapped open.

Two flashes of light burst out from his pupils.

The glass tank shattered in a single thunderous crack, shards flying across the room.

Through the mist and drifting smoke, heavy footsteps echoed. The young man stepped out of the haze. His skin gleamed faintly red, as if lit from within. His gaze was cold, sharp, and filled with faint traces of bloodlight.

Reefus felt the weight of the air crush around him. His heart pounded. He forced his breath steady, bowed low, and spoke with respect.

"Chief Arbitrator of the Fourteenth Division," he said. "I greet you, Son of Judgment."

The young man didn't reply. He only nodded slightly. His power still lagged behind Reefus', but his presence pressed down with absolute authority.

This was the Son of Judgment—the weapon born to stand beside the Supreme Arbiters. Even those ranked above him in strength would kneel before his title.

"Of course." His voice was flat, but it carried command. He turned toward the icy thrones and knelt on one knee.

"Your Highnesses," he said, "thank you for granting me rebirth."

For a long moment, no one spoke. Then one of the thrones glowed faintly, and a voice answered.

"Three years ago, you stood among three hundred chosen warriors. You killed two hundred and ninety-nine of them yourself. That was when we knew you were the

one.

"Now you have absorbed the divine strength within the Water of Judgment and the blood of the sacrificed. From this day on, you are the Son of Judgment. You stand second only to us sixteen."

The young man lifted his head. His eyes burned with hunger. A small smile pulled at his lips.

"Thank you, Your Highnesses. I will not fail you. One day, I will sit beside you as an equal."

His words rang with ambition, each syllable sharp as steel.

"Excellent."

The voice from the thrones rumbled with satisfaction.

"Son of Judgment, we sixteen have remained hidden for sixty years. The world has forgotten what power truly means. You now carry the face of the Arbitration Office.

"A young warrior from Astria named Jeff Ashcroft has killed more than ten of our people. You know what must be done."

The young man's eyes gleamed. "Jeff," he repeated softly. His tone carried amusement. His smile widened.

"Do not worry, Your Highnesses. Within fifteen days, I will bring you his head.

"Anyone who challenges the Arbitration Office dies."

His voice was calm, but the air vibrated with his killing intent. He had endured pain beyond imagination for this title.

Now, at last, the world would see why.

Silence fell again as he turned from the thrones and walked past Reefus. His bare feet tapped against the cold floor until he vanished through the great doors. Reefus frowned. His gut twisted with doubt. He looked back at the frozen thrones and asked carefully, "Your Highness, are you certain he can defeat Jeff?"

A cold snarl echoed through the chamber. "Reefus, do not forget who he is.

"For three years, the Water of Judgment and the blood of the sacrificed have become one with his soul. Beneath the King Phase, he is invincible."

Reefus froze, his eyes wide with disbelief.

"What? He's invincible as long as King Phase and above don't show up?"

He turned toward the massive doors where the young man had just left. His pulse quickened. His expression twisted in shock as he stared at the empty hall.

The youth stepped out of the dark palace and raised one hand. A blood-red cloak flew through the air and wrapped around his shoulders. Against his tall frame, it flowed like liquid fire, fierce and regal

"Jeff Ashcroft," he murmured.

He turned his head toward the eastern sky. His eyes narrowed, and a killing light gleamed in their depths.

"You'll be the first step beneath my feet. The first name that makes the world remember me."

He pressed one foot to the ground.

The stone cracked. A violent shockwave erupted beneath him, tearing through the courtyard. The earth Shattered in every direction, sending shards of rock flying into the air.

In the next heartbeat, his body vanished. Only a streak of blood-red light shot across the heavens, racing east toward the distant horizon.

Thousands of miles away, Leander stood inside Durham Abbey. The quiet hum of the wind filled the hall. He was about to visit Lydia when his steps suddenly faltered.

He turned his head sharply toward the western sky. "Hm?" His eyes narrowed, and a strange chill rippled through his chest. It wasn't pain. It

was instinct, deep and primal, like the moment before lightning struck. He felt it in his bones—someone powerful was coming for him. His nemesis.

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Chapter 373

Leander stood at the peak of Westvale, atop the tower of Durham Abbey. The wind tugged at his coat as he looked toward the far horizon. The strange feeling in his chest grew stronger. It was sharp now, almost calling to him, like another force in the world was reaching back.

"What is that?"

His gaze darkened. He stood there in silence for a long time before he finally exhaled and turned away.

At the entrance of the quiet temple, he raised his hand and knocked gently.

"Come in," came Lydia's soft voice from within.

Leander opened the door. Lydia sat at a wooden table, dressed in a simple blue robe. Her hair was tied high, her face bare of paint, yet calm and radiant.

What caught his attention, though, was the girl sitting across from her.

The girl turned at the sound of the door. When she saw Leander, surprise widened her eyes.

"You?"

Her eyebrows arched slightly. Her skin was fair, her teeth pearl-white. The long white dress she wore made her look pure and gentle. Her hair fell straight down her back, dark and glossy, framing delicate features that could rival any of the campus beauties at Highcliffe University.

Leander blinked, curious. He walked closer. "Have we met?"

The girl's eyes dimmed with disappointment, but she quickly straightened her posture. "You don't remember me?"

She pressed her lips together and continued, "The day you first arrived at Highcliffe University, I offered to show you around."

Leander paused, searching his memory. Then it clicked.

"Oh, that was you."

He remembered now. She had tried to speak to him that day, but he had brushed her off. At the time, he hadn't cared enough to remember any of the girls who crossed his path.

"Leander, sit," Lydia said, smiling warmly.

She pulled him down beside her, then looked between them with surprise. "So, you two know each other?"

Leander smiled faintly and shook his head. "Not really. When I first came to Highcliffe U, she was kind enough to offer help. We only met that once."

The girl was Luna-the same one he had turned down before. She was a devoted believer, often visiting Durham Abbey for peace and prayer.

One day, she met Lydia by chance, and the two had grown close. Luna liked the air Lydia gave off. Their quiet talks had become a habit.

She hadn't expected to see Leander here.

"Ah, I see," Lydia said with a gentle nod.

She turned to Luna with a warm smile. "Luna, this is my son, Leander."

Then she looked back at him. "Leander, this young lady is Luna. She's been keeping me company lately. She visits almost every day."

"Luna?"

Leander paused for a moment. He remembered now there was a girl by that name on the Highcliffe campus ranking list. He smiled lightly.

Seeing his expression, Luna's heart fluttered. She thought he had recognized her name. Her excitement lasted only a second before she saw the calm return to his face.

"Nice to meet you, Luna," he said.

"Thank you for spending time with my mom."

Luna's smile faltered, a quiet sadness flickering in her eyes.

Still, she answered softly, "No need to thank me. Talking with Lydia has been a blessing. She's taught me a lot about patience and kindness. I should be the one thanking her."

Her voice was clear, gentle. Her bright eyes lingered on Leander a moment longer, curiosity and admiration mixing in her gaze.

"I never thought you'd be her son," she said, half-smiling. Updates are released by

Leander chuckled and nodded politely. The room fell into an easy calm again. The three of them talked quietly, their voices soft against the backdrop of rustling leaves outside.

After a few minutes, Leander leaned

back and let the two women

continue their conversation. He listened quietly content to watch them talk. Then, suddenly, footsteps echoed from the corridor. They were quick, uneven, and almost frantic. Content

Moments later, a sharp knock rattled the door. "Luna! Are you in there?"

The voice was feminine, young, and filled with urgency.

"Janey?"

Before Luna could even answer, the door slammed open with a heavy crack.

A tall woman with long brown hair strode in, her heels hitting the floor in sharp, nervous clicks. She rushed straight to Luna, panic carved into her face.

"Luna! Something's wrong! Eve just called me. She slipped up and told Skelly where you are. He knows you're at Durham Abbey. He's already on his way here!"

Her voice trembled as she spoke, every word filled with tension.

Leander's face turned cold at once. He had no interest in this woman's chaos, but barging into Lydia's quiet space without knocking was something he couldn't ignore.

"Skelly's coming here?" Luna's voice was faint, her brows pulling together.

Before she could say another word, Leander's low voice cut through the room like steel.

"Do you not knock before you walk into someone's room?" His tone was sharp and unyielding. "Who told you you could come in like that?"

Janey blinked, startled. Her eyes then hardened, and her tone turned defensive. "And who the hell are you?" she snapped. "You don't get to lecture me. I'm here for Luna. She's here almost every day. I know this place better than you ever will." Leander's gaze turned colder. His eyes looked like glass covered in frost. Lydia felt the tension rise. She raised a hand quickly to calm him.

"Leander, that's enough," she said softly. "This is Janey Chestnut, Luna's friend. She visits often. She means no harm."

Janey folded her arms and smirked. She thought Lydia's interjection meant she could do anything she wanted. "See? Lydia doesn't mind. You don't have to act like you own the place."

Leander looked at her once, his face unreadable, then turned away completely as if she didn't exist.

Janey mistook his silence for weakness. She took a breath, ready to throw more words his way-

But the door flew open again. A rush of heavy footsteps filled the small temple. More than ten men poured in, crowding the narrow space until the air itself seemed to tighten.

At their lead was a young man dressed in tight black leather. His hair was styled in thick waves that stood high, almost like a rock singer from another decade. He moved with swagger, each step dripping arrogance.

Behind him, men in black suits filled the doorway, silent but dangerous. And now the place was packed.

The man's grin widened when his

het

eyes landed on Luna. He put on a look only he thought was cool. "Luna, there you are," he said smoothly. "I've been looking for you everywhere. Your roommate told me you agreed to catch a movie with me today. I'm here to take you there."

Luna's expression froze. Her shoulders stiffened. Skelly Riverstone. The most persistent and annoying one among her suitors. He was also the richest, but she had no feelings for him.

"Skelly, I didn't agree to anything," she said coldly. "Whoever told you that, you can

go bother her instead. Stop harassing me."

Her eyes narrowed. "This is a sacred place. Show some respect."

Skelly threw his head back and laughed.

"A sacred place?" he mocked. "Please. I don't care about that."

He stepped closer, his grin widening. "The car's waiting down the hill. The movie starts soon. Let's not waste time. You like this place, don't you?"

Fine Come with me tonight, and tomorrow I'll donate a hundred thousand to your little abbey."

He reached out toward her.

Luna froze where she sat. Her breath caught in her throat.

He'd done this before, cornered her in places where she had no way to escape. But never here. Never in a room this small.

Then, before his fingers could touch her, a voice cut through the air like shattering ice.

"Take your people," Leander said quietly, his tone colder than steel, "and get out." "If you take one more step, I'll throw you off Westvale Peak myself."

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Chapter 374

"If you take one more step, I'll throw you off Westvale Peak myself."

The words rolled through the air like thunder. The killing intent inside them froze everyone in place.

Luna turned sharply. Her eyes were wide. "Leander?"

Every head turned toward him.

Except for Lydia, no one could believe what they had just heard.

Leander stood still, his eyes steady, his tone calm. But the power behind his voice made the guards hesitate.

To them, it sounded insane. Skelly wasn't some random troublemaker. Even threatening him could mean ruin. And throwing him off Westvale Peak meant death. Who would dare say that so casually?

Skelly's grin twisted into something darker. His eyes narrowed.

"Say that again," he said softly. "Louder this time. I don't think I heard you right."

He was the second heir to the Riverstone family, one of the most powerful families in the western region. Their reach spread across politics, the military, and business. They weren't one of Highcliffe's ancient houses, but their influence matched any of them. The Riverstones could stand toe to toe with the Ashcrofts or the Florians.

Though he was not at the top of his family, he was still part of the main branch. Even men like Ethan or Tycen tread lightly when he entered the room. [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT](#)

Yet now, some nameless kid had the nerve to threaten him to his face.

Janey looked at Leander, disgust flashing across her eyes. "What's wrong with you? Do you just pick fights with everyone you see? You really don't know when to shut up."

Behind Skelly, his guards straightened, their gazes sharp and full of mockery.

Each one of them was trained, hardened, and loyal. They had broken bones and silenced men for less. The Riverstone family could bend laws and erase names with a single phone call.

Leander looked calm, but to them, he was already a dead man. The brat was wearing nothing but cheap clothes and radiated no aura at all.

All they needed was a single word from Skelly. Then they would move—and no one would stop them.

Lydia was the only one who didn't move. A small smile curved her lips, calm and knowing.

Just the day before, Ethan had stopped by and told her everything about the martial assembly between the four major elite families. She knew her eldest son well enough to understand one thing he hadn't fallen. He had grown more dangerous, more ruthless, and far stronger than before.

Even those Transcendent Realm masters, warriors others saw as untouchable, had fallen to his hands like fragile prey. Someone like Skelly was nothing to him.

As every eye in the room followed him, Leander slowly rose from his seat.

"You think I'm playing with you?"

His voice was quiet, but it carried a chill that dug into bone.

Luna's heart lurched. "Leander, please, don't do this."

She tried to reach for him, afraid he would go too far, afraid he would make a mistake he couldn't undo. But he was already moving.

Leander grabbed Skelly by the collar. "What-what are you doing?" Skelly stammered.

Before he could finish, Leander lifted him clean off the floor. Skelly's body, heavy and strong, hung in the air like it weighed nothing. His limbs flailed, but his strength failed him.

Luna froze. Janey gasped in disbelief. Leander didn't speak. He just walked forward, each step deliberate, dragging Skelly toward the doorway.

"Let him go!" one of the guards shouted.

"Put him down now!" another barked. The guards rushed forward as a group.

Leander turned his head slightly, his eyes glinting like shards of ice. "Out."

His voice exploded through the air like a thunderclap. The sound hit the guards like a wave of force.

One by one, they dropped to their knees, clutching their heads, groaning in agony.

Leander didn't even glance their way. He walked out into the courtyard, dragging Skelly behind him like a lifeless doll. The cold wind whipped around them as he stopped at the edge of the cliff. "I'm going to throw you from here" he said, his tone low and icy. "If you live, you're lucky. If you die, that's your fate."

Skelly's face drained of color. His bravado vanished. Now he knew. Now he realized what the man he faced was like. This man was not some no-name fool. He was merciless. Cruel. "Wait! Please! You don't understand—"

Leander's grip didn't loosen. His face didn't change. Under the horrified stares of everyone inside the room, his fingers opened.

Skelly's scream tore through the mountain air as his body fell away, crashing against the cliffside before vanishing into the darkness below.

Then there was silence. Leander turned around and walked back inside, his expression calm, his steps steady.

The guards on the floor stared at him like they were seeing a ghost. They couldn't comprehend what had just happened.

He had actually done it. They'd thought it was just a threat, a bluff to scare Skelly. But he had gone through with it, tossing the Riverstone heir off Westvale Peak without hesitation.

Leander looked over them, his gaze cold and heavy. "You have three seconds," he said flatly. "If you're still here after that, you'll follow him."

The words rolled through the room like a death sentence. The guards scrambled to their feet, stumbling and tripping over each other as they fled. Within seconds, the courtyard was empty.

Only Lydia remained seated, unshaken, her hands resting calmly in her lap. Luna and Janey stood frozen. Their faces were pale.

Leander looked gentle, refined, even scholarly, yet what he had just done proved something terrifying his restraint was gone. Luna's heartbeat hammered in her ears. Did he not care about the law?

Janey took an involuntary step back. Her hands trembled. She'd stormed into the room earlier without knocking. If Lydia hadn't known her, would she have shared Skelly's fate?

Leander sat back down beside his mother. Lydia turned to him with the same serene expression and began talking as if nothing had happened.

Luna's stomach twisted.

How could they be so calm?

"Leander, what did you just do?" she whispered, her voice shaking.

Leander turned his head slightly. "You're my mother's acquaintance. He barged in and tried to drag you out. I showed mercy by letting him fall."

"Mercy?" Luna's voice cracked.

Throwing a man off a mountain-was that mercy? If that was mercy, she could not comprehend what was not. Murder, perhaps.

Janey's fear turned to anger. "You're insane!" she shouted. "Do you even realize who that man was?"

She pointed toward the door, her hand trembling. "That was Skelly Riverstone-the second-in-line of the Riverstone family! They control half the western region! Even the Ashcrofts and the Florians don't want to cross them!"

Her voice rose with panic. "You didn't just break the law. You picked a fight with a family that owns this city! Do you have any idea what you've done?" Leander leaned back against the wooden pillar. He looked utterly unbothered. "The Riverstone family?" His tone was casual, his eyes cold. "They're just another family hanging onto power. If their patriarch himself came here and disrespected my mother, I'd treat him the same way. Their second-in-line means less than crumbs of cookies tucked away in some dingy old attic."

Every word dripped with conviction. Janey's mouth went dry. Luna's hands clenched against her dress. Though she liked Leander, even she thought this was being arrogant.

They didn't know if they were terrified or awed.

That same night, in a villa nestled deep within Highcliffe's western hills, the sound of hurried footsteps echoed through a private courtyard. A group of guards carried Skelly's broken body across the stone path. His arms and legs hung limp. His face was mangled, unrecognizable. His breathing was faint, shallow, barely there.

At the center of the courtyard stood

a man in uniform, tall and still, his hands clasped behind his back. His posture was sharp, his presence cold enough to silence the air. He stared at his brother's ruined form, saying nothing. Skelly's limbs were broken, his breathing was shallow, and half his face was ruined. Even though he was supposed to stay composed, he failed to hold his fury back. Bloodlust and murder were raging in his eyes.

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Chapter 375

This was Quincy Riverstone-the eldest son of the Riverstone family.

The difference between the two brothers was stark. One shallow, one deep. They represented the family's creed. Move with the tide, survive through adaptation.

Quincy had entered the military at eight years old. He'd been trained personally by Old Mr. Riverstone. For more than a decade, he hadn't once left the field. Now, at twenty-three, he stood as a lieutenant colonel-an officer with a flawless record and limitless potential.

This was only his second year back home. And his younger brother had returned to him half-dead.

Quincy's voice cracked through the courtyard like a blade slicing air. "Who did this?"

He stood beside Skelly's broken body, staring at his brother's pale, lifeless face. Rage boiled in his chest like a storm about to burst.

The guards who had followed Skelly to Durham Abbey stood trembling under his glare. One of them stepped forward, his voice shaking, and repeated everything that had happened, word for word. This update is available on

Quincy's expression darkened with every sentence. His eyes burned cold, his jaw clenched tight.

"So it was about a woman again," he muttered, a bitter sneer twisting his mouth.

He narrowed his eyes, thinking fast. "A nameless young man threw my brother off Westvale Peak? In all of Highcliffe, even Ethan or Tycen wouldn't dare pull something like that. Who would have the nerve?"

The lead guard took a step forward, lowering his head. "Mr. Quincy, that man wasn't ordinary. He barely lifted a hand, and we were all taken down in seconds. He's a martial expert."

"A martial expert?" Quincy's tone stayed calm, but his gaze sharpened. He'd spent most of his life in the army. He'd seen men who could bend steel with their bare hands, men who could crush bones with a single blow. He knew what that kind of power meant.

He paused, then spoke quietly.

"Go. Bring Mr. Gessinger here."

The guards looked at each other in shock. None dared question him. They bowed and hurried out to carry out his order.

Behind the Riverstone estate, a pavilion stood. Two elderly men sat across a stone table, a chessboard spread between them.

One wore a neat military uniform. His posture was straight, his hands steady as he held a white piece. Each move he made was sharp and precise.

The other man, with long white hair and a flowing robe, looked calm and timeless, his expression unreadable. His black pieces landed softly, one after another, as if they carried the rhythm of the wind.

The soldier played with aggression, each move cutting forward like a strike. But the robed elder countered every attack with patient grace. His defense flowed like water, smooth and effortless, turning certain defeat into narrow escape.

Soon, the board was filled with black and white. Neither could win.

The soldier finally exhaled. "Homer, your skill's improved again. I tried three openings to break your defense, but your moves wrapped around mine like silk. I couldn't find a single flaw. That was a fine match."

The robed man smiled faintly.

"Logan, you push too hard. You forget that chess, like life, is a balance. You must know when to press forward and when to yield. Only then can you control the game."

Logan Riverstone laughed quietly and shook his head. "No wonder they call you Gessinger the Dustless. You never rush, never stumble. You're still teaching me after all these years."

The two shared a small smile as they reset the board.

Before the next game began, the sound of footsteps broke the stillness.

A young acolyte in robes ran up to Homer and whispered something in his ear.

Homer's eyes flickered. He turned to Logan.

"Quincy's calling for me. It must be urgent. We'll continue next time."

Without another word, he rose and walked out of the courtyard.

Logan watched him go, his brows drawn together.

"Urgent business?" he murmured.

It puzzled him. Within the Riverstone family, Homer Gessinger was no ordinary man. He was their hidden protector, a living legend called upon only in times of true crisis.

If Quincy had summoned him, something serious had happened.

Outside, Homer entered the main courtyard. Quincy was already waiting for him, his back straight and his hands clasped behind him.

As soon as he saw the old master, Quincy stepped forward and bowed deeply. "Mr. Gessinger."

Homer gave a slow nod. His gaze shifted toward the ground where Skelly lay broken and unconscious. His brow furrowed.

"Who would dare harm a member of the Riverstone family, especially in Highcliffe?" His voice was quiet but carried a sharp undercurrent. "Was it the Ashcrofts? The Florians?"

He looked at Quincy, calm and collected.

Quincy shook his head. "No. It was a young man. We don't know his name, but he's a martial artist. I doubt anyone else in the family could face him. This is about our honor. I need your help."

Homer was silent for several seconds. Then he nodded once.

"Very well. I'll go with you." His tone was firm, calm, and final.

He turned toward the mountains, his eyes distant. "I've been resting for forty years.

Maybe it's time these old bones saw sunlight again."

He paused, a faint smile ghosting his lips. I wonder, he thought, if anyone still remembers the name Homer Gessinger.

At Durham Abbey, Janey paced the

floor, her anxiety rising by the second. "Luna, you have to leave," she said urgently. "They'll come after

him, and when they do, they'll come

for anyone close

to him. You can

to him.

You can

stay here.

But Luna shook her head, her voice quiet but resolute. "This started because of me.

I'm not running away. I need to face it."

Her stubbornness only made Janey more desperate.

Across the room, Leander and Lydia sat in perfect calm, as if none of this concerned them. The quiet between them made Janey's skin crawl.

"Lydia, please," Luna begged, biting her lip. "You and Leander should go. He didn't mean to do what he did, but the Riverstones won't care about that. They'll come for revenge. I don't want you to get hurt because of me."

Lydia smiled softly and opened her mouth to speak. Before she could, a cold voice echoed from outside. It carried a sharp, murderous edge that cut straight through the air.

"You hurt someone from the Riverstone family, and you think you can walk away?" The temperature in the room seemed to drop. A tall figure stepped through the doorway, his every move radiating control and authority. It was Quincy.

He had come in person, straight from the Riverstone estate. His gaze swept the room and locked on Leander instantly.

His voice was low, dangerous. "You're the one who threw my brother off Westvale Peak?"

Leander's eyes lifted lazily. His tone was calm, almost amused.

"Your family's pretty bold," he said slowly. "Half an hour ago, I threw one of you off that mountain. Now another one shows up already?"

Quincy's eyes gleamed with cold fury. The killing intent in them was sharp enough to chill the air. Leander was a stranger-someone he had never seen before. If this had been a direct heir from one of Highcliffe's great families, Quincy might have softened his tone maybe exchanged a few polite

words first. But now, facing a

nameless outsider, he didn't bother

to hide his anger.

"You've got guts," he said coldly. "You knew my brother was from the Riverstone family, yet you still struck him down so hard?"

His voice lashed out like a whip. "You might be a martial artist, but don't think that a little strength gives you the right to act without consequence."

He gestured behind him. The soft rhythm of approaching footsteps filled the air. An elderly man in gray robes stepped into view.

"This is Mr. Gessinger," Quincy announced, his tone proud. "Forty years ago, he served as the teaching elder at Mount Martial. Since then, he's been the Riverstone family's most honored protector.

"If you can survive a single strike from him, I'll let this matter end here."

When he finished, Quincy stepped aside.

Homer stood before Leander, his hands clasped behind his back. His expression was serene but unyielding. "Young man," he said

everly lye walked a quiet bath for I've many years. I don't enjoy using force. But as the guardian of the Riverstone family, I must deliver justice.

"I'll strike once. If you survive, we'll leave it at that."

The air began to hum. Power swelled around him like the pull of a storm. Wind whipped through the meditation hall, tearing at the curtains and rattling the floorboards.

Luna and Janey froze in terror. Their eyes widened, unable to comprehend what they were seeing. The man who had looked like a gentle monk moments ago now radiated enough strength to make the entire hall tremble.

Homer spread his palm. The air bent around his arm as if pulled by invisible tides. He was about to strike.

But Leander let out a low, quiet laugh. His tone was relaxed, his gaze half amused. "Mount Martial's teaching elder?" he said, smiling faintly. "That's all?"

He raised a single finger, his voice cold and deliberate. "If you can take one palm from me without injury, I'll pretend none of this ever happened."

He moved. His hand drifted forward, soft and light as falling snow.

The moment his palm landed, the world seemed to explode.

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Chapter 376

Leander's palm looked harmless—like a breeze brushing across a field. But when it struck, the air around them shattered like glass.

A brilliant light burst through the hall. A circular tunnel of energy spiraled open in midair, glowing and immense, as if someone had torn a hole in the world.

Homer's calm face twisted in shock. A wall of crushing force rolled toward him, heavy as a mountain, unstoppable as an avalanche.

He gasped, stunned. How could someone so young—barely in his twenties—carry such terrifying power?

Panic surged through him. His instincts screamed. He poured every ounce of his strength into his counterstrike, his inner vitality roaring through his veins like fire.

He thrust his palm forward, meeting the blow head-on.

A thunderous crash ripped through the air. The whole of Durham Abbey shook violently. Dust fell from the rafters. Tourists outside turned toward the temple, their faces full of confusion and fear.

A blur of motion shot through the doorway—a body hurled through the air like a cannonball. Shockwaves burst beneath his feet as he fought to steady himself midair, every step cracking the air around him.

Inside, the meditation hall stood untouched. Luna and Janey could only stare, frozen in disbelief.

Even Lydia, who had prepared herself for this, felt her breath catch. She had heard the stories-how Leander once wiped out eleven Transcendent Realm warriors alone in the Southern Ocean. But seeing it with her own eyes was another thing entirely. The calm young man she knew now radiated raw power that shook her to her core.

Quincy stood motionless. The arrogance in his posture had vanished. His chest tightened as cold realization settled in.

Homer-the man who had once ranked eleventh among the International Combat Units, a master whose Burning Stage cultivation was revered across the world-had just been defeated in a single move.

Leander hadn't even stood up. He sat cross-legged, unmoving, his breathing steady, not a single mark on him.

The image branded itself into Quincy's mind like a scar. He couldn't comprehend what he had just witnessed.

Then, from outside, a furious roar shook the sky. "Who are you?"

The voice thundered across the mountain range. The very air trembled. Everyone in Durham Abbey heard it.

Tourists outside looked up in terror.

Above the temple, Homer hovered in midair. His robes whipped wildly in the wind, his presence towering like a storm god.

But his face was twisted with rage. Blood streaked down from the corner of his mouth. His breath came sharp and uneven, and his hands trembled from pain.

"Mommy, what's that?" a small boy cried, tugging on his mother's sleeve. "Is that a superhero?"

The woman beside him stood frozen, unable to speak.

Inside the temple, Leander rested calmly against the wall, unmoved. "You took my palm and got hurt," he said softly. "Which means this isn't over."

His voice carried clearly through the room. "Tonight, I'll visit the Riverstone estate myself. For now, leave."

He tilted his head, a faint smile forming on his lips. The Riverstone family had caught his interest. Homer's power had surpassed even Ares and Enderman, both men he had already slain. For a family to produce someone stronger than them meant their reach extended beyond any of the four great houses.

He wanted to see for himself how far their power went.

From above, Homer's voice came down like frost.

"There's no need to wait until tonight."

His eyes burned with fury, and his voice cut through the clouds.

"I was careless before. That won't happen again. You've made an enemy of the Riverstone family. That means you've made an enemy of me."

The sound of his challenge boomed across the sky. "Do you dare face me outside?" His voice echoed over the mountain, heavy and cold, while the people below stared upward, pale with disbelief.

Gasps rippled through the courtyard like waves breaking against stone. "Is that old man in the sky actually challenging someone?" The rightful source is

"No way! Tell me I'm not seeing this. That's... that's got to be some kind of god, right?"

"Look for yourself! Everyone's staring. You think we're all imagining it? That's a real deity up there!"

The whispers spread fast, full of awe and fear. Most of those gathered at Durham Abbey were people of quiet faith-men and women who burned incense and prayed for peace but none of them truly believed in gods.

none broad daylight, they

Yet now,

watched a man floating in the sky, his robes billowing as if he

commanded the wind itself.

Inside the meditation hall, Leander's voice carried outward, calm yet razor-sharp.

"So, you're still asking for a fight?"

The tone was cold, cutting through the air like a blade. "I thought that first strike would've been enough to teach you something."

He lifted his gaze toward the sky, his voice steady and low. "You should know this-I held back. Push me again, and I won't.

"You've spent a century building that Burning Stage strength of yours. It's not easy, I get that. You're one of Astria's strongest, and I'd rather not end your life."

Homer's expression twisted. The words struck deeper than any blade. Memories clawed their way up from his past the humiliation of losing leadership to this

Mount

brother, the shame that drove him down the mountain, the decades he

spent buried in silence as the

Riverstone family's guardian.

But even in defeat, not once had anyone ever dared speak to him like that. And now,

this boy, barely a man, was looking down on him as though he were a child.

Rage burned through him. "Arrogant brat!" Homer snapped, his voice booming like thunder. His sleeves whipped through the air, gathering light. A spear of blinding energy shot from his hand, slicing toward the hall.

Before it struck, a beam of blue light erupted from the ground. It met Homer's attack midair, shattering it with a crack that tore through the mountain's silence. Leander stepped out from the hall, his movements slow, his eyes like frozen steel. "So you've chosen death," he said softly.

He hadn't wanted to fight him again. The words of the Celestial Mirror still haunted his thoughts-the prophecy of the world's end. Every strong fighter alive was another hope against the coming darkness.

But Homer had crossed a line.

He'd dared to strike the abbey where Lydia had lived in peace for nine long years.

That was something Leander couldn't forgive.

A violent gust roared beneath his feet. Dust burst upward as he launched himself into the sky.

Homer's eyes widened.

A fist filled his vision, growing larger and larger.

He clenched his jaw and brought his arms up in defense.

"Twin Extremities!" he shouted.

The Great Balance Mount Martial's most sacred art. Created centuries ago by the sage who founded the mountain, the style had been passed down through generations, evolving into a discipline that even the weak could master.

Homer had once been its top instructor. His mastery was

absolute. The twin extremities' energies wrapped around his arms, one hand, one soft, both balanced perfectly. He divided Leander's attack into thirteen separate forces and dissolved them effortlessly.

Leander paused. A flicker of respect passed through his eyes.

"So, you really are from Mount Martial," he said quietly. "That explains a lot." A faint smile touched his lips, his tone softening for a moment.

"Funny thing," he said. "The path I walk now—my own martial art—was born from Mount Martial's teachings. The Great Balance showed me how the world turns."

He tilted his head slightly, his voice darkening again. "Because of that, I'll give you one last chance. Leave now, and I'll let you live."

His eyes sharpened. The warmth in them vanished.

"If you stay," he said coldly, "you die."

The air seemed to stop moving. Even the wind went still. The mountain waited in silence.

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Chapter 377

There had been a time when Leander was broken. His power gone. His spirit hollow. His future dark.

He had wandered aimlessly for months until, one afternoon, he stumbled upon a monk beneath a pine tree at the foot of Mount Martial. The old man's every move was slow and deliberate. His steps curved in rhythm, each one flowing into the next like the endless change of seasons. It was the Great Balance.

That moment had changed everything. Leander began to understand the push and pull of all things-the cycle of heaven and earth, the stillness within movement, the strength hidden in calm. From that understanding, he created the "Devourer's Ninefold Path."

It was different from Great Balance, rougher and far more dangerous, but without that moment under the pine tree, he never would have learned the way of harmony. He never would've gotten this far in life.

Because of that, he had always respected Mount Martial deeply. And seeing Homer now, using that same technique, only strengthened his hesitation. He didn't want to hurt him.

However, Homer's glare hardened.

"You? Connected to Mount Martial? What a joke!" He laughed coldly. "Our teachings are about control and balance. You radiate chaos and violence. You could never come from Mount Martial!"

Before Leander could speak, Homer lunged forward. His arm swung like lightning.

"Crumbleforce!"

The strike tore through the air. His sleeves stretched long, glowing as waves of energy layered upon one another. The force twisted the sky itself, pressing the air inward until it formed a dent in space. The blow came straight for Leander's chest.

This was one of the mightier attacks in Great Balance, and inner strength was its focus. It could be controlled freely. It carried enough strength to tear the ground apart.

Leander's lips curved in a cold smile. "Very well."

He clenched his fist, his knuckles cracking, and struck.

Homer's move was flawless, elegant, filled with purpose. Even the bystanders who knew nothing about martial arts felt the beauty of it.

Leander's punch, by contrast, looked simple-so simple it seemed dull. But when it connected, the world shifted. It felt as though a mountain had moved. Not Leander, of course. He was not something that could be moved.

Leander didn't waver. His body stood firm in the air, like an unshakable force that nothing on earth could move.

A roar tore through the heavens. The sound rolled down like thunder, shaking every wall and pillar of Durham Abbey. Even the towering Nine Dragon Pagoda swayed under the shock, its bells clanging wildly as dust drifted from its roof.

Homer's triple punch ripped through the sky in waves of blinding light. It was fierce, raw, and wild, but his power scattered before it reached its mark. Leander's counterpunch was sharp and exact, like a steel spike driven deep into the earth. The impact cut through Homer's energy and split it apart as if tearing through cloth.

A violent force exploded outward. Homer's body jolted. A grunt burst from his throat

as the pressure slammed him backward across the air. He barely steadied himself after sliding thirty feet.

What kind of monster is this kid? His thoughts raced. His pupils contracted in disbelief.

Homer had long served as the Riverstone family's protector. For decades, he had kept to himself, only acting when the family's survival was at stake. The outside world had long stopped mattering to him.

He hadn't followed the rise of new names or new legends. He didn't know who Leander was, only that this young man's strength defied every law of martial cultivation.

The air rippled.

Leander moved again. His body vanished and reappeared in a blur. In one step, he stood right before Homer, close enough that the wind around them howled like a storm.

He raised his fist, calm and precise. "Tailcatch!"

Homer's arm swept out wide, his left hand turning in a spiral. The air bent around him, forming an unseen vortex. His whole body flowed with energy, each motion smooth and sure. He tried to catch and dissolve the force coming toward him.

But when his palms met Leander's strike, everything changed. A sudden surge erupted, bursting through his defense like a tidal wave. His technique shattered before it could even form, and the blast crashed into his chest.

A choking sound echoed. Blood burst from Homer's mouth, scattering into the air as his body hurled backward again, spinning through the sky.

His eyes widened in shock. "Impossible!"

His most trusted technique-Tailcatch-had failed him. It was the cornerstone of Mount Martial's Great Balance, known for its perfect control, its power to neutralize any attack. Yet here it had broken like glass. His strength dissolved, leaving nothing to stand on.

Leander's face stayed unreadable. His eyes held no pity, no pride, only the cold certainty of someone who already knew the outcome.

His "Devourer's Ninefold Path" had been inspired by the very art Homer now used. Leander had studied its every strength, but he also knew every flaw hidden within. He understood it better than those who had practiced it their entire lives.

He attacked again. Then again. Nine strikes followed, each louder and heavier than the last. The sky cracked with sound.

Every punch sent Homer flying farther back, his robes tearing to ribbons. The wind around him burned like fire. His breath grew ragged. His arms trembled from the strain.

Below, the crowd of monks and

tourists watched in stunned silence.

"Mom," a little boy whispered,

tugging on his mother's sleeve.

-H

That old man's losing. That guy in

the sky... he's winning. Is he @god too?"

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There was excitement hiding inside his eyes as he stared at Leander.

The woman didn't answer. Her eyes were wide, her voice gone. Around her, no one spoke. They all stared upward, frozen between terror and awe.

Outside the temple, Luna and Janey stood motionless. Their faces were pale, their eyes locked on Leander.

Both of them had grown up reading stories about heroes and warriors. But no book, no movie, no tale of myth had ever shown something like this. The man above them wasn't just human anymore.

He was something greater.

Another blow lit the sky. Tenth strike.

A burst of energy cracked like thunder. Homer's arms exploded under the impact, the sleeves of his robe shredding into scraps that drifted through the air like burnt paper.

His breath came out in short, broken gasps. His eyes were wide and hollow. I am ranked eleventh in the International Combat Units, he thought numbly. How can I fall

to someone like him?

His voice came weak and trembling. "Who are you?"

Leander's gaze turned colder.

"A dying man doesn't need the answer," he said softly.

Blue light gathered around his fist, coiling tighter, brighter, until it looked like lightning trapped in his hand.

"Trinity Strike Technique-Soulbreaker."

He had once used this very strike to end the life of the Peterson family patriarch, Now, with his Devourer Form perfected his strength had crossed beyond the Franscendent Realm. The power of that punch

could tear apart mountains and drain rivers dry.

The next moment, the sky exploded.

A blinding fist of blue light punched through the heavens. The shockwave shattered clouds and split the air with cracks that echoed for miles. Homer's last cry was drowned out as the force hit him full-on.

Blood gushed from his pores. His body swelled, then burst apart, scattering into a mist of red that rained down from the clouds.

Leander's expression barely changed. "Burning Stage Transcendent Realm?" he muttered to himself. He shook his head with faint disappointment.

He floated down through the drifting dust and landed quietly in front of the temple.

Luna and Janey stood frozen in place, their minds unable to catch up with what they had just seen.

Leander turned toward Quincy, his voice sharp and calm.

"You've got guts," he said. "Bringing people here to come after me."

He tilted his head slightly. "Do you even know who I am?"

Quincy's face was pale. His eyes darted from Leander to the shattered sky. His lips trembled.

"Jeff Ashcroft?"

He had never seen the man before,

but everyone in the elite families knew that name—the one who had single-handedly wiped out eleven Transcendent Realm fighters in the Southern Ocean. That name was no longer human. It was legend. It was fear.

Leander's mouth curved into a thin, humorless smile. "Then, you know," he said,

"what it costs to cross me."

He flicked his sleeve. A violent gust of air swept through the courtyard. Quincy's feet left the ground. His scream was cut short as his body was thrown into the sky, tumbling helplessly before vanishing over the edge of Westvale Peak.

The wind went still.

Luna and Janey didn't move. Their hearts pounded, but their minds were blank. The world around them had gone quiet, like the calm after a storm. Leander turned to Lydia and grinned. His tone softened. "So, Mom," he said with a spark in his eyes, "where were we in the story? I was actually enjoying it."

The tenderness in his voice clashed with the devastation around him. It felt unreal, almost surreal.

The next morning, the news swept across Highcliffe like fire. Both Riverstone brothers had been thrown from Westvale Peak. Their bodies were shattered. Their pride was gone. And the whole city trembled.

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Chapter 378

Quincy had been thrown off Westvale Peak by Leander. Fortunately, members of the Riverstone family were already stationed at the foot of the mountain and managed to save him in time—otherwise, he would've been dead.

Even so, all four of his limbs were broken, and his body was damaged.

Within a few hours, the news spread across Highcliffe's upper circle like wildfire. The fact that the Riverstone family's two young heirs had been tossed off Westvale Peak sent shockwaves through the city's elite. Everyone who heard it was stunned beyond words.

The Riverstones of Highcliffe might not be counted among the top aristocratic families, but their power rivaled—if not exceeded—that of the city's four major elite families.

Their roots in Highcliffe went back further than anyone's. The family had followed the founding ancestor in his campaigns, earning their title through loyalty and valor. Generation after generation, the Riverstones had risen to prominence—producing governors, generals, and political leaders.

The family head, Logan Riverstone, had once served as Captain General, one of Astria's highest-ranking and most influential military figures. Though retired, his authority still carried weight; his students and followers held key positions throughout Astria's military and government.

His eldest son, Dorian Riverstone, was barely fifty yet already a major general. The second son, Lachlan, governed one of the three Northeastern provinces—handpicked by the central government as provincial governor.

Among the third generation, Skelly Riverstone was considered the least promising, content to drift within Highcliffe's social scene. But Quincy was different. He had joined the army at eight, risen through the ranks over more than a decade, and now held the rank of Captain—a meteoric rise for someone his age, a young officer destined to become a pillar of the military.

One family, two generals, a provincial governor, and a young officer already commanding respect—such a lineage was formidable. In both the political and military

arenas, the Riverstones' influence far outstripped that of Highcliffe's four major elite families.

And yet, even a family this powerful had been humiliated. Someone had dared to strike them, injuring both young heirs of the Riverstone family without mercy-swift, brutal, and utterly unrestrained.

No one could believe it. Not even Highcliffe's four major elite families would have the nerve to do such a thing.

Who could possibly have that kind of courage to lay hands on Quincy and Skelly Riverstone?

The powerful families of Highcliffe were all watching in silence, waiting to see how things would unfold. But inside the Riverstone Residence, the air was frozen and heavy-like the heart of winter itself.

The head of the Riverstone family, Logan, sat in his military-green coat, his palm slamming down on the armrest of his chair. His eyes burned like twin flames.

"Outrageous. Absolutely outrageous!"

Both of his grandsons had been rushed into intensive care one after another. The fury boiling inside him could have set the room ablaze.

He had spent his life on the battlefield-charging through gunfire, leading counteroffensives, carving out victories that had built the Riverstone name. Under his protection, the family had flourished, standing shoulder to shoulder with Highcliffe's four major elite families.

But now, both heirs of the third generation were gravely injured. The blow was crushing.

If it had been Skelly alone, he might have kept his temper in check. But Quincy was the family's lifeblood, their future. And now, even with the best doctors and treatments available, they said he might never walk properly again.

For a soldier, that was the end.

With Quincy fallen, half the Riverstone family's foundation had collapsed overnight.

"Find out who did this," Logan roared. "I don't care who it is-he'll pay the price. The Riverstones will never rest until this debt is settled!"

At his command, the entire Riverstone family mobilized. When Dorian, Quincy's father, received the news, he immediately led several senior officers out of camp, heading straight for home.

The attack that sent both Riverstone heirs tumbling down Westvale Peak had shaken Highcliffe to its core.

And yet, Leander remained completely unaware.

While the city churned with unrest, his life at school went on as quietly as ever. Calm, detached, and focused, he was already planning his next step his training in spiritual strength.

Normally, the Transcendent Realm meant refining one's inner energy into pure innate vitality. But the Devourer's Ninefold Path—the technique Leander practiced— was different. From the very beginning, it allowed him to generate something far more primal and formidable: Primordial Energy.

Though Primordial Energy was powerful, it could only strengthen his body. To elevate his spirit, Leander still needed the help of rare treasures.

He had decided to begin cultivating his spiritual strength because he understood what was required to reach the highest level of the Transcendent Realm—the Infernal Crown Transcendent.

That realm wasn't defined by physical might, but by the state of one's mind and spirit.

To ascend to the level of Infernal Crown Transcendent, one needed not only immense Primordial Energy but, more critically, a spiritual strength powerful enough to undergo a complete metamorphosis.

This spiritual strength, often called divine sense, was a force beyond the physical. When mastered, a single thought could carry one across miles, command the elements, and bend the world to one's will. It could even be shaped into invisible attacks that shattered the enemy's consciousness.

The cultivators he had encountered before did possess some level of mental assault, but it was nothing more than a shallow imitation. A true master of spiritual strength could shift mountains, part seas, and suppress the world with a single thought.

Though Leander was a martial artist, he intended to perfect his spiritual strength as well. Only when body, Primordial Energy, and spirit all reached their peaks and fused as one could he claim the title of the strongest.

As far as he knew, the cultivation of spiritual strength was divided into five stages: Spirit Awakening, Spirit Convergence, Spirit Breakthrough, Spirit Condensation, and Spirit Projection.

Spirit Awakening marked the first step-when one's spiritual strength first stirred, allowing entry into the path of cultivation.

Spirit Convergence came next, when the mind grew tranquil and resolute. The spiritual strength condensed inward, nourished and refined, allowing the user to wield faint traces of spiritual strength in combat.

Reaching Spirit Breakthrough meant shattering the inner barriers. At that stage, the spirit could finally extend beyond the body-striking unseen and wounding the mind directly.

Spirit Condensation was a transcendence of that state, where spiritual strength became fully refined and absolute-strong enough that a single thought could move mountains or sever seas.

Spirit Projection—the ability to let one's consciousness leave the body and move freely—was the pinnacle of spiritual cultivation, mysterious and nearly divine.

As for anything beyond that, Leander's knowledge was limited.

Right now, his own spiritual strength had reached the threshold of Spirit Convergence. To take the next step, he needed opportunity—and the right catalyst. "Looks like it's time to get out for a while if I want to reach the Origin Breaking Realm," he murmured.

In the classroom, Leander rested his chin on his hand, lost in thought. The bell rang, pulling him back to the present and signaling the end of the morning classes.

"Leander," Nathan called out,

grinning as he and the others

approached. "There's a new billiard

club that just opened near the school. They've got some stunning hostesses, and rumor is it's invite-only—money alone won't get you in. Since you're the Ashcroft heir, how about coming with us?"

Nathan, Luke, and Evander hadn't seen Leander for a few days. The moment class ended, they hurried over, eyes bright with anticipation.

Leander arched a brow, a faint smile tugging at his lips. "A billiard club? I didn't know that it could be so luxurious these days." [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT](#)

When they first learned he was Ethan's older brother—the eldest son of the Ashcroft family—Nathan and the others had kept their distance. But over time, that tension faded, and their friendship returned to the easy camaraderie of old.

Since Daphne happened to be away at the Florian Estate that day, Leander nodded without hesitation.

"Sure. Let's go take a look."

The moment he agreed, the three of them cheered in unison and half-dragged, half-pushed Leander out of the classroom.

The billiard club Nathan mentioned was on the fifth floor of Central Mall in the university district. It had only been open for a week, yet it was already packed with students from nearby colleges.

As soon as Leander arrived downstairs, he saw groups of young people crowding into the elevators, all chatting excitedly. From their conversations, it was obvious they were headed for the same place—the billiard club on the fifth floor.

"I thought this place was supposed to be exclusive," Leander said, raising an eyebrow. "If only people with special status can get in, why is it this crowded?"

Nathan shrugged helplessly. "What can I say? The owner's loaded. They turned the entire fifth floor into one massive billiard hall. It's not just about money. Only rich heirs and their friends can get in. That means any college student who manages to enter automatically looks elite—everyone wants that kind of attention. The place practically sells status."

Leander shook his head, half amused, half bored. "So, that's all it is."

After waiting ages for the elevator, the four of them finally reached the fifth floor.

At the entrance, four men in black suits stood guard beside a sleek security scanner.

The whole setup looked like the front door of a private club rather than a student hangout.

Leander was just about to speak when Nathan stepped forward, flashed a glossy VIP card, and was immediately waved through. A staff member hurried over to lead them inside and assign them a table.

Leander couldn't help but laugh under his breath. Nathan's earlier claim that he wasn't qualified to enter had been nonsense from the start. As a young heir from Seagate, Nathan's status was easily high enough.

The whole invitation had just been an excuse to drag him along.

"So, this is what you meant by not qualified, huh?" Leander said dryly, amusement flickering in his eyes.

Caught lying, Nathan scratched the back of his head with an awkward grin and tugged at Leander's sleeve. "Come on, Leander. We just wanted you to hang out with us. You're already here—play a round or two, will you?"

Leander sighed and shook his head helplessly, though he still reached for a cue stick.

The place was, admittedly, extravagant. Crystal chandeliers glittered overhead; fine art lined the walls; even the floors were polished glass. Each billiard table occupied

its own spacious section—dozens of square yards—separated by rows of sleek indoor greenery.

There were three classes of tables, not billed by the hour but by the day. The most basic one cost five thousand, while the top-tier Royal Table went for a staggering fifty thousand a day.

Pricey as it was, the venue spared

no expense in creating its allure. The

hostesses were strikingly beautiful, dressed to turn heads with elegant bar tables circling each section. Drinks, pastries, and gourmet snacks were served nonstop—every detail radiated indulgence.

Nathan, Luke, and Evander were clearly no strangers to the place. They moved

about with practiced ease, and even the usually modest Luke was learning how to flirt with the hostesses.

Leander humored Nathan with a match, deliberately holding back and losing by a single ball. Nathan beamed like he'd just won a championship.

Leander smiled faintly, took a cappuccino from a passing server, and sat down to rest.

That was when he felt it—a presence so familiar it stopped him cold.

He turned his head toward the far end of the hall, to the area reserved for the Royal Table.

There, standing gracefully beneath the soft glow of a chandelier, was a woman in a

fitted dress, speaking with another young beauty beside her. Nearly every man in the room had his eyes fixed on her. Leander's gaze sharpened. It was Yvette the woman he hadn't seen in a long time.

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Chapter 379

"Yvette?"

Leander's eyes flickered with surprise.

It had been quite some time since he last saw her. After leaving Ravenridge, he'd accompanied Madeline to Cranfordale, then spent a full month serving as Chief Instructor at Southern Wyvern Blade. When he later came to Highcliffe, he knew Yvette was studying at Highcliffe University, but he'd never sought her out-and their paths had never crossed.

By now, it had been almost two months since their last meeting. He hadn't expected to run into her here, of all places.

He glanced at Yvette briefly, then looked away, with no intention of saying hello.

Things between them were no longer tense, but they were far from close. He had helped her plenty, and they had spent a fair amount of time together, yet there was still a quiet distance between them—neither friends nor lovers. Follow current novels on

And seeing her surrounded by classmates she clearly knew well, he had even less reason to interrupt. So, he stayed where he was, quietly seated.

"Whoa, I think I just saw Yvette-the campus beauty!"

Nathan, fresh off a hole-in-one, exclaimed in surprise and smacked Evander's shoulder.

"For real? Where?"

The moment the words campus beauty left Nathan's mouth, both Evander and Luke perked up, their eyes darting eagerly around the room.

"Over there!"

Nathan pointed toward the Royal Table near the center. The two followed his gaze- and instantly spotted Yvette, dazzling as ever amid the crowd.

She wore a light blue dress, simple flat shoes on her feet, yet no amount of modest styling could hide her natural grace. Every gesture, every smile carried the quiet poise of an heiress. Her skin was like porcelain, her lips soft and red, her light makeup elegant and refined.

Beside Yvette stood another woman-striking in her own right. She wasn't quite on Yvette's level, but she was still the kind of beauty that could turn heads in any crowd. The two seemed close, chatting animatedly by the table.

Not far from them, a young man in a crisp white shirt held a cue stick with practiced ease. He was effortlessly handsome, his poise commanding attention.

With a few casual shots, he sank three balls in a row. Cheers erupted around him, especially from the girls. Their eyes gleamed with admiration, hoping he'd glance their way.

Even Yvette's friend couldn't hide the spark in her eyes, clearly intrigued. Yvette, however, remained calm-her expression serene, untouched by the commotion.

When the man straightened and his gaze swept toward Yvette, admiration flashed unmistakably in his eyes. He was clearly one of her many admirers.

Every other man in the room seemed to fade beside him. The entire billiards lounge revolved around his presence.

"Who's that guy? He's really putting on a show," Evander muttered, adjusting his glasses with a teasing grin.

Nathan paused before answering. "That's Corin Cole. Big name. He's the grandson of Old Mr. Riverstone from the western region—and the reigning champion of this pool hall. His skills are nearly on par with the pros."

Evander and Luke both looked startled. "Wait, that Riverstone family? The one with two generals from the western region?"

Nathan nodded. "That's the one. This place gets crowded with girls all the time— nine out of ten are here just for him. He's a sophomore at Highcliffe University too. Rumor has it, he's one of Yvette's more determined suitors."

At that, Evander and Luke immediately shrank back, their earlier courage evaporating.

The Riverstones from the western region weren't just any family-they rivaled the nation's most powerful houses. Even an offspring of that bloodline was far beyond their reach.

Seeing the look on his friends' faces,

Nathan glanced at Leander, who was still sitting calmly beside them and said with an easy smile, "Relax, you two. Corin might have a fancy but Leander here is the

back of the 7

eldest son family. Compared to him, Corin's actually a step below."

At that, Nathan suddenly remembered what Leander had mentioned before—he knew three of the top five campus beauties at Highfiffe University. And Yvette was one of them. His eyes lit up, and he leaned toward Leander with a grin.

"Leander, didn't you say you know Yvette? Why don't you call her over for a game?"

Luke and Evander perked up immediately, eyes full of hope.

Playing billiards with the campus beauty herself definitely sounded better than a guys-only match.

"Call her?" Leander shook his head without hesitation. "She's here with her friends. Why would I call her over?"

The three looked visibly disappointed. They didn't doubt that Leander knew Yvette, but from his tone, it didn't seem like the two were particularly close—certainly not as much as they'd imagined.

Just then, over at the Royal Table, Yvette seemed to sense something. She lifted her gaze, her bright eyes sweeping casually across the room—past Nathan and the others—before landing on Leander.

"Huh?"

Her once-calm expression froze, lips parting slightly in surprise.

"Yvette, Corin's almost done with his round. How about we play the next one together?" her friend asked cheerfully beside her.

But Yvette didn't respond. She just stood there, staring across the room, as if trying to make sure she wasn't imagining what she saw.

"Yvette, what's wrong?"

Her friend looked puzzled, and Corin—who had just set down his cue—walked over with a polite smile. "Yvette, we're done. Why don't you and Calira play the next round?"

Both of them turned toward her, but Yvette didn't seem to hear a word. Suddenly, she stepped over the divider lined with plants and started walking quickly toward the other side of the room—her pace half a run, as if she couldn't wait another second.

Corin and the girl exchanged confused glances, clearly at a loss.

Nathan sighed. "Man, this is boring. Maybe I'll call Livia and the others to come hang out—"

Before he could finish, a whiff of perfume brushed past him.

All three Nathan, Luke, and Evander—froze in disbelief as Yvette strode straight up to them, stopping right in front of Leander.

"When did you come to Highcliffe? Why didn't you tell me?"

Her voice was soft, her smile bright as spring sunlight. She leaned in, lowering herself slightly until her face was almost touching his. The closeness was intimate enough to draw stares from half the room.

"Don't get so close," Leander muttered, shooting her a look. He pressed his palm lightly to her forehead and pushed her back a little.

"Sit."

He gestured casually to the chair beside him. And just like that, the famously aloof campus beauty—usually cool and untouchable—pulled out a chair and sat obediently next to him, her shoulder nearly brushing his.

Nathan, Evander, and Luke were stunned into silence, their eyes wide with disbelief.

Across the room, Corin stood frozen, staring blankly at the scene.

It took him a long moment to process what he was seeing. Then, his hands slowly clenched into fists, his nails biting deep into his palms as anger flared in his eyes.

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Chapter 380

Corin's expression kept shifting, his whole body trembling with barely contained rage.

He was a sophomore in the finance department—the same as Yvette. The first time he saw her was at the freshman welcome party. From that moment on, he'd been completely captivated by her beauty and poise. But it was her distant, untouchable air that truly drove him mad.

He swore to himself that he would win her over. For nearly a month, he played the part of a thoughtful upperclassman-checking in on her, offering help, keeping just the right distance. He made sure to show his strengths in front of her, hoping to earn even a glance of interest.

But no matter how outstanding he was, no matter how many girls hovered around him with admiration, Yvette remained unmoved. She never seemed to warm up to him, never even agreed to have a meal with him alone.

He had always told himself that Yvette was simply reserved by nature that he just needed more time. But now, watching her, that illusion shattered completely.

Yvette had walked up to another guy-on her own. And that guy had reached out to touch her forehead. She didn't flinch, didn't pull away. Instead, she looked shy and happy.

Then, when the young man casually motioned for her to sit, she obediently pulled out a chair and sat beside him like it was the most natural thing in the world. The sight sent a hot wave of jealousy surging through Corin's chest.

So, Yvette wasn't cold by nature after all—just cold to him. But why? He couldn't understand, couldn't accept it. Yes, the guy looked handsome, but hardly remarkable. How could someone like that be the one Yvette-the campus beauty of their university-chose to lean on?

Beside him, Calira-Yvette's close friend of just a month—was just as stunned.

Her usually aloof and proud friend was acting like a bashful schoolgirl. Calira could hardly believe what she was seeing.

"D*mn it!"

Corin slammed his cue back into the rack, the sound sharp and violent. Then, he shot Calira a look.

"Calira, come with me."

The girl followed immediately, heels clicking softly as she trailed behind Corin toward Leander's table.

Her eyes flickered, cooling as they landed on Leander. Her name was Calira Cole-Corin's younger sister. She knew exactly what was on her brother's mind, and she'd been quietly helping him pursue Yvette from the start.

So, when she saw Yvette all but throwing herself into another man's arms, her stomach twisted with resentment.

Highcliffe was full of outstanding young people who could rival Corin-but Leander? He was definitely not one of them.

"You've been in Highcliffe for over a month already. Why didn't you tell me? Are you at Highcliffe University too?"

Yvette's eyes lit up as she reunited with Leander. She leaned closer, full of delight, peppering him with questions like a stream that wouldn't stop.

Leander took a slow sip of his coffee, his tone calm and faintly detached.

"I wasn't sure if you'd changed your number. And I've been busy lately. Besides, there wasn't really anything worth calling about."

Nathan and his two friends sitting nearby couldn't help raising their thumbs at him. They'd just realized something every stunning girl seemed to have some kind of connection with Leander.

Daphne did. Eira did. And now Yvette, too.

What blew their minds was that, aside from Daphne, Leander treated all of them with the same cool indifference. The guy was unreal.

Yvette pouted at his response. She had thought of calling him, but Leander was

always busy, and she didn't want to be a bother or come off as clingy. She'd kept her feelings bottled up all this time—and now that she finally saw him again, the excitement just spilled over.

"Oh, right—are these your classmates?"

A playful glint flashed in her eyes as she turned to Nathan and the others.

"They're my close friends," Leander replied simply.

At that, Yvette's face brightened. She turned to Nathan and the other two with a radiant smile.

"Hi, I'm Yvette. Leander and I went to high school together-we're good friends."

That smile alone was enough to make the three guys lose all composure. Each of them scrambled to introduce himself, eager not to be the last.

Yvette remained warm and polite. She knew that anyone Leander considered a friend had to be

someone he respected-just like

Liam back then. Since she already saw Leander as someone special, she naturally wanted to stay on good terms with the people close to him.

"By the way, Lean, what's your major now?"

Her bright eyes sparkled as she looked at him.

"Lean?" Leander's brows drew together, his voice turning cool. "Who told you to call me that?"

But Yvette only smiled mischievously, her tone teasing. "I like it. It sounds fun—and it should be my special nickname for you. No one else calls you that, right?"

Leander's gaze flickered with a trace of helplessness. "You're getting bolder by the day."

Yvette covered her mouth with a light laugh-graceful yet playful. After knowing him for so long, she understood his temperament well. He responded better to gentle persistence than force.

She was just about to stand up and join Nathan and the others for a game when an ill-timed voice broke in.

"Yvette, running into some friends?"

Everyone turned to see Corin walking toward them, trailed by a group of men and women—a whole entourage.

Yvette frowned slightly. She wasn't close to Corin, but after spending over a month in the same circle, she had a pretty good sense of his personality.

She stepped forward, her expression calm and distant, and gave him a curt nod.

Seeing how cold Yvette suddenly became so different from the way she'd just been smiling at Leander Corin's anger nearly boiled over.

He forced himself to stay composed, masking his fury with a polite, almost gentlemanly smile.

"Since they're all your friends," he

said smoothly, "why don't we move over to the Royal Table? It's a better spot and the more people, the merrier. This table's on me

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The tone of his voice-gracious, confident, and generous-made the onlookers nod approvingly.

"No need, Corin."

Before Leander or the others could respond, Yvette had already lifted her hand with a small shake of her head.

"I'm fine right here with my friends. We wouldn't want to bother your group."

The polite but firm refusal made Corin's pupils tighten. He turned his gaze toward Leander, who was still sitting calmly, unmoved. Then, a faint smile curved on his lips.

"Well, that's fine too. I just noticed your friend here has quite the knack for the game.

I'd like to get to know him. What's his name?"

His real target was obvious.

Leander's lips curved faintly, but he didn't answer he simply took another sip of coffee.

Yvette spoke up instead, her tone protective.

"Corin, he's not really one for small talk. You don't need to know his name."

Every word out of her mouth drew a line between the two men and every word was in defense of Leander.

Corin could feel his jealousy twisting inside him like a venomous snake, biting deeper the more he tried to contain it. New NOVEL chapters are published on He took a slow breath, his eyes glinting with a hint of challenge.

"All right, if your friend doesn't like socializing, I won't push."

Then, his tone shifted suddenly.

"But I did notice his form it seems like he's got some real skill. I'm feeling a little rusty myself. Maybe he'd be up for a round?"

He turned directly to Leander, a spark of provocation burning in his eyes.

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Chapter 381

The moment Corin spoke, everyone around finally caught on he hadn't come over for small talk. He was gunning straight for Leander.

Corin wasn't just anyone. He was the undisputed king of this billiard hall, undefeated, with a skill level sharp enough to go toe-to-toe with pros. Challenging Leander to a match wasn't about fun—it was a setup to humiliate him in front of the crowd.

Calira's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. She had complete faith in her brother's game. Seeing Leander getting close to Yvette today had irritated them both. They couldn't do anything to Yvette, but humiliating Leander right in front of her? Corin could easily manage that.

Everyone turned toward Leander, waiting for his response. Yvette didn't speak up this time—she only looked at him, a faint teasing smile playing on her lips.

Seriously? Leander, of all people? The man who could flatten mountains if he wanted to? And someone thought he couldn't handle a game of pool?

Corin was asking to be embarrassed. Yvette had been fed up with him pestering her lately, so she didn't mind letting Leander teach him a well-deserved lesson.

"You want to play against me?"

Leander set his coffee cup down and shook his head with a light chuckle. "Forget it."

Corin wasn't about to let that go. Seeing Leander back off, he took it as fear, assuming the man didn't think he stood a chance. A smug grin spread across his face.

"Hey, it's just a friendly game. Don't get so nervous. If you're really that scared of losing, I'll even play the whole round with my other hand. You can pick the rules- eight-ball, nine-ball, snooker, whatever you want."

His tone dripped with arrogance, his confidence practically radiating off him.

After all, Corin ruled this place. No one here had ever beaten him. Every top student from nearby universities had tried and failed. The only people who might stand a chance were professionals—and even then, only the very best.

The others exchanged amused glances, quietly pitying Leander.

Getting on Corin's bad side meant Leander might as well say goodbye to this pool hall for good.

"That's not the problem," Leander said, waving a hand dismissively.

"I just think playing against me would be... unfair to you."

The room fell dead silent.

Dozens of eyes turned toward him, stunned, then incredulous.

Corin was the best player in the hall, his skills on another level entirely. Anyone who could last within three balls of him was already considered top-tier.

So, when Leander had the nerve to say that playing against him would be unfair to Corin, the room nearly burst out laughing. Overpowering Corin? That would take a professional and not just any pro, but one of the best in the game. Leander was clearly nowhere close.

Corin was quiet for a beat, then burst out laughing.

"You've got a real sense of humor, I'll give you that. Too unfair to me? Go ahead, ask anyone here if they'd dare say something like that.

"Fine. Whatever the rules, if you somehow beat me, every expense you rack up in this hall from now on is on me.

"But if you lose-stay away from Yvette. Completely. Are you up for it?"

Nathan and his two friends stiffened. So, that was it—Corin was picking a fight over Yvette.

Yvette sat quietly, saying nothing. Leander glanced her way, then sighed and stood. "My expenses don't need you to cover them. I can afford my own games. But since you're so eager to embarrass yourself, I'll play along. If I lose, I'll honor your terms.

"But if I win, I don't want your money. I just want one thing-next time I come here, I don't ever want to see you again. Fair enough?"

Corin's pupils contracted sharply, his gaze turning cold as the air in the room seemed to drop several degrees.

"Fine. Deal."

He gave a slight nod, a glint of satisfaction flashing in his eyes-like a man who believed he'd already won.

In his mind, this was a sure victory. Once Leander lost, he'd have to keep his promise and stay away from Yvette. And once Leander was out of the picture, what could possibly stop Corin from winning her over?

As for losing? That thought never even crossed his mind.

"What rules do you want to play by?" he asked, spreading his hands generously, as if granting Leander a favor.

"Keep it simple-eight-ball," Leander replied.

In eight-ball, the balls were divided into two groups: solids and stripes. Numbers one through seven were solids, while nine through fifteen were stripes. Once a player sank a ball from either group, that side became theirs for the rest of the game, and the opponent took the opposite set.

After clearing all their assigned balls, a player could then go for the black eight.

Whoever sank the eight ball first won the game.

"Perfect," Corin said, nodding. Eight-ball was his specialty.

He signaled to a server to rack the balls and gestured for Leander to take position.

"This is my home turf. You're the guest. I'll let you break first."

In eight-ball, the one who broke usually gained the upper hand-but Corin wasn't worried. On a small table packed with sixteen balls, they were tightly clustered. To clear the table in one turn was nearly impossible-unless the player had both world-class skill and incredible luck.

And he didn't believe Leander had either.

As long as Leander missed even once, Corin was confident he could finish the game in a single run.

Nathan frowned slightly. Leander might have terrifying strength-he could take down a dozen men alone-but pool wasn't about power.

Just earlier, when they'd played a casual round, Leander had actually lost a ball to him. And compared to Corin, Nathan's skills were nothing. So, how could Leander possibly win this time?

"You're letting me break?" Leander asked, the corner of his mouth lifting. "If you went first, maybe you'd have a slim chance. But since I'm breaking... one shot's all it'll take for you to lose."

The words had barely left his lips when he leaned forward, setting up in perfect form. His left hand framed the bridge, thumb slightly raised, while his right arm drew back smoothly-then struck.

The cue ball shot forward like

streak of light, smashing into the neatly racked triangle. The fifteen balls exploded across the table, ricocheting off cushions with sharp clacks that echoed through the hall.

Ten seconds passed before the last ball stopped rolling.

Silence.

Everyone leaned in, eyes widening in disbelief. Corin froze, his face drained of color, as if he'd just seen a ghost.

On the table, balls numbered nine through fifteen were scattered neatly across the

felt. Every solid-one through seven-was gone, cleanly pocketed.

Only the black eight remained, sitting quietly at the corner pocket. The cue ball rested just two inches away-perfectly lined up. One light tap would have sent it home.

The room was utterly still.

"I don't think I need to take another shot, do I?" Leander said calmly, setting the cue back on the rack.

"If not for the rule that says sinking the eight ball first counts as a loss, that one would've gone in too. I'd say that settles it."

He

gave a faint wave, walking past Corin without another glance.

"Remember what you promised. I don't ever want to see you in this pool hall again."

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Chapter 382

Leander's voice echoed across the quiet pool hall. The glamorous servers, the other top players, Nathan and the rest-everyone froze, the room falling utterly silent.

Corin and his sister Calira stood dumbfounded, words failing them. Corin had played pool for more than a decade; he knew exactly what that single shot meant.

A single run-out that cleared the table wasn't impossible for him-but in tournament terms, a "single run" meant starting with one ball, then continuing with consecutive shots.

To pocket all solids or all stripes required a string of flawless plays. Clearing the entire table in literally one stroke—sending every ball in with one hit—was the stuff of fantasy.

Even the world's best pros wouldn't attempt to claim it.

Yet with just one stroke, Leander had sunk every solid on the table. More than that -the stripes and even the eight-ball, which couldn't be pocketed on the break, had all stayed out. The level of control behind that shot was downright terrifying.

Just how much mastery over the game did it take to pull that off? Even world-class players like Rhett Lawson or Trent Holt probably couldn't do it.

Yvette's eyes shone with delight. To her, Leander might as well be omnipotent—and frankly, he often seemed that way.

Leander stretched, bored, and waved at Nathan and the others. "That's about enough. I'm going to get some kebabs-I can't really stomach the food here. Want to come?"

Nathan and the others snapped back to themselves and nodded. Yvette didn't wait for an invitation; she hooked her arm through Leander's and practically dragged him toward the door, leaving him with an amused, helpless expression.

"Stop!"

They hadn't reached the exit when Corin's voice cut after them.

"I want another game. Snooker. I don't accept this."

Corin's eyes blazed with fury. Watching the woman he loved cling to another man, her face glowing with happiness, felt like having a knife driven straight through his chest. He couldn't bear it.

He was the club's champion, the king of this game and he'd just been humiliated by some nobody. How could he swallow that?

Leander didn't slow; he only shook his head, calm. "Whether it's eight-ball, nine-ball, or snooker, the result's obvious. You know that yourself, don't you?"

Corin clenched his fists. Leander was right: he had no real chance. When Leander and his group were near the door, Corin's expression darkened, and he barked an order.

"No one leaves."

Four bodyguards at the doorway stepped forward and blocked Leander and his friends. Other guards from the side corridors moved in one after another until Leander was boxed in.

"Did I say you could go?" Corin's eyes flashed; his true colors had just shown.

He wasn't the owner, but his father was the club's major shareholder. Corin ran this place like royalty.

Yvette glanced back; she gave him a cold look full of contempt.

Her expression only made Corin's anger deeper, but he couldn't worry about that now.

"What?" Leander tilted his head, still unfazed. "You lose the game and you lose your decency too? Holding guests against their will—is that the hall's policy?"

His tone was mocking, utterly untroubled.

Calira thought her brother was overstepping, but seeing Corin's dark expression, she fell silent and stepped aside.

"I'm Corin. This is how I behave. What are you going to do about it?" Corin snarled. "Kid, I admit your pool is better than mine, but so what? Compared to me, you're nothing in status, rank, or wealth. I'm the grandson of Old Mr. Riverstone, and the Riverstone family dominates the western region—you think you have the right to go after the same woman as me?"

He curled his lips into a vicious grin, showing his teeth. "If you leave Yvette alone now, I'll let you walk out of here in peace. Be sensible. If you don't, none of you are going anywhere."

The onlookers watched with morbid fascination, some shaking their heads.

Leander's skill had been breathtaking so much so that even those who disliked him couldn't help but admire it. But as for Corin's behavior, most found it distasteful.

Still, however they felt, no one dared to speak up.

Corin was the grandson of the Riverstone family, one of the most powerful clans in the western region. In Highcliffe, only a handful of people could stand up to his

grandfather Logan an old vel.ne

Who'd once slammed the table an front of Astria's top executives and lived to tell the tale.

Who would dare to interfere in his grandson's business?

Several girls who had been dazzled by Leander's earlier shot sighed softly. Life was never fair. For all his stunning talent, he'd still have to bow to reality.

Beautiful women had always been the trophies of the powerful. What chance did an ordinary man have of keeping one?

"Riverstone family, huh?"

Leander looked at Corin's raging face and smiled—a sharp, disdainful curve of his lips.

"You're just a grandson of the Riverstones. Yesterday, I threw Quincy and Skelly down Westvale Peak. You think you can threaten me?"

The entire room went still. It was as if an earthquake had hit. Faces paled. Even Corin's expression shifted violently, his pulse hammering in his throat.

"What did you just say?" His pupils contracted; fear began to creep into his eyes.

Around them, gasps rippled. Everyone there was from money—many from Highcliffe itself.

Most of them had already heard the

rumor: the Riverstone brothers,

Quincy and Skelly, had been badly injured after someone tossed them off Westvale Peak. People had whispered about it for days, trying to guess which madman would dare strike at the Riverstones like that.

No one had imagined that man would be standing right here.

Calira's eyes widened, disbelief flashing across her face. She knew her cousins—especially Quincy. He was a force of nature, fierce and commanding, his presence enough to make most men shrink back.

When she'd first heard they'd been thrown off Westvale Peak, she'd been stunned for days.

And now, she was staring straight at the man who had done it.

Corin's arrogance drained away, replaced by raw terror. His status was nothing compared to his cousins', and the men flanking him weren't even in the same league as their bodyguards.

If even Quincy and Skelly couldn't stand against Leander, what chance did he have?

Leander's eyes flicked toward him, calm and cold. Corin's heart seized; just as he opened his mouth to beg for mercy, the sharp rhythm of boots echoed from the entrance.

In the next instant, a squad of armed officers stormed in, weapons raised, moving with perfect precision. Within seconds, the entire hall was locked down.

A man strode in at their head—tall, broad-shouldered, the insignia of a major general gleaming on his uniform, the emblem of an olive branch and heart glinting beneath the lights.

Gasps rippled through the crowd. A general? Here? What could possibly have happened to bring a decorated officer to a pool hall?

"Uncle Dorian?"

Corin and Calira immediately straightened and greeted him with
was none other than Dorian Riverstone, the family" second-generation war hero and
deep respect. The man" net
the father of Quincy and Skelly.

Dorian's fierce eyes gleamed with a cutting sharpness. He ignored them completely
and barked out an order, his voice crashing through the hall like thunder.

"I received intel that the criminal who defied the nation's laws is hiding in this pool
hall. Everyone—hands on your heads, stand against the wall!"

The sheer authority in his tone left no room for disobedience. The timid scrambled to
comply; even the proudest patrons hesitated before following orders.

Only one man didn't move.

Leander stood tall and unshaken in the center of the room, his calm presence somehow
more commanding than all the rifles aimed his way.

Dorian's eyes locked onto him. He let out a cold snort and raised a finger.

"So, you're the one who attacked my sons at Westvale Peak."

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- Chapter 383

Chapter 383

Dorian pointed a finger straight at Leander, his eyes flashing cold light, a commanding aura rolling off him like a storm.

Behind Leander, Nathan and the other two unconsciously took a step back. The weight of Dorian's military presence alone was enough to make their spines stiffen.

"Wait—that's the major general from the Northern Military District... Dorian Riverstone?"

"It really is him!"

Among the crowd were plenty of seasoned onlookers, and several had already recognized the pillar of the Riverstone family.

"They say Dorian controls a tenth of the Northern Military District's military affairs— his authority's enormous. Even the provincial governor gives him leeway. And now he's here, personally, with armed troops? Looks like he's come to demand justice for his two sons."

"Of course he has. Those two are his only sons, and both were crippled by that young man. No matter how steady Dorian's temper is, no father could swallow that."

The whispers swelled into a low murmur of alarm. Dorian's presence alone, flanked by so many armed soldiers, made it clear this was no casual visit.

Corin exhaled in relief the instant Dorian appeared. Facing someone like Leander, who had once thrown Quincy off Westvale Peak without a second thought, he'd been trembling. But now that a major general was here one commanding an entire division and backed by live ammunition—Leander's arrogance would have to meet its limit. Surely, this time, he wouldn't dare strike again.

Beside Leander, Yvette's expression hardened. Her brows drew tight.

Leander might be unmatched in strength, but as far as she knew, he had never crossed paths with the government or the military-much less someone of this rank.

A major general was no ordinary title. In Astria, men like Dorian Riverstone carried immense power; to use force against one wasn't just reckless—it was tantamount to challenging the dignity of the entire military.

No individual, no matter how powerful, could stand against a nation.

Yet while Yvette's chest knotted with worry, Leander remained still as stone, his gaze calm and unreadable.

Even with a major general standing before him, his face didn't waver. He looked up slightly, his tone as even as ever.

"So, the Riverstones really do have some pull-sending a major general over a grudge."

He paused, his voice faint but cutting. "What now? You've come to avenge Quincy and Skelly? Is this how the Riverstone family gets its way?"

He spoke as though the rifles aimed at him didn't exist.

Dorian's eyes narrowed, the cold in them deepening.

"Impressive," he said slowly. "I've met plenty of promising young men in my life-but none this arrogant."

"In all of Highcliffe, even the heirs of the four major elite families wouldn't dare stand openly against my family. I'm curious-what gives you the confidence to do something so insane?"

The question rippled through the crowd. Ever since word spread that Quincy and Skelly Riverstone had been thrown off Westvale Peak, Highcliffe had been in uproar. But no one knew what the culprit truly relied on what kind of backing it took to defy the Riverstones so brazenly.

After all, even the children of Astria's most powerful figures wouldn't dare go that far. Leander's reply was calm, almost lazy.

"What gives me the right? The fact that they barged in without knowing their place. I don't go easy on people like that."

He glanced at Dorian, unflinching. "Throwing them off Westvale Peak was mercy. If I'd chosen to kill them on the spot-so what?"

A stunned silence fell.

Dozens of rifles were locked on him, a single command away from turning him into a corpse. Yet Leander spoke without fear, his words ringing through the air like thunder.

Even against the muzzle of an army, his arrogance burned brighter than ever.

"How insolent!"

Dorian's roar cracked through the air as he raised his hand-then slammed it down like a gavel.

"Cuff him! Bring him in for trial!"

At once, every soldier surged forward, ready to subdue Leander.

Inside the intensive care unit, Quincy finally stirred. His eyelids fluttered open, and the faint beeping of monitors filled the sterile air.

"Quincy! You're finally awake!"

Logan rushed to his grandson's bedside. When he saw the once-proud young man lying pale and broken, his heart clenched. A tear-thick and heavy-slipper down his weathered cheek.

"Grandpa..."

Quincy's voice was weak, his face twisting as pain shot through every limb.

"Don't talk, Quincy. Don't move. You need to rest."

Logan's tone softened, but his eyes darkened with murderous rage.

"Don't worry. Your father's already leading the men to deal with that lunatic. You and Skelly will get justice. The Riverstones won't let this go."

Quincy froze, his eyes snapping open.

"What? Dad went after him?"

Ignoring the pain, he tried to sit up, his breathing ragged.

"Grandpa, call him-tell him to stop! They can't touch that man! That's Jeff Ashcroft!"

He'd seen it himself-the terrifying sight of Homer, the strongest of the Riverstone family and an elder from Mount Martial, obliterated by a

single punch from Leander, igl no

father might be a major general with troops at his command, but what good were guns against someone like him?

If Leander lost patience, he could kill them all in an instant and vanish into the mountains. Even the state wouldn't be able to find him.

"What? Jeff Ashcroft?"

Logan's expression collapsed, all composure gone. Shock hollowed his voice.

The name alone sent a chill through him. He hadn't known much before-but after hearing detailed reports about the incident at the Southern Ocean days ago, the story had spread through every upper echelon in Astria.

The Riverstones weren't one of the four major elite families, so they hadn't taken part in the grand tournament. Still, they'd sent a few people to watch-and through their reports, Logan already knew exactly what had happened that day.

At his level, he'd heard plenty about the martial world and the figures who ruled it: But Leander's battle the Southern Shore where he

single handedly crushed en&

Transcendent Realm masters-was something else entirely. It was the kind of feat that bordered on the divine.

And now, Dorian was marching his troops straight toward him.

Logan's heart slammed against his ribs.

"This is bad."

Inside the billiard hall, soldiers were closing in when Leander suddenly laughed.

"Cuff me?" His tone dripped with amusement. "Dorian, you give your men far too much credit—yourself included."

He tilted his head slightly, his voice steady but sharp enough to cut steel. "The Mount Martial elder of the Riverstone family tried to lay a hand on me and I erased him with one punch. You really think these soldiers can do better?"

The air grew heavy, his words echoing like thunder.

"What did you just say?"

Dorian's eyes went wide-but before he could react, Leander lifted one hand.

A surge of invisible force rippled through the room. In an instant, dozens of rifles were wrenched from the soldiers' grips, spinning weightlessly into the air, suspended as if caught by an unseen giant hand.

The crowd froze in terror. Faces went pale all around-even Dorian's expression twisted in shock. Original content can be found at

The air inside the billiard hall churned like a storm, the pressure thick enough to make lungs ache. Leander stood tall in the center, cold light flickering in his eyes.

"Dorian," he said evenly, "for the sake of your rank as a major general, I'll give you a shred of courtesy. You have one minute to take your men and leave. Don't make me repeat myself."

Anyone else would've already been flattened into dust-but Dorian was a major general, a pillar of the nation. Leander had no desire to cross a line that couldn't be uncrossed.

Dorian's breath caught. His pupils shrank. "So, it's you... Jeff Ashcroft."

Realization hit him hard, followed by a wave of bitter helplessness.

man

At last, he understood why Leander had the audacity to cripple both his sons. A man of Leander's caliber wasn't just a martial artist-he was someone the Astrian military kept classified under top-secret files. Even major generals were cautioned to tread carefully around such figures. Dorian knew then that matter how many soldiers he brought, it would make no difference. Against Leander, they

no

were utterly powerless.

The silence in the room stretched. Finally, Dorian exhaled and took a reluctant step back.

"Jeff..... I didn't realize it was you. I misjudged the situation."

Leander's tone stayed cool. "Then take your men and go."

He flicked his wrist. The dozens of rifles hanging in midair clattered down gently, landing back in the soldiers' stunned hands. The sight alone left the onlookers speechless.

"Fall back!" Dorian barked.

The soldiers fell into formation and filed out in perfect order. Dorian followed them to the doorway—but just before stepping through, he stopped and turned his head.

"Jeff, I'll admit it-I can't beat you."

His gaze hardened. "But don't think this is over. My sons' injuries won't go unanswered. The Riverstone family will have its revenge."

"You may be powerful," he said, his voice low and resolute, "but we still have ways to bring you down."

Leander slid one hand into his pocket, his lips curling into a faint, mocking smile.

"Is that so? I'll be waiting."

Dorian gave a cold snort and strode away, his footsteps echoing down the corridor until the sound faded entirely.

Inside the billiard hall, silence reigned.

An entire armed unit—led by a major general—had arrived to arrest one man. And

yet, before a single shot was fired, they'd retreated because of Leander's words. If even a major general admitted defeat, just how terrifying was Leander?

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Chapter 384

"Lean, that major general just now—was he from the Riverstone family?"

As Dorian led his men away, Yvette hurried over and grabbed Leander's arm.

Leander gave a slight nod, his tone carrying a touch of disdain.

"Major general? The title sounds impressive, but that's all it is."

He shook his head. "Someone with that rank should be responsible for Astria's security—for defending the nation, staying calm under pressure, and making clear-headed decisions in any situation.

"But he let personal grudges cloud his judgment. Because of his sons, he lost control, didn't even bother to investigate my background, and barged in with his men. It was reckless—pathetic, really.

"If it weren't for Old Mr. Riverstone's pull in the military, with Dorian's actual ability, he'd be lucky to make it to a first-tier officer, let alone a major general. What gives him the right to hold that rank?"

Even among major generals, there were levels. Some commanded respect with every word and gesture, their presence alone enough to awe others. Dorian, however, was painfully ordinary.

Even Graham—the one who once invited Leander to serve as Chief Instructor for Wyvern Blade—though lower in rank, possessed far greater poise and character.

Yvette nodded slightly, then frowned, worry clouding her face. "Lean, I heard what happened at Westvale Peak. You threw both of the Riverstone sons off the cliff. The Riverstone family won't just let that slide.

"I don't know much about them myself, but a distant cousin of theirs once told me that the Riverstones built their power through the military and politics. Their reach extends everywhere—official, underground, you name it.

"Quincy, the one you injured, is a third-tier officer in the Northern Military District. That's not a small matter. If the Riverstones accuse you of assaulting a senior officer, even you might have a hard time getting out of it."

Her tone grew heavier by the second. The Riverstone family's influence ran deep—if the real power players decided to act, even someone of Leander's strength might not be able to contain the fallout.

Leander barely seemed to care. "Let them come. Whatever they plan, I'll deal with it."

He stood up and waved his hand. "Come on, let's go grab some kebabs."

Nathan and the others snapped out of their daze and quickly followed.

Back at the billiard hall, everyone else remained frozen, still trying to process what they'd just seen.

"Leander, seriously—how did you do that back there? You caught all their rifles out of thin air, and then handed them back like it was nothing!"

At the food stall, Nathan couldn't hold back his astonishment any longer.

Evander and Luke both turned toward Leander, just as curious. That move—snatching weapons from a distance—had looked nothing short of supernatural.

Leander grinned. "That? Just a little martial training. When your skills reach a certain level, tricks like that are easy."

"Martial skills?"

The three of them exchanged looks, speechless, half understanding, and half bewildered.

...

Meanwhile, at the Riverstone family's private estate, Dorian finally returned.

Logan sat at the head of the hall, and the moment Dorian entered, their eyes met.

"Dad, I miscalculated," Dorian said grimly. "The one who hurt Quincy and Skelly—it was Jeff. I can't touch him."

The proud major general sank into a wooden chair, his face etched with defeat. "I already know."

Logan nodded heavily, his face drawn and grave.

If there were people in Highcliffe that the Riverstones avoided provoking, Leander was certainly one of them.

They didn't know exactly how strong he was, but Leander's sweep through the Southern Shore-taking down eleven Transcendent Realm fighters by himself-had already raised him to a level the Riverstones couldn't reach.

A calamity that even the four major elite families together couldn't overcome had been quelled by Leander alone. That was raw power.

Logan had known Homer for years. Homer had served the Riverstones for a long time and had once been a senior elder at Mount Martial, nearly succeeding to lead it. Logan understood Homer's strength better than most.

Yet Homer had been easily crushed by Leander obliterated with a single punch. Who, then, could stand against Leander? To move against him would be to oppose someone at the peak of the martial world and it would run counter to the

Riverstones' interests.

Seeing Logan's reaction, Dorian realized his father was hesitating.

He tightened his expression and urged, "Dad Quincy and Skelly are my own sons, the only two male heirs of the third generation. Jeff injured them. They might need crutches for the rest of their lives. We can't let this go unanswered."

Logan considered for a long moment, inhaled deeply, and then a cold light passed through his eyes.

"You're right. The Riverstone family must avenge this. But to take on Jeff, we must prepare thoroughly."

He rose and paced toward the hall's entrance.

"Jeff whose real name is Leander is the eldest son of Gareth Ashcroft. That means the Ashcroft family stands behind him.

"Jeff alone would be dangerous. Since he's backed by the Ashcrofts, bringing him down will require someone of considerable weight.

"It looks like I'll have to call on some old friends."

Logan narrowed his eyes, already plotting.

Dorian's face lit with ecstatic relief. He understood what Logan's old friends meant—each one a legendary commander, a veteran with unquestioned achievements.

Any of them could sway the balance in Highcliffe. Their word alone would make Astria's major powers take notice. If they all came, it would be like calling in a powerful army.

Even with the Ashcrofts backing him, Dorian believed they could

Though Logan kept his composure, a shadow passed over his mind. These old friends were powerful men who ruled their own domains. Call them in meant spending political capital. They could drink together and enjoy the theater any day, but mobilizing them was a favor that cost influence-and once used, it was gone.

Leander.

Logan had intended to save those cards for a true crisis. Now, for one Leander, he would have to lay everything on the table. He questioned whether spending so much simply to avenge two grandsons was worth it.

After long thought, he pushed the doubts aside, and a different light came into his eyes.

"Dorian, contact them for me—invite them in my name. And to make sure everything goes smoothly, there's one more thing I must do."

Dorian blinked in surprise as Logan produced a token from his clothes. Etched on it was a delicate black-and-white symbol.

Logan had received the token from Homer when Homer first joined the Riverstone family. He pocketed it and called out sharply.

"Get the car ready. I'm going to Mount Martial."

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Chapter 385

Mount Martial-known in ancient times as the Great Mountain and later called Mount Harmony-was the sacred ground of Astria's Taoist tradition. Nestled within the Northlake region, it was praised through the ages as "a peerless wonder of the world, the foremost immortal mountain beneath the heavens."

For centuries, Mount Martial had produced one prodigy after another. Around six hundred years ago, it reached its golden age when a true Taoist master emerged-a figure later revered as Saint Greaterson.

Saint Greaterson's cultivation was beyond compare. He dominated an era, earning the reverence of every faction under the heavens. His legacy, the Eternal Flow Technique, was passed down through generations, spreading far and wide. Today, it was practiced by men and women alike, young and old—a symbol of balance and strength that transcended time.

The mountain's front slopes had long been developed into a major tourist destination, bustling year-round with visitors from across Astria.

But while the front mountain teemed with noise and excitement, three army-green jeeps, each bearing military plates, quietly made their way up the back mountain.

Mount Martial had seventy-two peaks, thirty-six cliffs, twenty-four valleys, eleven caves, three deep pools, nine springs, ten ponds, and nine wells. The convoy was heading straight for the highest of the seventy-two peaks.

Most people knew of the Palace of Concord and the Golden Sanctum, but few realized that deep within the heart of those seventy-two peaks lay a hidden sanctuary known only to the initiated-Martial Hall.

That secluded hall was the true sacred heart of Mount Martial, where only the most devoted disciples were ever allowed to set foot.

The jeeps stopped halfway up the mountain when the road vanished into rock. The doors opened, and a tall, silver-haired man in a crisp military uniform stepped out-Logan.

With several guards following him, Logan began the steep climb along a narrow forest trail leading toward the summit.

By the time they reached roughly seven-tenths of the way up, the path ended at a sheer cliff. A few guards volunteered to climb it by hand, but Logan raised a hand to stop them.

Reaching into his coat, he drew out a token engraved with the Tai Chi Diagram and called out in a firm, commanding voice.

"I am Logan of the Riverstone family from Highcliffe, bearer of the Token of Balance.

I humbly request an audience with the Grandmaster of Mount Martial. Please, reveal yourself!"

Though Logan was past seventy, his voice was deep and steady, echoing through the mountains with a weight that lingered in the air.

For a while, there was only silence. The guards exchanged puzzled looks.

Then suddenly, the wind shifted.

A sharp gust roared through the peaks, sending the mists swirling like waves. The fog rolled and rose, twisting as if alive.

The guards stood frozen, their eyes widening in disbelief as the clouds began to move in deliberate formation-coalescing, turning, and finally shaping into a vast, glowing Tai Chi Diagram that slowly spun in midair.

They were speechless. Even as elite military guards accustomed to danger and discipline, none of them had ever witnessed anything remotely like this.

Logan stood firm, holding the Token of Balance, his gaze fixed on the center of that massive, turning symbol.

From its heart, a small black speck began to grow larger—until it took the shape of a tall man in flowing robes, descending lightly as though carried by the wind itself.

In his hand was a horsetail whisk, his age impossible to tell. With a single step, he seemed to traverse centuries-the distance between them closed in the blink of an eye.

The guards could only stare, struck dumb. To them, the man might as well have been an immortal descending from the clouds.

The figure approached without a sound; even his footsteps left no trace. When he stopped before Logan, he raised one hand and the Token of Balance floated from Logan's grasp as if drawn by an invisible force, settling gently into the man's palm. "The Token of Balance..." Get full chapters from

The man's voice was quiet, almost reverent, yet it carried the weight of centuries- like wind passing over the bones of history.

"It truly is the Token of Balance."

His fingers brushed lightly across the intricate Tai Chi emblem carved into the token, his gaze shifting with emotions too complex to name.

Decades ago, among these very seventy-two peaks, two of Mount Martial's most revered masters had faced each other in a duel that stunned the entire sect. It was not a battle to the death, but one to determine mastery—a test of skill, not survival.

The two had once been brothers in all but blood, bound by years of shared training and mutual respect. Yet the victor of that duel would ascend as the Grandmaster of Mount Martial, inheriting the sect's most sacred techniques. The one who lost would be given the Token of Balance—an honor, but also a mark of exile—stripped of the right to ever vie for leadership again.

In the end, he became Grandmaster. Homer, the defeated one, took the Token and left the mountain in silence. He had never returned not once in all these years.

The Grandmaster himself had also spent decades in isolation, devoted to perfecting Mount Martial's ultimate arts. The two of them, though bound by fate, had remained worlds apart for half a lifetime.

At last, the man pulled himself from the depths of memory and let out a quiet sigh.

"How is Homer now?"

His dark eyes fixed on Logan, deep and endless as a void. It was a gaze that drew the soul in, commanding both awe and submission.

Logan—veteran major general, forged in decades of command—bowed with clasped fists and stepped back respectfully.

"I'm Logan Riverstone, here to pay my respects to the Grandmaster of Mount Martial."

He had never

er seen the man before,

but there could be no mistaking him. That commanding presence-calm unshakable, and utterly

transcendent-belonged to in?

person alone: Galen Pierce, the legendary Grandmaster of Moun Martial, once hailed as a martial sage who shook the world.

Though Logan held the rank of major general, he still lowered his head before

Galen; this man stood on a plane beyond worldly hierarchy.

When the formalities were done, Logan's expression darkened with grief.

"Mr. Pierce... Homer has passed away."

The words had barely left his mouth when the mountain shuddered. The enormous

Tai Chi Diagram overhead shattered with a deafening crack, dissolving into a violent storm.

Winds howled through the

seventy-two peaks, sending dust, stones, and entire trees flying. The sky dimmed, the earth trembled. A crushing pressure descended like a mountain's weight, and pebbles the ground split into powder under its force.

Galen's robe whipped wildly in the storm. His eyes blazed with light so fierce it made the guards stumble back, terror etched across their faces.

In that moment, they finally understood-this was the true power of Mount Martial's Grandmaster.

"How could he die? How could he possibly die?"

Since ascending to the Grandmaster's seat, Galen had never once lost his temper.

He lived in harmony with nature, detached from worldly anger. Yet now, at the news of his junior brother's death, fury surged through him like wildfire. Decades had passed since they last met, but even back then, Homer had already reached the Transcendent Realm. Ten years ago, he advanced even further into the Burning Stage, ranking eleventh among the International Combat Units.

A cultivator of that level possessed innate vitality—an extended life span easily exceeding a century and a half. Unless he faced catastrophic misfortune, there was simply no way Homer could have died.

"Mr. Pierce," Logan said gravely, steadying himself under the pressure, "that is precisely why I came."

He drew a slow breath, each word deliberate.

"Two days ago, in Highcliffe... Homer was killed with a single punch-by a young man."

"A young man?"

Galen paused only a beat, and a name flashed through his mind.

"Jeff Ashcroft."

Though he had long lived atop the peak and kept his distance from the world, Gaten's disciples were many and news from the martial world reached him frequently. He had already heard of this young, O formidable prodigy and had watched

him with quiet interest.

If Homer had been killed by a young man, there was no one else in all of Astria who could likely have done it.

"That's him," Logan said, nodding hard and clasping his fists again in salute to Galen.

"Mr. Pierce, my two grandsons were thrown off Westvale Peak by Jeff. Their limbs were shattered; they're left disabled for life," he said.

"Homer and I were close for twenty years. He cared deeply for me, and because of matters involving the Riverstone family, he died at Jeff's hand.

"We were ready to move against Jeff. But he is one of the martial world's strongest. We needed an unmatched master—a steadying anchor-to make sure our plan would succeed without fail."

Logan's gaze turned steely; his words carried a hard, unforgiving resolve.

"I came with the Token of Balance to ask you to come down from the mountain-for my Riverstone family, for Homer-to be that decisive force that ensures Jeff can no longer rise again."

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Chapter 386

Logan's voice rang with unshakable authority. This veteran major general, who had spent half his life on the battlefield, bowed deeply to Galen.

"Please, Mr. Pierce, come down the mountain and help us!"

The aura of Galen's robe dissipated, leaving him calm and composed. He stared at the Token of Balance in his hand, memories of the days he and Homer had trained together, learning martial arts side by side, flooding back.

By now, his eyes were filled with a cold, unyielding clarity.

"Jeff... He sure carries himself with a lot of swagger.

"The Divine Loom even gave him the nickname 'Iron Sovereign.' Defeating a few Burning Stage Transcendent Realm fighters at the bottom ranks of the International Combat Units, and now he thinks he's invincible?"

With that, he channeled his energy through two fingers, and the pure iron Token of Balance in his hand shattered into countless fragments, scattering like dust.

"The Token of Balance is Mount Martial's emblem. Whoever holds it is entitled to Mount Martial's full support. As the head of Mount Martial, it is my duty beyond question.

"Now that the Token of Balance has been used, Mount Martial's rules dictate it must be destroyed. This trip to Highcliffe, I'll accompany you!"

Galen turned, lowering his head, and his eyes burned with hatred as he gazed at the vast, empty peaks stretching before him.

"Even without the Token of Balance, I would still go to Highcliffe with you. Homer joined Mount Martial at ten; we trained and ate together, lived together, like brothers. He lost the chance to become Mount Martial's leader due to a single misstep, and I've carried that guilt ever since.

"Though he claims to have left Mount Martial, he is still one of us. Jeff dared harm him, and I will be the one to hold him accountable!"

With a powerful motion of his hand, Galen lifted the surrounding mists of Mount Martial as if grasped by an invisible giant, weaving them into countless threads of force that connected all seventy-two peaks.

And this was casual for him—yet it surpassed Grayson's Infinite Silken Trap by hundreds, maybe thousands of times.

"Homer, wait until I reach Highcliffe. I will strip Jeff of all his power and avenge you!"

Unaware of the affairs at Mount Martial, Leander was in the cafeteria with Daphne that day. Nathan and the others, sensing the moment, wisely chose a table farther away, leaving the two of them in private.

"Ander... was it you who dealt with Quincy and Skelly?" Daphne asked suddenly, her eyes sparkling.

"It was." Leander nodded.

Daphne let out a helpless sigh, spreading her hands. "I knew it. No one in all of Highcliffe would dare move against the Riverstone brothers except you."

She set down her spoon and straightened, her expression growing serious. "Ander, how do you plan to handle this? The Riverstone family isn't a top-tier house, but they're far from weak. My father says their hidden strength exceeds that of the four major elite families. If they strike in earnest... it would be overwhelming. "Old Mr. Riverstone's influence is unmatched in our circles, even surpassing everyone in my grandfather's generation. And Quincy is a third-tier officer. You severely injured him. If this reaches the military, it could spell serious trouble for you." Follow current novels on

Daphne had considered every angle. Leander might be powerful in martial arts, but influence and connections operated by different rules. The world was ultimately ruled by nations, and Astria's government and military were unstoppable.

No matter how strong Leander was, he could not resist if they came together. Even the seemingly invincible Jeff would be forced to yield.

If the incident caused a citywide uproar or national manhunt, Leander might avoid capture, but he would never live a normal life again—peace and safety would vanish forever.

"Don't worry, Dani. The Riverstone family can't touch me," Leander said, his mouth full of soup, words slightly muffled.

Seeing the confidence in his expression, Daphne didn't press the matter. The

Riverstones might be powerful, but if they truly tried anything against Leander, no matter how the Ashcroft family responded, the Florian family would never stand idly by.

They were in the middle of their meal when suddenly, a stir rippled through the cafeteria. Heads turned toward the entrance.

"Look! It's Luna!"

Everyone craned their necks, and sure enough, Luna appeared, dressed in a simple, breezy outfit. The soft tap of her flats echoed as she walked gracefully, with her friend Janey at her side.

The two passed right in front of Leander's table. Luna's eyes flicked toward him, and they immediately lit up.

"Leander! What a coincidence!"

Janey, though a little shy, also showed a look of surprise and excitement. That day at Westvale Peak, Leander had bested two major heirs in a single aerial duel—an

unforgettable scene. They had long since put him on a pedestal.

"Yeah," Leander replied casually, not even lifting his head.

"You're friends with Ander?" Daphne asked with a playful smile.

"You're... Daphne?" Luna suddenly noticed the girl next to Leander, and her expression shifted.

"That's me. If you don't mind, why don't you join us?" Daphne gestured gracefully, radiating poise and charm.

Luna glanced at Leander. Seeing no sign of displeasure, she and Janey sat down letting out a quiet sigh. Clearly, Leander and Daphne had special bond, and in terms of both family background and beauty, Luna came second.

Not long after Luna arrived, another commotion erupted at the entrance. Eira appeared, draped in purple, her figure graceful and elegant, instantly drawing over a hundred gazes.

At the same time, Yvette and Aurora appeared at different exits. It was as if the top beauties of Highcliffe University had agreed to make a synchronized entrance, all arriving in the cafeteria simultaneously.

"Oh my gosh, what's going on? These top beauties are usually so rare to see... and now there are this many in the cafeteria?"

"Wow, it's like a garden in full bloom!"

"Seriously, being part of Highcliffe University is amazing!"

The cafeteria erupted into chaos. With all five of the top beauties arriving one after another, every eye in the room followed them.

Many of the wealthy students squirmed, subtly making space next to them, hoping one of the girls might sit by their side. A few bold ones even dared to invite them outright—but none were acknowledged.

Instead, after getting their meals, all five girls, as if by unspoken agreement, chose to sit at Leander's table.

In an instant, the five beauties surrounded him, placing him at the center. The entire room fell silent.

Each of these girls alone would be considered a striking beauty; sitting beside one was already a huge blessing. But now, all five were. clustered around a single boy. The sheer fortune of it drove the male students in the cafeteria nearly insane.

Whispers spread. Who was this Leander? A son of a tycoon? A descendant of high-ranking officials?

Yvette grabbed a simple meal and sat diagonally across from Leander. She glanced at Daphne, her eyes briefly flickering with curiosity.

Back in Ravenridge, Leander had once said that someone already held a special place in his heart. Now, she finally understood exactly whom he meant.

After a brief pause, she stood and extended her delicate hand toward Daphne.

"Hello, Daphne. This is our first proper meeting. I'm Yvette, Lean's classmate and close friend back in Ravenridge," she said.

"Lean?" Daphne raised an eyebrow. In Yvette's eyes, she saw a fierce, unyielding determination—a competitive fire that refused to back down.

She realized that among the five top beauties, Yvette might be her most persistent rival.

The Florian princess smiled warmly, extending her hand with elegance.

"I've heard a lot about you. It's a pleasure!"

Finally, the two girls with deep ties to Leander's life met face to face.

Watching this, Eira curved her lips into a knowing smile, her expression laced with mischief. She leaned close to Leander's ear.

"B*stard, I didn't come here to eat with you. I've got news for you want to hear it?" She whispered in his ear, her breath teasing, laden with flirtation.

"If it's important, say it," Leander replied without looking up, focused on his meal.

"Hmph, boring." Eira scoffed lightly, then her tone turned serious.

"According to my sources, the Riverstone family has made their move.

"Right now, at the Riverstone Residence, at least five former high-ranking major generals have gathered. Each one was a

distinguished officer, longtiminet

comrades of Old Mr. Riverstone, holding key positions in various military districts. Their status is not something to underestimate.

"So many of them assembled together—it's clear they're coming for you."

Though Eira's voice was low, Daphne and the others heard every word perfectly.

"Five major generals?"

Such a force was terrifying enough on its own. Adding Logan and Dorian into the mix, it meant seven major generals were converging.

"Not just that," Eira continued. "Lachlan, the Riverstones' second son, has contacted the governors of the other two Northeastern provinces. He's making a move too."

"I suspect he plans to petition the other governors together, to officially charge you," she added.

Hearing this, the group fell silent, their expressions shifting with each passing

second.

"The Riverstones are truly formidable," Daphne murmured, her eyes narrowing with

concern.

Seven major generals personally mobilized-intent on cornering Leander.

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Chapter 387

"B*stard, what are you planning to do?"

Eira's eyes sparkled with mischief as she looked at Leander, curious about his next move.

Leander was undoubtedly powerful, but this wasn't like the battle at Southern Shore. Here, they were facing seven major generals and three provincial governors— officials of Astria itself. There was no way he could use force against them.

If Leander actually laid a hand on them, it would be seen as a direct challenge to the country. Martial artists could wield their strength to uphold justice, but ultimately, they had to operate within the framework of the country-unless Leander was willing to vanish completely from Astria's records and live outside the law.

Given the current situation, even Leander's unmatched combat skills wouldn't be enough to take on seven major generals and three provincial governors working together. Facing such a lineup, the Ashcroft family alone would have to go all out just to barely hold their ground.

And even that might not be enough to keep Leander safe.

To counter the Riverstone family's lineup, only a handful of the top-tier families- those with power in both politics and military-could intervene. Other than that, only the true heavyweights of Astria could step in to prevent a full-scale conflict.

Leander, though revered as one of the strongest in the martial world, likely didn't have the same network in the political and military spheres as others did. How, then, would he navigate this?

"What do you mean, what am I going to do?"

Leander chewed a piece of beef, his expression casual.

Eira furrowed her brows. "Don't you need to plan and think things through?"

Leander shook his head, a faint smile tugging at his lips.

"I'll respond to whatever the Riverstone family does. Why would I need to prepare?"

Eira's eyes narrowed. He seemed unnervingly calm, as if he already had the entire situation mapped out. She couldn't help but wonder—beyond being the strongest in the martial world, did Leander have some hidden ace up his sleeve?

But what kind of card could allow him to ignore seven major generals and three provincial governors entirely?

Her gaze flicked to Daphne, who frowned slightly beside him, and the pieces fell into place.

Leander was the eldest son of the Ashcroft family, and Daphne was the sole daughter of the Florian family. If the Riverstone family sent all these big shots, the Ashcroft and Florian families would never stand idly by. Alone, the Ashcrofts might not be enough to tip the scales—but with the Florians in the mix, they could potentially match their opponent.

So, it comes down to the Ashcroft and Florian families?

Eira's lips twitched with a hint of disappointment. She had expected Leander to face the Riverstone family and their political-military allies on his own, relying purely on his own strength. Instead, it seemed even he needed the combined support of these families, which, to her, slightly tarnished the legendary aura of the Iron Sovereign. Leander, however, didn't acknowledge her thoughts. He finished the last of his soup, wiped his mouth, and stood.

"I'm full. Carry on without me."

With that, he strode out of the cafeteria alongside Daphne, leaving a few of the top beauties exchanging glances of admiration and curiosity.

Riverstone Residence, western region, Highcliffe.

Logan sat high at the head of the table. On either side of him were five elderly officers, all around his age, dressed in sharp military uniforms, their posture rigid, radiating the aura of disciplined authority.

Each of them had once commanded armies, led sieges, and wielded iron-fisted control. Though they had retired due to age, their influence remained vast. Their reputations spanned the military districts, granting them immense power in decision-making.

"Gentlemen, I've summoned you here because the Riverstone family can no longer swallow this insult!

"Jeff has gone too far. He dared to sever the bloodline of our Riverstone family, almost cutting off the flow of fresh blood. If we don't settle this score, then all my years of service in the army will have been wasted!"

His words burned with anger, laced with unwavering resolve.

A short-bearded elder sitting nearby glared, nostrils flaring, letting out a cold snort.

"This Jeff has gone way too far," he

said through gritted teeth. "He thinks because he's one of the

the martial world, he can do

whatever he wants. He even attacked a military officer! This is blatant disregard for discipline and the law!"

in

As soon as his words fell, another elder turned slightly, nodding in agreement.

"Absolutely. I've heard of this Jeff. From the moment he entered the scene, he's been flashy, stirring up storms in the martial world, ruthless in his methods. He always uses killing to stop killing-I've long disapproved of his ways!

"I also heard that the Shadow Division already mobilized against him, imposing sanctions and bans. Clearly, he hasn't taken their warnings seriously!"

At the far end of the table, another elder rolled two balls in his hand. His expression radiated authority without needing anger, yet his voice carried sharp indignation.

"Jeff's actions have gone beyond any rules!

"Even though the country holds the strongest martial artists in high regard, no one should be above the law!

"He dared to harm a military officer

today; what's to stop him from

attacking a major general

tomorrow? Such arrogance must be punished. Even if he doesn't pay with blood, he must at least understand that this country is not his to command!"

Seeing his old comrades stirred with righteous fury, all directing their condemnation at Leander, Logan felt a surge of pride and power well up inside him.

"Gentlemen, I'm grateful that you've come to support the Riverstone family. From now on, if you ever need our assistance, don't hesitate to ask!"

Just as he prepared to speak further, a figure appeared at the door—Dorian.

Dorian quickened his pace, whispered something into Logan's ear, and Logan's face lit up with joy.

"Really? That's wonderful!"

He scanned the room and, turning to the five other veteran major generals, bowed deeply, his voice booming.

"Old friends, everything is in place. This time, we're counting on all of you!"

The five responded with their own

bows, each with a glint of ferocity in their eyes. Facing a supreme martial artist alone was intimidating; now, with all of them united and the joint petition of three provincial governors, the pressure was immense. Unless a top-tier Astria figure personally intervened, even Leander would have no choice but to bow to the country's authority, no

matter how powerful he was.

Meanwhile, Leander paid little attention to the Riverstone family's maneuvering. He

and Daphne left the cafeteria and headed straight to the northern market of

Highcliffe.

The market was crowded and noisy, a bustling hub alive with the chaotic energy of a real city.

Daphne, however, was completely at ease. She followed behind Leander, happily browsing the stalls, picking up trinkets and sweets—just like when they were children, coming here long ago.

A street vendor's call for sugared berries floated past. Daphne's heart leapt, and she reached out to pull Leander along—but he didn't move. His gaze was fixed on the far end of the market.

Following his eyes, she saw a tall Taoist walking slowly, carrying a whisk. The source of this content is

He wore a simple white robe, clean and elegant, untouched by the grime of the crowded market. He looked entirely out of place, like a drop of oil on water, drifting effortlessly above the chaos.

"I never expected to see him here again," Leander murmured, eyes flickering.

This Taoist, holding the whisk, was none other than the man he had encountered beneath the ancient pines after passing Mount Martial—the same one practicing the Eternal Flow Technique.

"Come on, Dani," Leander said, lifting his hand to pull Daphne close.

"Follow me. It's time to offer a toast."

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Chapter 388

At the edge of the market, Leander guided Daphne through the throng, moving toward the quieter streets beyond.

The tall Taoist was already heading toward a secluded alley, leaving the crowded market behind.

"Wait, sir!" Leander's voice carried like a thread across the distance.

The tall Taoist paused and slowly turned his head. When his eyes met Leander's, there was little reaction. But when they flicked to Daphne, a hint of something unusual shone in his gaze, a quiet note of approval.

He stopped at the alley's entrance, and Leander led Daphne up to him.

"Why did you call out to me, sir?"

The Taoist held a whisk in his hand, his voice calm and detached, revealing no emotion. His eyes were deep and dark, like twin black holes, impossibly profound.

Daphne immediately sensed his extraordinary presence, but she stayed silent, looking at Leander with curiosity. Why had he called this man over?

At Leander's level, even extraordinary beings were often nothing remarkable. Yet she had noticed a subtle urgency in his tone earlier, as if he feared the Taoist might leave before they could speak.

Leander gave her a small, reassuring smile, releasing her delicate hand, then inclined his head slightly to the Taoist, clasping his own in respect.

"I would like to invite you for a drink. Would you honor me with your company?"

The tall Taoist studied him, a spark lighting his eyes. After a pause, a faint smile appeared, and he nodded decisively. "I have lived a solitary life, wandering beyond worldly affairs. If someone wishes to spend freely to share a drink with me, why would I refuse?"

Leander chuckled, spreading his hands in a carefree gesture. "Then, it's decided—please join us."

The Taoist fell in step behind Leander and Daphne. They chose a small, quaint tavern, the kind that looked like it had stepped out of ancient times, with carved wooden signs and rustic charm.

The tavern was nearly empty; their table was the only one occupied.

Leander and the Taoist faced each other, with Daphne seated beside him.

"Hey! A pound of liquor, a pound of stewed beef, and a plate of peanuts!" Breaking from his usual calm, Leander's voice rang out loud and clear across the room.

"Hold on!" The Taoist waved a hand, interrupting him. "The meat and peanuts are fine, but one pound of liquor won't suffice. Sir! Bring ten pounds of liquor, all on this gentleman's tab!"

The owner's face went pale. Their liquor wasn't the strongest in the world, but one pound could easily intoxicate an ordinary person. Ten pounds? Who could possibly handle that?

He looked at Leander, who laughed heartily and nodded. "Take the Taoist at his word—bring the liquor!"

Daphne placed ten bills of a hundred each on the table. The owner, now beaming, took the money and hurried to prepare the order.

After paying, she glanced at the Taoist again, struck by a wave of curiosity.

This was a man who had renounced the world, wielding a whisk, exuding the aura of a transcendent master. How could he drink and eat without a hint of restraint?

The Taoist set the whisk on the table, a gentle smile on his face. He looked at Leander and spoke. "It is a pleasure to be invited for food and drink. But I have one question: Why did you seek me out?"

Leander's eyes lifted, memories stirring within him. A sigh escaped, heavy with emotion.

"Because you once granted me a debt of gratitude that cannot be repaid."

"Oh?" The Taoist's expression shifted slightly, and then he shook his head gently. "You must have confused me with someone else, sir," the Taoist explained, a faint smile playing on his lips. "I am eighty-five years old, have met countless people, and yet I can say with certainty that I have never met you. How could there be a debt of gratitude owed by you?"

Leander hadn't yet replied when the owner returned, carrying three porcelain bowls and two large jars of liquor.

"Here you go, folks. The beef and peanuts will be out shortly!"

As the owner stepped back, Daphne lifted one of the jars to pour for Leander and the Taoist—but Leander gently pressed her hand down.

"Dani, we don't need bowls for this," he said, pushing the jar toward the Taoist. "If we're going to drink properly, then one jar each. Cheers!"

Leander lifted the second jar with one hand and took a hearty drink.

"This trip to Highcliffe," the Taoist said with a wide grin, "I never expected to meet such a kindred spirit—what a thrill!"

His smile deepened. He lifted his jar, clinked it against Leander's, and tipped it back in one long pull.

Ten seconds later, both men set the jars down. Their collars were soaked, and of the five pounds of liquor in each jar, only about a third remained.

"Excellent drink," the Taoist complimented with a nod, then turned back to Leander. "The liquor is fine, but you still haven't answered me. What is this debt of gratitude you claim you owe me?"

Leander's gaze grew distant, his

voice quiet but steady. "Eight years ago, my power was destroyed. I was lost and hopeless. By chance, I passed beneath Mount Martakand saw you perform a set called the Harmonic Spiral. Something clicked within me. That moment of insight... It changed everything, and it allowed me to become who I am today.

"To you, it was just a form of martial technique. But to me, it opened an entire world.

That is the debt I speak of."

Daphne's eyes went wide as

understanding dawned. So, this was New novel chapters are published on

the reason Leander had reclaimed his martial prowess and risen to dominate the world was thanks to this man's guidance, given unknowingly.

"Oh?" The Taoist's eyes sharpened, a flicker of memory passing through them. He recalled eight years ago, landing at Mount Martial and testing the final stage with the Eternal Flow Technique.

A dusty, forlorn boy had stood on a distant hill, watching silently. At the time, he had paid no mind.

Now, as he looked at Leander before him, the figure gradually aligned with that lonely, fragile boy from his memory.

"It was you!" he exclaimed, laughing loudly. He raised his jar again, clinking it with Leander's, and drained the rest of his liquor.

Leander set down his jar, a satisfied smile on his face.

"Ever since that chance meeting, I never imagined I'd see you again in this lifetime. And yet here we are, in Highcliffe's market. You must be a master from Mount Martial. What brings you to Highcliffe?"

The Taoist had been about to pick up some meat, but Leander's question paused him. A subtle light flashed in his eyes, and his voice took on a heavier tone.

"A walk, a drink, and a kill. That's all."

Though he spoke calmly, Daphne sensed a pure, unshakable intent in his words a killing intent beyond any ordinary grudge or emotion, in that instant, she realized without a that in shane se med before her wa doubt that the man before her was a transcendent being, one utterly above the world.

Leander tilted his chin, eyes sharpening. Though he couldn't fully gauge the Taoist's power, the faint aura he exuded was enough for a rough estimate.

This was someone far beyond the Burning Stage of the Transcendent Realm.

Just days ago, he had slain a Burning Stage master from Mount Martial. And now, another unparalleled master from the same sect had appeared in Highcliffe. This was no coincidence.

A dark premonition crept into his heart. Something was very, very wrong. Leander paused for a moment, then spoke, his voice low and calm. "Sir... could the person you intend to kill be named Jeff Ashcroft?"

The question cut through the tavern like a blade. The Taoist's expression darkened instantly.

His gaze snapped to Leander, radiating a crushing, undeniable pressure. The entire tavern seemed to hold its breath, gripped by a sudden, deadly tension.

"Tell me... Where is he?"

This tall Taoist, of course, was Galen-the Grandmaster summoned by Logan from Mount Martial to Highcliffe, sent to deal with Leander.

Leander pushed the jar aside, a wry, resigned smile tugging at his lips. "Not to hide anything, sir... I am Jeff Ashcroft."

In an instant, the atmosphere in the tavern shifted violently. The calm of moments before vanished, replaced by a storm of shock, awe, and palpable danger.

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Chapter 389

Inside the tavern, the air suddenly froze. On the first floor, where Leander and his companions sat, a raging current of energy surged, shattering tables and chairs,

splintering jars of wine. Liquid sprayed everywhere, the aroma of spilt alcohol filling the room.

The owner and the few bartenders were dumbstruck, their faces ashen, unable to comprehend what was happening.

"So... you're Jeff Ashcroft!"

Galen's eyes shifted wildly. In a single glance, his aura exploded into a tempest, hurtling toward Leander.

Leander's lips curled into a faint, bitter smile. Eight years had passed since he last saw Galen, yet this reunion was far from pleasant. He hadn't expected that Galen's trip to Highcliffe was to come after him.

The windstorm swept forward. Leander did not seem to be doing anything, but the violent force could not reach him. Before him and Daphne hovered an invisible shield, holding the two of them safe as the storm raged around them.

Their opposing auras collided at the tables, making the entire tavern tremble. A low, muffled boom followed, sending ripples of energy outward. Outside, the towering cedar trees lining the tavern split cleanly in half, as if struck by a razor.

Nearby, several abandoned courtyard buildings crumbled instantly.

Daphne's eyes widened in shock. Leander and Galen hadn't even fully attacked— this was merely a clash of intent—and yet the destruction was terrifying. If they had gone all out, every building within a hundred feet could have been reduced to rubble.

"Impressive, Jeff Ashcroft," Galen said, his voice dark with awe. "I'd heard stories about you—making a name for yourself at a young age, killing masters across the martial world, even earning a title from the Divine Loom itself. Seeing you now, I can confirm every word was true."

The oppressive aura around Galen abruptly collapsed, vanishing. He raised his eyes to Leander, his expression a tangle of respect and lingering tension.

"No wonder Homer died by your hand."

Leander's defenses faded, and he shook his head lightly, his face calm and indifferent.

"He acted for the Riverstone family. I already told him to back off, but he didn't heed my warning," Leander said.

"I've always felt a certain respect for Mount Martial... I truly didn't want to kill him."
Leander had faced countless formidable enemies across the world without showing the

slightest hesitation or weakness. Yet now, facing Galen-whom he regarded as a benefactor-he couldn't help feeling a pang of nostalgia and regret.

"It doesn't matter," Galen said coldly, the murderous intent flickering in his eyes. "What matters is that he died by your hand."

Leander laughed lightly and drained the last of the liquor from the jar.

"Then drink this, and if you wish, avenge your junior brother."

Galen stared at Leander. The atmosphere seemed to freeze around them. After a long moment, the fury in his eyes softened.

"Today, our feud is set aside; this is just about courtesy and respect. I won't strike you."

He lifted the jar, drained it of its contents, then flicked it aside; it smashed against a beam, splintering to pieces.

"Wine shared and gone. From now on, we are enemies."

He picked up his whisk and walked calmly toward the door, his words chilling.

"I am Galen Pierce, head of Mount Martial, Taoist name Windborne. Next time... I will kill you."

With that, his tall figure vanished from the tavern.

"Ander!"

As soon as Galen left, Daphne hurried to grab Leander's arm, her eyes flickering with concern.

Leander picked up a piece of beef and chewed thoughtfully, a faint curve touching his lips.

"I had hoped that meeting an old benefactor would be a time to drink and give thanks. I never imagined that a friend could so easily become an enemy."

Daphne paused for a moment, then spoke.

"Ander, this Galen, head of Mount Martial-I've heard my grandfather mention him. On the International Combat Units ranking, he's actually two spots above you, sitting

third.

"Decades ago, he already reached

the Transcendent Realm. He's a
once-in-several-centuries prodigy for
unt Martial Among all the.

heads,

of Mount Martial over the years, his prestige is probably second only to Saint
Greaterson.

"If he fights you, you must be extremely careful."

Daphne had seen Leander's power firsthand. She knew that even if he couldn't defeat
Galen outright, he wouldn't fall completely. What worried her was that he might hold
back because of Galen's past kindness, leaving an opening that could cost him the fight.

As if reading her thoughts, Leander smiled faintly, brushing a strand of her hair aside.

"Don't worry, Dani. In this world, anyone who comes after me—I will never hold back,
even those who once did me favors.

"Besides, at this level of skill, if I held back, he wouldn't be satisfied either."

He straightened, stretching lazily, his eyes glinting with a cold light.

"Seven major generals, three provincial governors, and a Mount Martial head... the
Riverstone family sure is bold."

He clenched his fingers, a faint smirk curling his lips.

"Dani, this time, I'll show you what it means to crush them completely."

Watching Leander's confidence and unshakable poise, Daphne forced down her worries
for the moment.

She glanced at the wrecked tavern, then pulled a bank card loaded with a hundred
thousand and handed it to the owner.

With everything settled, they left together, leaving the stunned owner and bartenders
behind.

Just as they stepped outside, Daphne's phone rang. She answered, listened for a few
seconds, and her expression darkened.

"Ander, the Riverstone family is making a move."

She hung up and looked at him. "I just got word—they're hosting a banquet at Celestial Pavilion in the east of the city, inviting all the major families from Highcliffe.

"At this event, every notable from Highcliffe will be there—business, politics, and military alike.

"I think they plan to target you at this banquet."

The Riverstone family's influence was vast. Every banquet they hosted was overflowing with wealth and power, attended by the top elites.

By choosing this occasion to move against Leander, they intended to make a statement before the city's most influential figures. Not

would they avenge Quincy Online

and

Skelly, but they could also cement the Riverstone family's dominance in Highcliffe.

"Banquet or no banquet, if the Riverstones dare, I'll play their game all the way,"

Leander replied casually, his tone unconcerned.

Suddenly, the crowd ahead parted. A line of soldiers advanced in formation, led by a familiar figure—Dorian, dressed in his military uniform.

The onlookers stared in surprise. A major general had never appeared so directly before them, and no one knew what was happening. Follow current novels on

Dorian stopped in front of Leander and pulled an invitation from his chest. "Jeff, tonight the Riverstone family is hosting a banquet at Celestial Pavilion for the notable families of Highcliffe. I've been sent by my father to personally invite you. "All the grudges between you and the Riverstone family will be settled tonight."

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Chapter 390

Leander's expression remained indifferent as he casually took the invitation.

"A grand banquet, huh? Seems like the Riverstone family has a lot of confidence in themselves."

He walked past Dorian with Daphne by his side, a faint smile tugging at his lips.

"Don't worry. I'll be there tonight. Whatever tricks you've got, go ahead and use them."

As Leander left, Dorian's gaze shifted slightly, his face hardening with cold resolve.

"Jeff, tonight at the banquet, I'll make you understand the true power of the Riverstone family."

Although it was still midday, beneath the calm, the currents of rivalry and ambition were already swirling.

By 7:30 p.m., after dinner with Daphne, Leander headed straight toward the Celestial Pavilion on the east side of the city.

The Celestial Pavilion was a historic restaurant with an elegant, understated decor. Compared to Saffron House in the university district, it exuded a more refined, classical charm-pure, yet sophisticated.

Outside the pavilion, two towering stone pillars bore inscriptions.

'Astria's legacy spans a thousand years, its ancient ways crossing nineteen provinces.'

These were words left by the pavilion's founder and had been preserved ever since.

The parking lot outside was already a spectacle of luxury cars, gleaming like a rain of opulence. Many bore vanity plates, while a few green military-style jeeps added an air of authority.

Leander and Daphne arrived, and since Daphne needed to meet the Florian family group, she stepped inside ahead of him.

Without Daphne by his side, Leander immediately attracted far less attention. Presenting his invitation at the entrance, he walked into the main hall. Few noticed him; most of the attendees were strangers to this plainly dressed young man.

Although the Southern Shore battle had shocked the four major elite families, only those who had been there that day truly knew Leander. Genuine recognition was rare.

Leander took a Long Island iced tea from a waiter and found a seat near the edge of the hall, directly facing the stage—giving him a perfect view of everything.

Leaning back in his chair, he sipped his drink. Then, the click of high heels approached, stopping just in front of him.

"Leander?"

He set his glass down and looked up. Standing before him was a graceful figure.

Her hair was elegantly pinned, crowned with crystals like a royal princess. Emerald heels added a splash of color, and her long, perfectly straight legs made her stunning—a true beauty.

"It's you?"

Leander glanced at her briefly, then looked away, his face neutral.

She didn't mind. Instead, her eyes sparkled with delight as she sat down beside him. It was Ginny, someone he hadn't seen in a long time.

"Leander, it really is you! I thought I was imagining things!"

Ginny's eyes shone with excitement. Since their meeting in Ravenridge, they hadn't crossed paths again.

After graduation, Yvette had gone to Highcliffe University, while Ginny—slightly lower-scoring but passionate about performance—enrolled in the Academy of Film and Television.

Recently, she had seen Yvette almost every day, often talking about Leander, unaware that he, too, was in Highcliffe.

Leander tilted his head to drink, offering no response. Ginny, undeterred, leaned in a little closer.

"You're here for the Riverstone family banquet too?"

Leander popped a piece of watermelon into his mouth and hummed in acknowledgment.

Earlier, Ginny hadn't come alone. By her side had been a young woman dressed extravagantly.

Seeing Leander treat Ginny with such casual familiarity, the woman furrowed her brows. She slid down into a seat beside Ginny.

"Ginny, who's this? Why didn't you introduce me?"

She was Ginny's roommate. The two shared interests and quickly became inseparable friends.

She had known Ginny for just over a month. During that time, she had already cycled through three or four boyfriends, mingling with several of Highcliffe's wealthy young men, building her social network and connections—a common practice at the Academy of Film and Television.

Ginny, however, was far more beautiful. Admirers lined up for her even in classrooms, including sons of many prominent families from Highcliffe, yet she had always kept herself pure, never showing interest in anyone.

Now, seeing Ginny act so intimately with a stranger, she was genuinely surprised.

"Oh, sorry, Arden! I was so caught up talking to him, I completely forgot about you!"

Ginny apologized and pulled her friend closer.

"Leander, meet my roommate, Arden Skye."

Then, she turned to Arden, smiling sweetly. "Arden, this is Leander—the one I've told you about!"

Arden was dressed in opulent attire. Hearing Ginny, she felt her brows twitch slightly, and her expression wavered.

"Leander? Is this the all-powerful, perfect gentleman you've been telling me about?"

Ginny blushed immediately and tapped Arden on the arm.

"What are you talking about? He used to be my classmate, nothing more!"

She spoke with a shy glance toward Leander, only to find him calm and unbothered, which secretly tugged at her heart.

"Ah, right, right—just a former classmate!"

Arden smiled coquettishly, but her eyes never left Leander.

She was one of the Academy's new socialites, accustomed to rubbing elbows with wealthy heirs. In her eyes, money and status were all that mattered.

Since their arrival, she had been sizing up Leander. His outfit, from head to toe, wouldn't even compare to a single bracelet on her wrist. In a

hall futhor the city's elite Leander

cheap, ordinary clothes made him stand out-not in a good way.

She kept a polite smile, but inside, she couldn't hide her disappointment. This text is hosted at

Ginny really has terrible taste in friends, she thought.

Ginny had once raved about a friend who was supposedly capable of anything almost mythical in skill.

Arden had never openly question et

it, but she had always been skeptical. When she saw Leander in person, her disappointment was palpable.

Especially in a banquet hall where the most distinguished guests sat closest to the stage, Leander was at the far end with no companion—a detail that only deepened her sense of disdain.

Leander didn't glance at her, and she had no intention of interacting with him. She was planning to sit for a while before leaving.

At that moment, a young man dressed in Versace approached, smiling warmly.

"Ginny, Arden! You're over here!

"The boss of Silverpeak Entertainment is also here. Perfect timing-I'll introduce you two. Come on, Ginny. You're new to this circle and not quite familiar with it yet. I'll take you over."

He spoke as he reached out, ready to escort Ginny along.

Faced with the young man's outstretched hand, Ginny instinctively scooted closer to Leander, slipping out of reach.

She offered a subtle smile and spoke softly. "Mr. Harmon, I'm sorry. I've just run into a friend. As for the boss of Silverpeak Entertainment, maybe next time you can introduce me, but I'll stay here for now."

Her refusal was clear. The young man's expression faltered for a moment. Then, his gaze shifted to Leander beside her, darkening with a subtle edge.

Sensing the tension, Arden quickly tried to smooth things over. "Ginny, look around—so many influential people are here tonight. CEOs and directors of major entertainment companies. Meeting them could do wonders for your future in the film industry. Any one of them could become a valuable ally.

"Mr. Harmon is just trying to give you a proper introduction, help you get your name out there. Don't waste his effort this could make everything easier later on, no

matter which company you end up with."

The young man's voice grew stern. "Ginny, in this world, you have to seize opportunities. Don't let trivial matters or friends without status stand in the way of connecting with the real power players."

He waved a hand toward Leander, his tone casual but commanding.

"Step aside. I'm taking Ginny with me."

Just as he moved to step past Leander, a cold, sharp voice cut through the air.

"Get lost."

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Chapter 391

"Get lost."

Leander's voice was calm, almost casual, and he still held a glass of wine in his hand. But there was no mistaking the absolute authority behind his words. The young man in front of him froze mid-step, unable to move forward for a moment.

Arden's eyes widened in surprise. Leander looked refined and gentle, the kind of man who seemed uninterested in talking to anyone. Yet when he spoke, it was sharp, decisive, and unyielding.

She glanced at Owen Harmon beside her and suddenly realized just who she was dealing with. Standing here was one of Highcliffe's most prominent heirs—the only son of the Harmon family.

And Leander actually dared to tell him to get lost?

Arden shook her head, a cold sense of foreboding creeping in. [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT](#)

Sure enough, after a few tense seconds, Owen's expression snapped into focus. A flicker of ice passed through his eyes.

"You told me to get lost?"

He stepped closer to Leander, a faint, unsettling smile playing at his lips.

He was the heir of the Harmon family. Few in Highcliffe's younger generation could dare speak to him like this. And the rest? At most, they could stand on equal footing, but who would ever be so audacious as to challenge him openly?

"Maybe I wasn't clear enough," Leander said, glancing at him sideways, his eyes cold and detached.

Owen laughed, a short, sharp sound.

"Ha, kid... I have to admit, you're bold."

"I was only planning to leave with Ginny and not bother with someone like you," he continued, voice rising with controlled arrogance, "and yet here you are, stepping up to make yourself known."

He tapped his chest, his expression radiating pride.

"In Highcliffe's social circle, few people don't know me-Owen Harmon. And you dare tell me to get lost? Even if I agreed, do you think my friends would?"

He deliberately raised his voice, and immediately, several people nearby turned to look. Their expressions were calculating, their eyes sharp.

These were Owen's friends, almost all of them scions of Highcliffe's major families. Normally, they moved as a single unit with Owen at the center.

Any conflict Owen had, they witnessed firsthand. One word from him, and they would all rise.

Many of them sneered silently. Leander was a stranger here, clearly not from Highcliffe's circles. Owen's family was prestigious—the Harmon name, while not at the very top like the Ashcrofts or Florians, still ranked among the strongest second-tier families.

Owen was the only male heir, highly favored by his grandfather and groomed to take over the family. His wealth, connections, and influence far surpassed those of an ordinary young heir.

For Leander to challenge Owen here was nothing short of foolish. It was like deliberately picking a fight he couldn't win.

"Owen Harmon?"

Leander didn't even glance at the people gathering around. He let out a mocking smile.

"You can't even compare to Highcliffe's top heirs, and yet you dare announce your name to me?"

He set down his glass, picked up a piece of fruit, and didn't spare Owen a second thought.

Even someone like Tycen or Rodrick, a top-tier heir, would lower his head in silence before him. A mere Owen? Hardly worth noticing.

Owen's eyes went icy.

"Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

His gaze narrowed, radiating danger. If this weren't the Riverstone family's banquet tonight, he wouldn't hesitate to act—but just from Leander's words alone, he could have easily crushed him.

Owen's killing intent simmered beneath the surface, and several of his companions tensed, eager to spring into action.

At this, Arden's eyes narrowed sharply. Without thinking, she stepped forward, placing herself between Owen and Leander.

"Mr. Harmon, please, don't get angry!"

"This is Ginny's good friend, visiting from out of town—he doesn't know your name. Don't take it personally."

She lifted her glass and bowed slightly.

"Mr. Harmon, let this cup stand as his apology. Please, overlook it and don't mind him."

She then shot Ginny a quick look.

"Ginny, aren't you going to raise a glass to Mr. Harmon?"

Although Arden disapproved of Leander's behavior, she and Ginny were roommates, sharing

everything. Seeing how much Ginny seemed to care for Leander, Arden couldn't just stand by.

If she did nothing and Leander actually clashed with Owen, she feared the local heirs would destroy him without mercy.

Owen sneered as his gaze shifted to Ginny. Leander barely registered in his mind, his real target was Ginny. If she understood the rules and was willing to apologize with a drink he might spare Leander.

But Ginny didn't react as expected. Instead, she grabbed Arden's arm.

"Arden, you don't need to apologize for Leander. He has always been like this." Her eyes cooled as she looked at Owen.

"Mr. Harmon, we're acquaintances, so I'll give you a fair warning: if you know what's good for you, walk away. If he decides to take you seriously, things won't be so simple."

Owen might have influence and power, but Ginny had seen Leander's invincible might firsthand—a force above all. A second-tier heir from Highcliffe was no match.

Arden froze at Ginny's words, and Owen's expression also shifted in shock. After a long moment, he laughed harsh, cruel.

"Good, good, Ginny, you've got guts.

"You think being crowned the Academy of Film and Television's campus queen makes you special? To us, you're nothing more than someone anyone could buy and crush.

"I looked at you with respect, and this is how you repay me? Defending this kid?" His lips curved into a cold, cruel smile.

"Let me make it simple for you. After this banquet, I'll make this kid kneel before me and beg for mercy. As for you, if you want that supporting fentale role you can strip and serve me in bed tonight."

Ginny's expression instantly darkened, while Arden stood frozen, utterly speechless.

She had intended to save the situation, but Ginny's words had instead lit the fuse.

The scene had spun beyond her control.

As she frantically considered how to salvage it, Leander stood up.

He shook his head lazily, his tone calm but edged with disdain.

"I didn't come here tonight to waste time on a clown like you, but apparently, you just can't stop talking."

With that, Leander reached out with one hand, grabbed Owen by the collar, and gave a light toss.

Whoosh!

Owen, over a hundred pounds, flew through the air in a humiliating arc, smashing into the corner and crashing through four or five wooden tables in a row.

"Ugh!"

Blood streamed from Owen's head as several teeth flew from his mouth. For a long moment, he couldn't get back on his feet.

The sight made everyone present stiffen, their shock barely contained.

Leander actually struck him?

This was the Riverstone family's banquet, attended by the top eighty percent of Highcliffe's elite. Every person here carried influence, wealth, or both.

To cause a scene at such an event was not just disrespectful to the Riverstones—it was a public insult to all the prominent guests in attendance.

And yet Leander, just a reckless kid, dared to do it?

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Chapter 392

Owen hit the floor with a sickening thud, blood streaming down his face. Stars burst before his eyes as pain exploded through his skull. For a long moment, he couldn't even get up. He stared at Leander in disbelief—had he really just done that?

No one in their right mind would dare start a fight at a banquet hosted by the Riverstone family. Even Owen, the sole heir of the Harmon family, wouldn't have had that kind of nerve.

Around the grand banquet hall, guests had witnessed everything. Brows furrowed, heads turned; all eyes now fixed on Leander.

These were Highcliffe's most powerful elites—business magnates, politicians, heirs, and socialites. Each of them was silently assessing this stranger, wondering what kind of man would throw a punch here, of all places.

Even Ethan or Tycen—scions of Highcliffe's top families—wouldn't have dared pull something like this.

"What the hell is he doing?"

Arden's face went pale, her expression shifting from shock to panic. She never could've imagined Leander would actually attack Owen.

After the initial disbelief came dread. The moment she saw the room's attention shift toward them, her mind went completely blank.

This is bad.

She'd thought her friendly ties with Owen might help smooth things over if things went tense. But now? Leander had shattered that last hope with a single move.

Even if Owen decided not to retaliate, the hosts of tonight's banquet—the Riverstone family—certainly wouldn't let Leander walk away unscathed.

She turned toward Ginny, hoping to see some trace of worry on her face, but there was none. Ginny sat calmly, chin propped on one hand, her expression serene—as if everything unfolding before her was perfectly natural.

"Who do you think you are?" a voice thundered. "How dare you cause trouble here? Do you even know where you are?"

A middle-aged man in a black suit strode forward, his tone sharp with authority.

"Vance Harmon?" Arden whispered, her heart sinking.

The man was none other than Vance Harmon-Owen's father, and the head of the Harmon family.

He was a titan of Highcliffe's business world, worth billions, with influence that could shake the city's economy. When someone like him so much as frowned, the entire commercial circle took notice.

Leander gave him a cold glance. "Say one more word, and I'll throw you next."

Vance's face stiffened. In all his years commanding boardrooms and executives, no one—no kid—had ever spoken to him that way.

"Arrogant fool!" he barked. "Do you have any idea what you're doing? This is a Riverstone banquet. You think you can cause chaos here without consequences?"

"You even dare to threaten me? You've clearly snuck in here without an invitation. Someone like you—reckless, ignorant—has no place among civilized people. I'll have security throw you—"

He never finished the sentence.

Leander moved again—swiftly, effortlessly.

A blur, a twist, and Vance was airborne. He crashed down beside his son with a brutal crack, both father and son sprawled across the marble floor, bloodied and dazed.

The hall went dead silent. Then came a collective gasp.

Even the most composed socialites those used to keeping their emotions in check - couldn't help but recoil in shock.

Leander hadn't just taken down Owen; he'd thrown Vance Harmon like he was nothing.

Arden slumped back into her chair, and the color drained from her face. Words failed her entirely.

Leander pulled out a chair and sat down casually, as though tossing two of Highcliffe's most influential men across the floor had been a trivial matter.

He swept his gaze over the stunned crowd and said evenly, "Anyone else have a problem?"

People standing near Leander instinctively backed away, afraid they might be next. For a moment, the usually untouchable elite of Highcliffe—those who ruled corporations and controlled fortunes—were struck silent. Not a single one dared speak.

They kept their faces still, but behind those polished smiles lurked cold amusement. Let him strut while he can, they thought. The Riverstone family will crush him soon enough. No one walks away after making a scene at their banquet.

Just then, the doors of the hall opened. A man in an embroidered suit stepped in, flanked by a group of young heirs from the O'Brien family.

Tycen O'Brien.

The room stirred at once.

Owen, who had just begun to regain his senses, looked up and nearly wept with relief. "Tycen! Help me!" he cried, his voice hoarse.

Tycen turned toward the sound. When he saw Owen's bloodied face and tattered clothes, his brows drew together.

The Harmons and O'Briens were connected by marriage-Tycen's aunt had married Vance Harmon—so the two families shared both triumph and disgrace.

Owen, as Tycen's younger cousin, often tagged along with him to clubs and parties. Seeing Owen in such a pitiful state-and Vance sprawled beside him, equally humiliated-ignited a spark of anger in Tycen's chest.

"What happened?" Tycen asked coldly.

The onlookers exchanged knowing glances, their amusement deepening.

Leander's done for now, they thought.

Tycen was notorious for protecting

his own. Anyone who touched

et

someone close to him never left unpunished. The rest of the guests had held their tongues out of caution but ycen, with a powerhouse family behind him, ad no reason to fear anyone?

Owen jabbed a trembling finger toward Leander, who still sat calmly in his chair. "It was him! He hit

me and my father! You have to

make this right for me, Tycen. I want him dead!"

Arden felt herself go numb. The moment Tycen appeared, any lingering hope of saving Leander evaporated. She sank into her seat, despair washing over her.

She shot Ginny a desperate look, silently pleading for her to move away from Leander, to avoid being dragged down with him.

But Ginny didn't move. She stayed where she was, her gaze fixed on Leander, eyes glimmering with an emotion no one else could read.

A faint smile curved her lips. "It's been so long," she murmured softly. "He really hasn't changed."

Tycen followed Owen's trembling finger-and then froze.

His gaze met Leander's across the room.

For a heartbeat, the world seemed to stop. Tycen's face turned ashen, his expression hollowing out as though he'd seen a ghost.

"Tycen, that's him!" Owen pressed, stepping forward. "He's the one-get him for me!" find~novel~net

Tycen didn't move.

Owen, thinking his cousin had hesitated, reached out and gave him a little shove. "Tycen-"

The crack of the slap echoed across the hall.

Owen stumbled backward and fell to the floor, clutching his cheek, eyes wide in disbelief.

"Shut your d*mn mouth, you idiot!" Tycen barked.

The room fell utterly still.

No one could comprehend what they were seeing. Tycen O'Brien—one of Highcliffe's most powerful heirs—had struck his own cousin instead of defending him.

Tycen ignored the stares. He strode across the hall, stopped before Leander, and bowed deeply—his upper body bent a full ninety degrees.

"Sovereign," he said solemnly. "I pay my respects."

The entire room went still as stone.

Every gaze locked on Leander in stunned disbelief.

Tycen O'Brien—the direct heir of the O'Brien family, one of Highcliffe's most prestigious young elites—was bowing to him?

Arden sat frozen, her mind blank. For a long moment, she couldn't even process what she had just seen.

Could it be that Leander was some hidden powerhouse?

While she was still trying to make sense of his identity, Leander casually flicked his fingers toward Tycen.

"Step aside," he said calmly. "I have other matters to deal with."

Tycen obeyed instantly, moving aside without hesitation—as if receiving an order from a superior.

Then, from the entrance of the banquet hall, two figures appeared amid a wave of murmurs and camera flashes.

Both men wore military uniforms, their shoulders adorned with olive-branch insignias and a single star each.

Two major generals—Logan and his son, Dorian Riverstone.

The Riverstone family had arrived.

The hall erupted with whispers, the crowd shifting in awe and unease. Yet the two men ignored everyone around them. Their eyes were fixed solely on Leander.

"Jeff," Dorian said coldly, his voice echoing through the hall. "You actually dared to show up."

Leander's lips curved into a faint smile. "Why wouldn't I?"

Dorian's expression hardened. He took a heavy step forward, his voice carrying the authority of a man used to command.

"Jeff, this entire banquet was arranged for you," he declared.

"You've used your strength to bully others, injuring my two sons.

Tonight before the eyes of Highcliffe's most powerful families, the Riverstone family will make this right.

"You will apologize to us and answer for your arrogance."

At that moment, the Riverstone family made their move.

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Chapter 393

The banquet hall fell into eerie silence as Dorian's deep, resonant voice echoed across the room.

"What?"

Every head turned toward Leander, faces stiff with disbelief.

The news that the Riverstone family's two heirs had been thrown off Westvale Peak and left gravely injured had already spread like wildfire through Highcliffe's elite circles.

Among the crowd were countless high-ranking figures and even representatives from the four most powerful families. Yet not one of them could claim they had the audacity to harm the Riverstone heirs. Even men like Gareth and Teion—heads of their own distinguished families—wouldn't have dared take things that far.

So, when the news first broke, it shook the entire city, and everyone was curious about who he was. Now, seeing the person behind it appear at the Riverstones' own banquet—young, calm, and completely unfamiliar—was beyond comprehension.

Arden sat frozen in her chair, her expression stiff and vacant.

She had thought Leander was already out of his mind for striking Owen and his father, but she had never imagined he was the one who had crippled the Riverstone brothers.

What stunned her even more was that an ordinary man who hurt the Riverstones would've been wiped off the map long ago—yet Leander had injured both heirs and still showed up to their family banquet as if nothing had happened. That kind of composure, that power, left her in silent awe.

Turning to Ginny, she suddenly recalled how Ginny had once said Leander could do anything. Now, she finally understood. The man standing before them wasn't just fearless he stood at a height so far above the rest that even the Riverstones treated him like a threat.

"Jeff? Why does that name sound so familiar?"

A few of the guests—wealthy figures closely tied to the four great families—frowned in confusion.

"Jeff?" one of the younger men suddenly exclaimed. "Wait—Jeff Ashcroft? The same Jeff Ashcroft who saved all four families during the martial assembly at the Southern Shore?"

That event—where the four major elite families had gathered to test their martial champions—had drawn countless onlookers from Highcliffe. Those who had been there still remembered the lone figure who swept through eleven opponents on the open sea. And now, seeing Leander's calm posture and striking features, realization dawned on them all—it was him.

Arden's heart pounded. She could hardly believe that Leander had such a legendary past. Even Ginny, who had always admired him, looked dazed. Official source is

Leander's strength was unquestionable. Beyond his rising fame in Astria's martial world, his only known title had been Mornwick's Legend. Yet in just over a month, his name had swept through Highcliffe, striking fear and awe even among its most powerful elites.

Leander stood tall, a faint, disdainful smile curving his lips.

"You want me, Jeff Ashcroft, to apologize? And you think your Riverstone family deserves that?"

Even the Transcendent Realm masters—those who could soar through the skies and walk through flames—had bowed to him. How could a single family expect him to kneel?

"Jeff, your arrogance knows no bounds!

"I warned you before—don't think that just because you're powerful, you can do whatever you please! The Riverstone family still has ways to bring you down!

"No matter how strong you are, can you defy the authorities? Can you defy the law of the nation?"

Dorian stepped forward, eyes blazing.

"Jeff, I want an answer. My two sons had no quarrel with you. Why did you throw them off Westvale Peak and leave them for dead?

"You're a citizen of Astria. You assaulted honorable men in public. Tell me who gave you that right?"

Dorian's voice carried the full weight of his rank as a major general—steady, sharp, and commanding. His words struck with the force of authority as he demanded an answer from Leander.

Sensing the tension, the guests quietly backed away, leaving a wide, empty space in the center of the banquet hall. Only Leander and the two members of the Riverstone family remained under the glaring lights.

"You want a reason? Fine. I'll make it simple."

Leander lifted his gaze, his tone calm but edged with ice. "Your younger son led men into my mother's sanctuary to abduct her. I warned him before—but he chose the wrong path.

"As for your eldest, he came with your family's enforcers, swearing he'd break my limbs and throw me off Westvale Peak. I simply returned the courtesy."

He shot Dorian a sidelong glance, a smirk playing at his lips.

"Dorian, as a major general, you should understand this—throwing them off Westvale Peak and leaving their lives to fate was already mercy."

Dorian's expression faltered for a moment.

Leander wasn't wrong. With his level of power, killing the two brothers outright would've been effortless. The fact that they still lived was, in truth, a restraint.

But Dorian's pride flared. He took a step forward, his voice cold and stern. "Jeff, don't push it too far!

"I know you're strong, and I know you've got powerful allies and plenty of connections. We've done our homework!

"Otherwise, the Riverstone family wouldn't have confronted you here—before all of Highcliffe's elite!"

As he spoke, he pulled a long sheet of paper from his coat. It unfurled and dropped, covered with dense lines of text—clearly a dossier.

"Besides being a martial master," Dorian continued, "you're also Mornwick's Legend, aren't you?"

A stir rippled through the crowd.

Those who frequented business councils and elite gatherings looked at one another, realization dawning.

"Mornwick's Legend... that's the man they call the ruler of a province, the one who united all of Mornwick's warlords—Mr. Ashcroft!"

Others who didn't know the name well still recognized its weight. Faces blanched.

"That's right!" another man

exclaimed suddenly. "I knew he looked familiar! I saw him—two

months ago at the Walsh wedding

in

Grove. He stormed the ceremony alone, took the bride right out from under them, and left the Walsh heir half-dead!

"Even when the Walsh family and all of Listin's elites joined forces, they couldn't

stop him. In the end, the Walshes had to apologize! He's definitely the Mornwick's Legend!"

Gasps rippled through the room.

Though Listin ranked low among the

provinces in terms of wealth, its city of Grove was known across the

nation The Walsh family Gro

foremost clan, was a name many had heard before.

In terms of power and influence, the Walshes in Listin stood on the same level as the four major elite families and the Riverstones in Highcliffe untouchable and supreme.

For such a powerful family to be humiliated, their heir badly injured, and yet still forced to bow their heads without retaliation-Leander's fearlessness was now undeniable.

"Mornwick's Legend," Leander said with an easy grin, swirling the cocktail in his hand. "That's me. So what?"

At that moment, the silent figure standing nearby finally spoke.

"Mr. Ashcroft."

It was Logan. His voice was low-but it cut through the hall like a blade.

He fixed Leander with a hard look, a thin edge of cold at the corner of his mouth.

"You've shaken all of Listin with your reputation-your martial skill is peerless. You truly stand out as the strongest of the younger generation," he said.

"You did intimidate the Walsh family in Grove on your own—that much is true. But don't go thinking the Riverstones are the Walshes.

"There are rules in the martial world, and there are laws in the nation. You openly harmed two of my grandsons and sentenced them to lives of canes and wheelchairs. If you don't give the Riverstone family an explanation today, we will settle this with blood."

He finished, and the rear doors opened again. Five rigid officers in uniform stepped into the hall, their posture immaculate.

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Chapter 394

Five elderly men entered the hall, all dressed in military uniforms. Each bore olive-branch insignia on their shoulders-four with single stars, and the one in the center with two.

The entire banquet hall erupted. Gasps filled the air as everyone froze, unable to look away.

Four major generals—and one high general. That lineup alone was enough to crush anything in its path.

Across all of Astria, only the nation's top elites could withstand such an overwhelming presence.

With five senior generals joining in, along with Logan and Dorian-two more generals—the total reached seven. The tension in the room thickened to the point of suffocation.

"Isn't that General Tarrow from Southcrest? I heard he once led his army to the Crosswind Ridge, wiping out the bandit strongholds and restoring order. Even after retirement, his proteges dominate the region's military ranks. The man's practically a living legend."

"And that's General Verrin from Overstead! He's an Alderton Military Academy graduate-top of his class back then. He's fought in countless major operations and even commanded entire units!"

"There's General Caulder... and General Ainsley..."

The onlookers, many of them seasoned veterans of politics and war, were visibly shaken. The five newcomers were all decorated generals of Astria's past, men who had once shaped history in times of chaos.

Any one of them could have held up a powerful family by himself—but together, the five formed a force that could level mountains.

A collective chill rippled through the crowd.

The Riverstone family, just to deal with one man-Leander-had mobilized an army of legends. It was an act of pure domination, leaving no room for mercy.

Dorian spread his hands, his tone cool and assured.

"Jeff, maybe our Riverstone family alone couldn't hurt you. But with everyone here—what do you think now?"

Seven generals. Dorian felt utterly secure, victory already gleaming in his eyes.

Among the five elders, the high general, Malric Tarrow, stepped forward and looked straight at Leander.

"So, you're Mornwick's Legend, the man who tops the rankings of martial artists— Jeff Ashcroft?" Follow current novels on

His tone was calm, almost courteous, as if addressing a younger man of promise.

The guests around them quietly shook their heads, their eyes filled with pity for Leander.

Most of them knew little about the martial world, but with seven generals standing together—and two of them high generals like Malric and Logan—they could already see how this would end. No matter how high Leander's status soared, he was about to be crushed beyond recognition.

Mornwick's Legend might have been a legend in name, but before seven generals of the nation, he was nothing more than dust in the wind.

Before Leander could speak, Malric continued, his gaze unflinching. "No wonder Logan called us in. You're impressive for your age.

"I've heard the stories—how you rule the underground of Mornwick, commanding countless factions, crushing any who stand against you. Even Grove's Walsh family was brought to heel under your hand. Quite the show of power."

His words sounded like praise, but his tone was glacial, edged with reprimand. Leander's reply was steady, his voice cold. "My power has nothing to do with you." Facing seven generals, he remained calm, almost detached. "But you—I respect what you've done for this country. So here's my advice: leave now. Don't wade into this mess. The feud between me and the Riverstones... is far beyond your reach."

His words had barely left his mouth when Malric's gaze darkened.

Beside him, Dorian snapped, fury blazing across his face.

"Jeff, you're just a kid-do you really think a few achievements make you untouchable? Do you think you can look down on every hero in the land? General Tarrow is a senior officer. Talking to him like that-do you even know what respect means?"

Around them, countless guests shook their heads and sighed. To them, Leander's attitude was pure arrogance.

This was a high general standing before him—an elder who had come all this way to support the Riverstones.

For Leander not to bow and beg forgiveness was already unthinkable, but to warn him? That was madness.

"Hmph. So, the stories about Mornwick's Legend were true-reckless, arrogant, and drunk on his own power."

Malric's face turned grim. Though he had yet to raise his voice, his tone was sharp as a blade.

"Young man, you can't be more than twenty, a few years younger than my grandson. You've dominated an entire province and reached the peak of both martial strength and influence—impressive indeed.

"But it seems you've forgotten something: the martial world still belongs to the nation. No matter how powerful you are, that doesn't give you the right to act like a tyrant.

"Remember this-this is Highcliffe, not Mornwick. You can't bring your blood-soaked ways here. This isn't your playground."

Leander drained his cocktail, leaned back in his chair, and crossed one leg over the other.

"The world is vast, and I walk it as I please. If you think you can lecture me, General... you'll need to be worth listening to."

Malric's expression hardened completely, his face turning the color of iron.

"Kid, your arrogance truly knows no bounds.

"With your talent and potential, you could have become a pillar of Astria. I came here hoping to mediate peace between you and the Riverstones, but after hearing your words, I've changed my mind.

"Astria needs strength, yes-but not men like you. Those who defy order, who trample decency and wield power as if it were law... men like that are not assets. They're disasters waiting to happen."

He turned sharply toward the Ashcroft family in the hall, locking eyes with Gareth.

"Gareth, I know you're your family's backbone, and that this young man is your heir. But even if Old Mr. Ashcroft himself were standing here, I, Malric Tarrow, would still

act.

"I've already submitted a formal

request to the military command-to have Jeff Ashcroft stripped of his Astrian citizenship and deported immediately if nothing changes, that approval will come through within ten minutes. No matter what the Ashcroft family tries, there'll be no saving him."

Gareth's brows furrowed. Ethan's face shifted uneasily.

Then, Logan spoke up, his voice solemn. "Gareth, convey my apologies to Old Mr. Ashcroft. Jeff may be your family's heir, but this time, there will be no leniency.

"My son Lachlan, together with the other two governors of the Northeastern provinces, has already co-signed a petition to the Central Authority-demanding Jeff's conviction and permanent exile."

At that, Gareth's expression finally changed. Even the heads of the three great families who had stood ready to back Leander looked shaken.

This move was ruthless beyond anything they had imagined.

Seven generals filing an official request, joined by three provincial governors in a unified appeal... the entire military and central government were effectively issuing a death warrant.

Once the order was approved, Leander would lose his citizenship and be exiled. Even the vast power and influence of the four great families could not overturn such a decree.

At that point, he would have only two choices: obey the ruling and leave Astria—or face the full force of the nation's army.

And no matter how strong he was, no one could stand alone against tanks and artillery.

Daphne's eyes widened, and she rushed to stand in front of Leander. Gripping his hand tightly, she looked up at him, her gaze full of fear and helplessness.

"Ander..."

Her voice faltered. Even with all the faith she had in him, her heart was pounding.

Being exiled wasn't a death

sentence-but it might as well have been. Once that order took effect, Leander Would be branded a

national traitor, blacklisted

erased from Astria as though he had never existed.

Eira's eyes flickered as she studied him. His face remained calm, unshaken, as if none of it mattered. She could only sigh. B*stard... you've already become powerful enough to stand above most—but this time, even you might have to swallow defeat.

At this stage, unless one of Astria's supreme powers intervened, there was no turning the tide.

Leander's situation had reached a point beyond saving.

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Chapter 395

All eyes fixed on Leander. Some watched with glee, others with pity, but almost no one believed he stood a chance anymore.

He was only twenty, had dominated a whole province, and had even crushed the Walsh family—the strongest house in Listin. That kind of record had been dazzling.

Still, facing seven generals acting together and a joint petition from three provincial governors was like trying to stop a freight train with his bare hands.

No matter how powerful one person was, how could he withstand the weight of the nation? Logan and his allies had effectively called in the nation's authority to sanction Leander.

Not far away, the leaders of the four great families-Gareth, Teion, and the others—shook their heads, a sense of dread settling over them.

They had expected friction between Leander and the Riverstone family and had even planned to take Leander's side at this banquet. Who could have guessed the Riverstones would play such a trump card?

Even the combined strength of the four major elite families couldn't stand against the will of the nation. United or not, in front of a powerful government, they could be crushed in an instant.

"Mr. Gareth!" Dorian said, watching Gareth's distracted gaze. His voice was low and hard. "We all know Jeff is from the Ashcroft family, but he no longer owes you any loyalty. Before you decide to help him, let your family think twice."

He continued without pause. "The Riverstone family's Imperion Group has already coordinated economic pressure with three of Astria's top ten firms. We will impose sanctions on Ashcroft Group.

"If you want to help Jeff, a single word from the Riverstones will be enough to seal Ashcroft Group off completely.

"Keep your family out of this, and after matters settle, we'll lift the blockade," Dorian added.

Gareth's expression tightened; displeasure flickered across his face. He rose to his feet, icy light in his eyes.

"Dorian, are you threatening me?" he demanded. "You think your rank as a major general lets you boss me around? Leander is my son. If you want to attack him, you'll answer to me and the Ashcroft family first."

The rest of the Ashcrofts stood as Gareth had risen to his feet.

"Old Mr. Riverstone," Teion said, rising with righteous anger, "this was your feud with Mr. Ashcroft. We shouldn't have intervened, but Mr. Ashcroft fought at Southern Shore and, alone against eleven, saved every one of the four great families. That debt cannot be forgotten. Whatever else happens today, we stand with the Ashcroft family."

Jack and Wesley rose in agreement the moment Teion did.

In an instant, the four major elite families rallied to Leander's side.

Logan, Malric, and the others' faces shifted-surprise and a touch of alarm. They had not expected the four families, without exception, to support Leander.

Logan straightened, a derisive sound escaping him. "So, the four great families are willing to back Jeff. Do you really think that will matter?

"The government's judgment is already on its way. If you defy the state, go ahead and prop Jeff up—but in front of the nation, don't imagine that even all four great families together couldn't be struck down with a single decree."

Wesley and Teion's faces had gone cold. Anger boiled under their calm, but they couldn't deny that Logan was right.

Even the four great families, powerful as they were, ultimately lived under Astria's shadow. Once the government and military decided to act, they would be nothing more than dust in history.

But even so, Leander had once saved them. Gratitude left them no path of retreat.

The guests around the hall could only shake their heads. To them, the four families were being reckless-throwing away a century of family legacy for a single young man. Foolish, they thought. Absolutely foolish.

And then, the man at the center of it all—Leander-laughed softly.

"So, a joint petition, calling on the government and the military to sanction me? That's the Riverstone family's grand move?"

He shook his head, a mocking smile curling at his lips. "I must've overestimated you."

All that talk about official decrees and deportation orders meant nothing to him.

He had once assumed that a clan like the Riverstones, with two generals in their ranks, would have at least some understanding of the martial world. Now, he saw how wrong he'd been.

The Riverstones were merely another family drifting between politics and the military. Their network might be wide, but they knew nothing of true strength.

Even setting aside those who had reached the Transcendent Realm, warriors like Grayson were already beyond ordinary comprehension-figures who dominated everyone else.

At the borders of Cloudveil, seven clans ruled two regions through sheer martial might, their power shaking entire provinces and earning the reverence of countless nobles. Their influence rivaled if not, surpassed, the four great families of Highcliffe. Such was the weight of martial power.

And someone like Leander-a being of that level was not a burden to Astria, but one of its greatest assets, a strategic force standing at the nation's pinnacle. The idea that seven generals and three provincial governors could simply file complaints and have the state condemn him was absurd. Newest update provided by

The true titans of Astria-the ones who guided the nation, who spoke eye-to-eye with leaders of world powers were no fools. They knew exactly where to place their loyalty when choosing between a martial prodigy of the Transcendent Realm and a family like the Riverstones.

"Jeff, disaster's at your door, and you're still talking big?"

Dorian's eyes narrowed, his voice cold. "Once the directive arrives, you'll be blacklisted from Astria for life—banished, stripped of citizenship. That's the price for crossing the Riverstones."

Leander chuckled and wagged a finger at the seven generals. "Westvale Peak should've been the end of it, but since you insist on dragging this out—it's my turn now.

"The Riverstones claim to rule business, politics, and the military. Fine. You came for me; I'll crush you, one sphere at a time."

He pulled out his phone and made a call.

"It's me," he said calmly. "Within a week, cut off every supply line linked to Imperion Group. Whatever price they pay, we'll pay double. I want Imperion Group gone from the business world.

"And one more thing—terminate all contracts with three of Astria's top ten corporations. Permanently."

Leander listed the names without pause the very companies Dorian had cited moments earlier.

When he hung up, he turned back to Dorian and the others. His voice was quiet but sharp. "That's the business world. Handled."

Logan and Dorian exchanged uncertain glances. Around them, murmurs spread as confusion rippled through the crowd.

Then, after a few tense minutes, a middle-aged man in a tailored suit abruptly shot to his feet, face drained of color.

Everyone recognized him the CEO of Imperion Group, the Riverstone family's own company.

The man hurried straight to Logan's side, his face pale, voice trembling.

"Old Mr. Riverstone," he reported urgently, "we just received word—our nine main suppliers, the ones we've worked with for ten years, have all announced they're ending their partnerships with us. Effective immediately, they'll no longer supply us with any goods."

Logan froze.

Though a retired soldier unversed in business, he understood enough to know how serious that was. Imperion Group had nine suppliers so stable they were considered unbreakable alliances—ten years of seamless cooperation.

For all nine to cut ties at the exact same time? Unthinkable.

Dorian's gaze flicked toward Leander, recalling the call he'd just made.

"Jeff... was that you?"

His voice faltered. The more he thought about it, the less sense it made. How could Leander have possibly severed Imperion Group's entire supply chain? To do that required more than connections—it demanded staggering financial power. Such massive liquidity... Even if every powerhouse in Mornwick and all four major elite families from Highcliffe combined their resources, they couldn't pull that off. Where on earth did Leander get that kind of wealth-enough to rival nations? Leander only smiled, indifferent, and raised a single finger.

"That was just the business world," he said quietly. "Now... let's play in the military."

The moment the words left his mouth, the deep, rhythmic thrum of helicopter blades filled the air outside the banquet hall.

The Celestial Pavilion's hall was built entirely of glass, and as everyone looked up, bright lights streaked across the night sky.

Three military helicopters hovered overhead—imposing, thunderous, and unmistakably real.

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Chapter 396

The deafening roar of rotors thundered from above. Three military helicopters descended onto the plaza outside the Celestial Pavilion. The source of this content is

"What's going on?"

Malric, Logan, and the others were stunned, unable to believe their eyes.

To summon military helicopters, it wasn't something just anyone could do. Aside from special missions, only an active-duty officer at the rank of general or above had that authority.

Retired generals like them? Completely powerless.

But what kind of emergency could bring three military helicopters straight to the Celestial Pavilion?

Logan exchanged a glance with Dorian. When they saw Leander's calm, unreadable expression, an uneasy premonition settled over them.

Dozens of troops filed in, forming perfect lines. Then, five middle-aged men in crisp military uniforms appeared, moving with the precision of predators each step commanding attention.

"General Darkmoor?"

Malric's face changed instantly when he recognized one of them. He hurried forward.

He had once served in the Central Military District. But the man before him? The supreme commander of the Central Military District, overseeing five provinces and two municipalities. His authority was unmatched.

Even at the peak of Malric's career, he couldn't hope to rival him-let alone now, years into retirement, standing in the presence of a man in his prime.

"That's the supreme commander of the Central Military District... Leif Darkmoor? General Darkmoor?"

Several guests gasped, their faces registering shock.

"And... the supreme commander of the Western Military District, Rylan Marwood? General Marwood?"

"And Eastern Military District's General Stormrider..."

"Northern Military District's General Wyntorpe..."

Each new name sent waves of awe and disbelief through the crowd.

All five were captain generals, the ultimate authorities of their respective military districts, each in charge of multiple provinces. Normally, they each held court in their own regions, unchallenged pillars of power. And yet here they were, all five, together in Highcliffe-and at the Celestial Pavilion, no less.

Leif gave Malric a slight nod, his expression cool and detached.

"General Tarrow, still finding time for leisure, visiting the Riverstone family here in Highcliffe? Retirement must be keeping you busy."

The hint of sarcasm in Leif's tone sent a chill down Malric's spine.

Leif continued, his voice steady. "We're here on serious business."

Malric's heart sank. What could be so urgent that it required the supreme commanders of all five Astria military districts to appear together?

Even the seven generals assembled by the Riverstone family seemed dim in comparison under the overwhelming presence of these five captain generals. Just as everyone began to wonder at their purpose, one of the five suddenly stepped forward, directly toward Leander.

"Mr. Ashcroft, long time no see."

He extended a hand to Leander with a warm, familiar smile.

Those nearby were stunned. Among them, Logan—who had served in the Southern Military District—felt his pupils constrict in shock.

The man greeting Leander was none other than the supreme commander of the Southern Military District, Darrow Leon.

"General Leon, it's been a long time."

Leander clasped Darrow's hand with a firm grip, a faint smile touching his lips.

Darrow placed his other hand over theirs, a subtle gesture of respect in his eyes.

"Just a month ago, Mr. Ashcroft, your battle at the Stormcairn River completely humbled the brats of the Southern Wyvern Blade. After that, every one of them trained harder than ever. Finally at last week North-South competition, they brought glory to our Southern Military District. It's all thanks to you, Mr. Ashcroft."

Those around exchanged stunned glances. Even the heads of the four major elite families looked on in disbelief.

Darrow, a captain general with absolute authority over his troops, should not have shown such warmth to Leander. Yet here he was, treating him like an old friend.

"General Leon, you flatter me. I only did what little I could," Leander said, shaking his head casually, his expression unchanged.

At that moment, Leif and the other four captain generals stepped forward. Their eyes scanned Leander with curiosity, and each offered a polite nod.

"So, this is Mr. Ashcroft. Even though we serve in the East, West, North, and South, your name precedes you. Finally, we get to meet in person-it's an honor."

Leander smiled faintly in response and nodded.

None of the generals took offense. At their level, they understood pride and ambition when they saw it. Today, their purpose was clear: to connect with a young talent like Leander.

"Mr. Ashcroft, we are here on urgent business," Darrow said, his tone suddenly serious, the weight of his words cutting through the chatter.

He signaled a senior officer nearby. The officer stepped forward, carrying a small box. Darrow opened it, and a brilliant light spilled forth, drawing everyone's eyes. Thside lay a medallion, sculpted in the shape of a dragon-shaped dagger.

Gareth's face went slack. Nearby, Malric and Logan paled.

A medallion bearing the dragon-dagger symbol was no ordinary award. Every high-ranking general had heard of it. It represented the supreme command of Astria's most secretive and lethal unit: the Wyvern Blade.

Its presence here signaled something monumental. Everyone understood exactly what it meant.

"This can't be..."

Logan and Dorian exchanged incredulous looks, unable to grasp the reality before them. But before they could react, Darrow spoke.

"Southern Wyvern Blade's Chief

Instructor, Jeff Ashcroft, created the

Devourer's Flow, elevating the combat effectiveness of the Wyvern Blade to new heights. For his unparalleled contributions, the military has personally awarded him

the Wyvern Blade medallion, appointing him as a major general of the Wyvern Blade."

Darrow's voice carried across the banquet hall. Every person present froze, shock etched into their faces.

The Wyvern Blade—Astria's most secretive and elite strike force—was legendary. Its supreme commander was the Chief Instructor, a position few ever held. None had expected that Leander, already famed for Mornwick's Legend, held this hidden role as well. Even more astonishing, five captain generals had come personally to confer the honor.

Logan, Malric, and the others were rooted to the spot. Even though it was just a major general of Wyvern Blade, the authority and weight it carried rivaled that of captain generals like Darrow.

They had never imagined Leander could conceal such a terrifying hidden identity. And the fact that he was not even twenty years old made it all the more unbelievable. How could someone so young achieve such an honor? Malric and the other generals who had come to lend support to the Riverstone family fell utterly silent, their expressions cold and unreadable.

Leander took the medallion in both hands. Darrow's face brightened with a broad smile.

"Well, you can't be called Mr. Ashcroft anymore. From now on, it's General Ashcroft."

Leander smiled faintly, offering no comment. He tucked the medallion away and turned his gaze toward Logan and Dorian, his expression hardening. "Just now, didn't you say you would petition together to punish me... to exile me? "Do you still have the nerve to say that now?"

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Chapter 397

Just a day ago, Leander had received a call from Darrow. It was that very call that made him ignore all other matters and head straight to the Riverstone family's

banquet.

"Do you still have the nerve to say that now?"

He cast a sidelong glance at Logan and the others, a faint, mocking smile tugging at his lips.

"What..."

Logan and the rest froze, completely at a loss for words.

They all knew exactly what it meant for Astria's military to have a general of Wyvern Blade in play. Even if all seven of them combined their complaints, how could they possibly match the backing of four captain generals?

Without even thinking much, they already understood: the chances of the military punishing Leander were virtually zero.

"What's going on here?"

Darrow and the other captain generals turned to look.

Logan and Malric's expressions changed drastically. They hesitated, unsure how to answer. Finally, Logan forced himself to speak, trying to mask his frustration.

"General Leon... General Darkmoor... I honestly don't understand. What has Jeff done to deserve becoming a general of Wyvern Blade?"

"Three days ago, he abused his power and threw my two grandsons off Westvale Peak, breaking all their limbs. My eldest grandson, Quincy, is a third-tier officer! How can someone this cruel be entrusted with such important military duties?"

"Oh?" This content belongs to

Darrow and Leif exchanged a glance, calm and unreadable, then turned toward Leander.

"General Ashcroft... would you like to say something?"

Leander let out a quiet, amused chuckle.

"Logan... you only mentioned that I gravely injured your two grandsons. But why didn't you talk about why I injured them?"

"Three days ago, the Riverstone family's third-generation Skelly led a group to Westvale Peak, broke into my mother's meditation room, and even tried to kidnap her. I intervened and threw them off Westvale Peak!

"Then, Quincy came at me, trying to throw me off Westvale Peak instead. Luckily, my skills were superior, and I turned the tables on him.

"Do I need to make it any clearer?"

Logan and Dorian exchanged glances. They knew well how reckless Skelly was, but they couldn't admit it now. Swallowing his pride, Logan stammered, "Jeff... that's just your version of events. Who can prove it? You're making it all up!"

"Is that so?" Leander's smile didn't waver. "Two female students from Highcliffe University were there. My mother was there. And dozens of your Riverstone family's bodyguards were present. Should we ask each of them to confirm the truth?"

"Err..."

Logan and Dorian fell utterly silent. Seeing their reaction, even Malric and the others felt a chill run through them, a hint of hesitation creeping in.

Darrow and Leif's eyes turned icy. At that moment, their voices rang out sharply.

"Old Mr. Riverstone... your family is bold indeed, daring to attack a general of Wyvern Blade. Do you even realize that attempting to murder a Wyvern Blade general is a crime your entire family might not survive?"

"I heard you even tried to incite five other senior generals to write a petition slandering General Ashcroft, to have him expelled from Astria and stripped of citizenship?"

"Old Mr. Riverstone... conspiring against and defaming a general of Wyvern Blade do you even know what kind of charges that is? I don't need to spell it out for you, do I?"

At Darrow and Leif's words, Logan and Dorian's faces went pale, hopelessness creeping in.

From the tone of their voices, it was clear that Astria's military had already thrown its weight behind Leander.

"Mr. Frostwell has arrived!"

At that moment, a herald's voice rang out outside the banquet hall. Logan and Dorian stiffened instantly.

Gideon Frostwell-he was their only hope.

"Mr. Frostwell? Could he be the one beside Number Two?"

Gasps spread across the hall. Many guests had already guessed the identity of the newcomer.

Across all of Highcliffe, very few could command the title of Mr. Frostwell and be treated with such solemnity by the Riverstone family. Apart from the figure standing beside Number Two, there was simply no other.

The entire room went rigid, every face stricken. Even figures like Gareth and Teion straightened with respect. After all, Gideon represented an Astria powerhouse.

A middle-aged man with black-framed glasses entered the hall. Under his arm, he carried a briefcase. He looked every bit the scholar, tall and lean, and he walked straight to the center of the room.

"Mr. Frostwell!"

Logan rushed forward, as if clinging to a lifeline.

"Lachlan and the other two provincial governors... Do we know what became of their petition?" he asked, his voice trembling with urgency, reaching out to grasp Gideon's hand.

Gideon's face remained impassive, cold and detached. He sidestepped Logan's hand without a word.

"Old Mr. Riverstone," he said icily, "your family really has audacity. To jointly petition against the backbone of our nation... Do you even grasp the gravity of such an act?"

"Orders have already been issued. Lachlan will be investigated thoroughly." Logan's hand shook. "Investigated thoroughly?"

He knew exactly what a full investigation of a provincial governor implied. He had never imagined things would escalate to this level.

Gideon ignored Logan completely, walking past him. He gave a polite smile to Darrow, Leif, and the other captain generals, then took a single step to stand before Leander.

"I first heard of you, General Ashcroft, months ago. Seeing you in person today... Truly, you are a hero of the ages, a young prodigy. No wonder even the top officials speak of you in such high praise."

Logan's expression froze, disbelief etched across his face.

"What? The top officials know Jeff? That's impossible!"

These were people who managed the affairs of the entire

Qu

nation-figures at the very apex of power Martial artists might be formidable, but they usually didn't command the attention of such people. Yet according to Gideon, not

only did these officials know

Leander, they held him in the highest regard.

Logan's understanding of the world shifted instantly.

"Old Mr. Riverstone," Gideon said coldly, "you are a senior general, yet you still fail to grasp what a supreme martial artist represents to a nation.

"You know well what the War God

Sanctum was during the invasion of the allied forces. General Ashcroft in the battle at Southern Shore, eradicated the remnants of the War God Sanctum and crushed the notorious World Arbitration Office on the international stage. The top officials themselves declared that a hero of the nation like General Ashcroft is a true national champion-a Guardian of the Nation.

"I am here on their orders. General Ashcroft's victory over the War God Sanctum and the World Arbitration Office brought great honor to the nation in recognition of his achievements, he is hereby awarded the Guardian Medal."

With that, Gideon withdrew a stunning medal from his briefcase. It was a crimson shield, intricately engraved with a golden five-pointed star, radiating solemn authority.

For a moment, the entire hall froze in awe and fear.

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Chapter 398

To serve the nation, to defend it, to defeat its greatest enemies those who achieved such feats were called Guardians of the Nation.

Astria's history was filled with legendary Guardians: the heroes who fought in the resistance, the brilliant minds behind the atomic bombs, and the satellite program all of them earned this title.

For such extraordinary contributions, the nation created a special medal: the Guardian Medal.

To receive this medal was to have the nation formally recognize them as a Guardian of the Nation. It was the highest honor imaginable. Even the captain generals considered it a badge of supreme distinction. Every citizen aspired to become a Guardian, to dedicate themselves fully to the service of their country. Updates are released by

Earning a Guardian Medal was nearly impossible. Yet here was Gideon—the personal secretary of one of Astria's most powerful figures—entering the hall with one in hand. And not just that: this medal was intended for a young man not yet twenty years old.

A Wyvern Blade general under twenty... a Guardian Medal holder under twenty... The hall fell deathly silent. And then, the room erupted in astonished cries that couldn't be contained.

Logan, Malric, and the others froze, their expressions drained of hope.

If Leander's appointment as a Wyvern Blade general had left the Riverstone family clinging to the faintest glimmer of resistance, this seal of approval from Astria's top powerhouses, the bestowal of a Guardian Medal, crushed any remaining hope.

Every Guardian Medal recipient was among the nation's most elite, its most respected figures. These were not people they could challenge with petitions or letters of complaint.

Skelly had started this conflict, but even if Leander had acted on his own initiative, the Riverstone family had no leverage. Astria's military and government would stand firmly on Leander's side.

Logan looked at Leander's calm, composed face, and his chest tightened with shock.

He had believed that by rallying five generals, two provincial governors, and three of Astria's top ten corporations, he could crush Leander and the Ashcroft family, brand Leander a traitor, and strip him of standing in Astria forever. Yet despite marshaling all these heavyweights, he had been suppressed by a single young man.

The power Leander wielded was beyond anything the Riverstone family could match. For the first time, Logan realized just how powerless they could truly be.

Dorian, a major general, felt a deep, bitter defeat for the first time. A young man not yet twenty had thrown the Riverstone family into chaos, and they were completely helpless. The gap between them was staggering-beyond measure.

When Gideon presented the Guardian Medal, Leander did not immediately accept it. He merely waved his hand lightly.

"You honor me too much. I've only done my small part for the nation. I am far from deserving this medal."

Gideon did not take offense. Instead, he pressed the medal slightly closer to Leander.

"General Ashcroft, a true man of honor accepts what is rightly his. Your contributions to the nation make you fully deserving of this recognition.

"You founded the Devourer's Flow, playing an irreplaceable role in the development and training of the Wyvern Blade. That alone is a monumental achievement.

"In the Southern Ocean, you single-handedly eradicated the remnants of the War God Sanctum, preventing their covert persecution of our nation, and struck a decisive blow against the World Arbitration Office, preserving the four major elite families of Highcliffe. That is another tremendous accomplishment.

"You established Jeff Enterprises, whose products-Phoenix Essence Pills and Soulwater among them-have greatly improved citizens' quality of life and slowed population aging. That is yet another major contribution.

"Three monumental achievements. General Ashcroft, if you are still deemed unworthy of the Guardian Medal, then how many in all of Astria truly deserve it?"

Those nearby were jolted again; several wealthy merchants who had dealt with Jeff Enterprises' subsidiaries at last understood.

"Jeff—of course. The chairman of Jeff Enterprises—people say his name is Jeff, right?"

Logan's face registered dawning

horror as the truth hit him: that was

why, within ten minutes, nine former suppliers abruptly cut ties with. Imperion Group, and why the three top-ten firms that had joined the attack on Ashcroft Group suddenly suffered devastating setbacks. All of it traced back to Leander's backer-Jeff Enterprises, the world's number one.

Ginny propped her cheek in her hand and watched the handsome young man who had captured the room. Her eyes flashed.

Arden beside her went utterly still; a storm of realization churned inside her. She finally understood why Ginny had said Leander was unstoppable and why Ginny had dismissed the other men.

Think about it heir of the Ashcroft family, the Mornwick's Legend, chairman of Jeff Enterprises,

Medalrecipient any one of those titles would let a person dominate Astria. Leander held them all at

Wyvern Blade general, Guale? net

once, wrapped in glory; who could possibly rival him?

When Gideon nudged the Guardian Medal forward, Leander knew he could no longer refuse. He closed his hand around the medal.

"Thank you for your generosity," he said.

Then, he turned to Logan and Dorian. "You dragged me through the worlds of business, military, and politics—what other cards do you have left?"

Logan and Dorian each stepped back, their faces ashen with humiliation. At this point, Leander held the initiative; even Astria's top powerhouses stood with him. Who in Astria would dare move against him now?

Leander's gaze swept from Logan and Dorian to Malric and the others. "You are all veteran national heroes, yet you rushed in to help on Logan's single accusation without checking the facts. Would you like me to pay a courtesy visit to your families?"

The five generals who had come to back Logan stiffened. Under Leander's stare, they dipped their heads slightly.

"General Ashcroft, we didn't act with sufficient care or verify the truth. Please spare our families any implication," they said.

They were veteran generals, but how could they match Leander's current standing? Even ignoring the Guardian Medal, the rank of Wyvern Blade general alone demanded their respect.

Leander's eyes cooled. "I honor your service to the nation. This time, I'll let it pass. Leave now."

They bowed again, offered a few polite words, and hurried from the banquet hall, leaving the trembling Riverstone father and son behind.

"General Ashcroft—about this matter..." Logan began, contrite and ready to beg for mercy. Leander waved him off.

"The Riverstone family's problems are far from over," he said. "When I'm done, I'll settle the score."

As he finished, a fierce wind blew in from outside and whipped the curtains aside.

Everyone turned. At the entrance stood a tall Taoist holding a whisk. White robes hung on him, and a pair of bright eyes bore straight at Leander. "Jeff," the person called, "a fight between you and me is inevitable. Let's fight."

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Chapter 399

The towering figure before them was Galen. He held the whisk in his hand, and with a casual sweep, a fierce gust tore through the banquet hall, scattering tables and chairs. Even the guests seated at them were swept aside, chairs and all.

Between Galen and Leander, a clear channel opened, as if the rest of the world didn't exist. Five captain generals, including Darrow, stood nearby, but Galen acted as if they were invisible, his cold gaze fixed only on Leander. The source of this content is

"Jeff, make your move."

The words fell from his lips like ice. The air beneath his feet erupted, propelling him like a rocket straight into the void.

Everyone craned their necks to the transparent glass above. A streak of white light shot skyward, then transformed into a flickering figure, hovering in midair, feet suspended as if holding up the heavens themselves.

"What..."

In the hall, only a handful—Darrow, a few seasoned captain generals, and the four families known for their martial prowess—remained calm. The rest were frozen, faces pale with shock.

Logan and Dorian, despite their frequent dealings with Homer, had never seen Homer in action. Now, they were wide-eyed and horrified.

Darrow and Leif exchanged a glance. Their memories of reports and records suddenly clarified Galen's identity.

"This... this is Galen Pierce, leader of Mount Martial. Ranked third in the International Combat Units."

Leif nodded slowly, his voice low and steady. "General Ashcroft ranks fifth in the International Combat Units. Facing a third-ranked opponent... I have no idea how this will end. Should we ask the military to intervene?"

Darrow paused for a moment, then shook his head.

"This is a fight of the martial world. This is General Ashcroft's battle alone. Let him handle it. He's a Wyvern Blade general and a Guardian Medal holder. He won't lose."

Leif could only nod. All eyes turned toward Leander.

"This fight... is indeed inevitable," Leander murmured. He planted his foot and shot toward the heavens. The tempered-glass ceiling shattered under his force. Two figures—one blue, one white—stretched across the sky, facing each other from afar.

"Ginny... who is Leander, really?"

Arden's eyes were fixed on the blue figure above, her expression frozen.

"He's the strongest sovereign of our time," Ginny said softly. She knew a fierce battle was about to erupt.

"Must it come to this?"

Leander stood in the night sky, one hand in his pocket, his gaze calm but piercing as he addressed Galen.

"It must," Galen replied coldly. In the next instant, without hesitation, he flicked his sleeve lightly.

That single motion sent the winds of heaven and earth into a frenzy. A broad streak of white, dozens of feet long, appeared in the night sky. It arced like a whip of foamy water, aimed directly at Leander.

A soft sigh escaped Leander's nose. This was the first fight he didn't want to fight.

He made no move. The white streak came crashing down, and he remained still, waiting.

Bang!

The streak struck his chest with a deafening thud. Leander's body became like a cannonball, flying hundreds of feet before skidding across the night sky, leaving a streak of blue in its wake.

Hundreds of feet away, Leander finally came to a stop. His chest bore a tear in his clothing, revealing skin both flawless and strong, with a faint mark etched across it.

"Hm?"

Galen's eyes flickered, and he tapped the whisk. A sweeping arc of energy surged outward. Ripples of raw innate vitality cut through the air like a blade, slicing diagonally toward Leander's chest.

Yet Leander remained unmoved. He met the strike head-on, barely reacting.

A low grunt escaped him as his body was thrown backward again, rebounding tens of feet. Hanging in midair, he flipped and landed lightly on the void, the air rippling beneath his feet.

"No wonder he's the Mount Martial

leader... Triple Surge Strike,

impressive," Leander murmured, a

small smile playing on his lips.

pulled his right hand back,

he

channeling his own immense force

into his fist, sending powerful waves

that rippled through the world.

Galen's robe fluttered. His eyes narrowed, hands weaving a series of intricate seals,

and a massive Tai Chi Diagram materialized before him.

The diagram rotated slowly at first, then the rotation intensified. Yin and Yang intertwined, drawing the potent energy of heaven and earth into their center.

Leander made as if to strike, but Galen's sleeves lashed violently, pushing the Tai Chi Diagram forward.

At the exact moment the diagram surged, Leander lowered his fist. Every ounce of energy in his body dissipated.

"What?"

Galen's expression shifted sharply. Below, Gareth, Teion, and the others all stared in disbelief. Daphne gasped aloud, horror etched across her face.

Leander had deliberately withheld his strike—even leaving himself completely exposed. In a duel between masters, such a move could easily be fatal.

Boom!

The Tai Chi Diagram's converging Yin and Yang pierced the space, slamming into Leander with brutal force. The diagram spanned dozens of feet dwarfing him. The Celestial Pavilion shuddered under the sheer violence, the air trembling with raw power.

Blue light streaked across the sky. Leander shot outward, struck by the full weight of the diagram, a trail of azure energy marking his flight into the distance.

Galen held the whisk, palm up. The Tai Chi Diagram dissolved instantly. His eyes followed the streak of blue across the horizon, his expression shifting again and again.

Whoosh!

Suddenly, the blue streak exploded into countless shards of light. In an instant, a figure cut through the wind—Leander had returned, appearing before Galen as if he had teleported.

Blood traced the corner of Leander's mouth. His torn clothing revealed sculpted, balanced muscles, each line brimming with destructive power.

Galen's eyes narrowed, his voice low but sharp. "Jeff... why are you doing this?"

He had unleashed three attacks in succession, yet Leander had neither blocked nor countered a single one. He had taken every strike head-on.

Leander wiped the blood from his lips with the back of his hand, a faint, confident smile on his face.

"You once taught me much... that debt I will never forget. So for this fight, I'll let you have three strikes."

in

Gareth and the others stared, hearts pounding. Galen's mastery was beyond compare—ranked third in the International Combat Units, his strength far exceeding that of Ares and Enderman Briggs-Higgins combined. And Leander had just absorbed three of his most

devastating attacks without

retaliation. In a duel between

masters, such courage-or

recklessness-could have been fatal.

"Jeff... do you really think that by doing this, I'll hold back?"

Galen's voice was low, heavy with menace.

Leander smiled faintly and waved a hand, stretching his neck. The subtle cracking of his joints echoed through the air, a signal of power coiling within him.

"The three strikes are over. Now... I won't hold back."

He lifted his left hand slightly, fingers curling, while his right palm shot upright—forming the precise starting stance of the Eternal Flow Technique.

"Tailcatch?"

Galen's eyes narrowed sharply, his body tensing.

Leander's lips curved into a calm, confident smile. The energy around him

thickened, folding in on itself, sealing off all space as though the world itself had been contained. No beginning, no end—limitless and unbroken.

"I'll face your Eternal Flow Technique... with my own."

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Chapter 400

"Eternal Flow Technique?"

Galen's gaze flickered. Leander raised his left hand slightly, while his right palm stood upright before his chest-a standard Tailcatch stance from the Eternal Flow Technique.

But Leander's stance wasn't some halfhearted mimicry. With just a lift of his hand, his energy coursed through him, forming a world of its own, as if he were a seasoned master who had spent decades refining the Eternal Flow Technique.

The Eternal Flow Technique of Mount Martial was deceptively simple to learn but nearly impossible to master. True understanding required repetition, over and over, until the practitioner could feel its essence.

Eight years ago, Galen had trained beneath the mountain in the Eternal Flow Technique, seeking that final breakthrough that would perfect his Eternal Flow Art. It was during that time that he had first crossed paths with Leander.

But Galen could never have imagined that Leander could casually assume a stance that rivaled decades of his own painstaking training.

"How do you know the Eternal Flow Technique?"

As the head of Mount Martial, he knew well that there was no one like Leander within their ranks-and that Leander had no ties to Mount Martial whatsoever. Yet now, the skill Leander displayed left him shocked.

"You taught me, sir... eight years ago," Leander replied calmly, his gaze steady.

"What?" Galen's eyes narrowed. Eight years ago... that was the year he had first met Leander beneath the mountain.

Back then, he had only performed a set of the Eternal Flow Technique in front of Leander and somehow, Leander had awakened an unparalleled power through sheer insight. Not only that, but he had seen the sequence once and memorized every variation, instantly grasping its essence.

"Impossible..."

Galen murmured, his eyes glinting coldly. With a single step, he covered dozens of feet, appearing before Leander.

He bent his knees slightly, settling into a bow stance, and pushed a palm toward Leander's shoulder.

Leander responded in kind, his stance solid, and their palms met.

The two pushed and resisted, endlessly exchanging force. Above, the sky seemed to freeze in a tense stillness.

Below, countless onlookers gaped, stunned by what they saw. Both fighters floated in midair, advancing and retreating, yet no explosive battle erupted. What they had expected to be a sky-shattering clash instead remained eerily calm.

"Flowing Hands!"

Gareth stared at the empty space above, his expression sharp but heavy with gravity.

"Dad... what did you say?" Ethan turned, puzzled.

"Ander and Galen are engaging in Flowing Hands! As is well known, Eternal Flow practitioners rely on Flowing Hands as the primary means of confrontation. Whoever can push the other back first is the victor, but right now, their duel far surpasses that of ordinary Eternal Flow practitioners."

Ethan's eyes narrowed as he gazed upward. Even the moon and stars seemed blurred, as if reality itself was bending.

"What..." His gaze sharpened. Suddenly, he felt the surrounding air roiling violently. Every hair on his body bristled as the invisible currents whipped through the night.

Daphne, Eira, and the other young people suddenly snapped back to attention, their eyes widening in shock.

The two men floating in the sky seemed to move slowly and smoothly, yet every push they exchanged sent shockwaves like massive trees shaking the heavens, whipping out gusts of wind dozens of feet wide. The power was utterly terrifying.

This was Flowing Hands taken to a level that spanned Yin and Yang-a realm of Tai Chi the world had never seen before.

"Jeff... how did you master the Eternal Flow Technique?"

As Galen and Leander moved in their circular push, Galen felt the endless, oceanic force flowing through him with every exchange. It tugged at his strength, dissolved it, and then returned it in layers-wave upon wave, unbroken and unrelenting.

This wasn't raw strength-it required complete comprehension of the

interaction between Yin and Yang

mastery of Tai Chi's subtle

principles. Galen could not understand how Leander had achieved such skill. He hadn't been guided by a renowned master he had only watched Galen practice once. And yet, in less than eight years, he had reached this level of mastery.

"Hmph!"

Though he was shocked by Leander's skill, Galen felt no fear.

He was the proud head of Mount Martial. He had spent decades refining his Eternal Flow Art and had inherited the secret teachings from the previous Mount Martial leader. How could he be afraid of an outer disciple?

A cold snort escaped him. The air

beneath his feet exploded, and force radiated from his body. With a violent tremor of his right arm, his Primordial Energy surged,

combining with the strength of every joint in his body to erupt in a single instant.

"Hm?"

Leander's eyes flickered. A torrent of overwhelming power poured from Galen's palm, as though capable of shaking mountains and shattering boulders.

The full force met him head-on-but Leander did not take a step back. He tilted his upper body slightly, his right hand rounding smoothly, flowing like a seasoned master wielding a blade.

"What?" Galen's pupils shrank. In a single instant, Leander absorbed all the explosive energy he had just unleashed.

Before he could react, Leander pushed back, using the very force Galen had sent, sending it crashing against his own palm.

The proud head of Mount Martial grunted, his body stumbling backward. Each step left a footprint of condensed air suspended in midair.

He stepped back ten paces before finally stabilizing, his face pale and hard as iron. "Galen..... actually lost in Flowing Hands?"

Inside the banquet hall, Gareth and the others were shocked beyond belief.

Galen had been ranked third in the International Combat Units a decade ago. Rumors had said he had already entered the Infernal Crown Transcendent. And now, the proud head of Mount Martial had been forced backward in an Eternal Flow

Technique duel by Leander?

Leander raised both palms slightly, then pressed them down slowly, his expression calm and indifferent.

Galen's gaze darkened as turmoil churned in his heart.

Leander's embrace of the force had been like wrapping the heavens themselves, combining with his own strength in a way so perfect it seemed instantaneous. Even Galen could not withstand it.

"Jeff... Flowing Hands..... I admit defeat."

His voice rang strong and clear, without a hint of pretension.

The moment his words fell, the whisk in his hand erupted, scattering into fragments across the sky. A golden light burst forth, shooting across the horizon with the sound of a sword ringing through the heavens.

"Hm?"

Leander's gaze sharpened. From the moment he first met Galen, he had sensed something unusual about the whisk. Now he realized it was no mere ornament. Hidden within was an ancient, sturdy Mount Martial golden sword.

Galen carried his sword on his back, and instantly his aura surged with sword intent. For original chapters go to

"Mount Martial lineage... is far beyond just the Eternal Flow Technique. I may have lost to you in that, but now..." He fixed his gaze on Leander. "Now, try to withstand my Flowing Sword!"

The sword's ringing echoed across the sky. With a single, precise swipe, the golden blade traced a brilliant arc in the air, slicing downward.

Half of the sky seemed to split apart, the sword energy extending over a hundred yards a single strike that cut through the void itself.

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