

From Outcast to Overlord The Unyielding Heir (Leander Ashcroft)

Chapter 401

Slash!

A golden flare shot across horizontally, cutting through the air.

Half of the void was illuminated by the blinding glow, dazzling anyone who looked.

The spectators below, save for Gareth and a few others, couldn't see clearly.

They had no idea what had happened, only feeling the sudden drop in pressure above, their breaths momentarily caught in their throats.

Leander shifted slightly to the side whilst in the air, moving just half a step.

Galen's sword barely swept past him.

"The Flying Sword Technique?" he murmured.

He stepped forward, his figure gliding diagonally through the air, leaving a long trace of energy in his wake.

He threw a punch straight at Galen's chest.

"Crumbleforce, Forward Flow Deflection Strike!"

Galen's expression remained calm, and his right fist met Leander's head-on without flinching.

The two clashed violently mid-air with a boom!

Ripples of energy radiated outward from the impact.

Nearby buildings cracked under the force, and some of the weaker ones collapsed entirely.

Even the Celestial Pavilion's bulletproof glass cracked, looking ready to shatter at any moment.

Whoosh!

Leander flipped backward, retreating rapidly.

Homer had previously used Crumbleforce on him, but it brought zero damage to Leander.

Yet, the sheer amount of force Galen had channeled was on a different level, far beyond anything he had experienced.

Galen staggered several steps back, absorbing the recoil into his feet.

He raised one arm, forming a sword seal with one hand. With a sudden thrust, the sword shot forward.

"Flowing Sword, Storm-Rending Piercing Thrust!"

The moment the sword surged forward, the air itself seemed to convulse.

Countless invisible vortexes of wind gathered around the golden sword, forming razor-sharp spikes that shot out in all directions.

Hundreds of these deadly wind spikes shot forth, able to shred even a reinforced armored vehicle to pieces in an instant.

"Trinity Strike Technique, Soulbreaker!" Leander pulled his right hand back, a blue glow igniting his fist.

He launched it forward.

In the void, a blue fist-shaped imprint blossomed like a lotus, expanding continuously, spanning over thirty feet as it surged straight ahead.

Clang!

The clash of metal rang out. Countless tiny ripples appeared on the blue fist imprint, like countless raindrops striking the air.

Each time a spike of wind was cut apart, the void seemed to ripple and churn with energy.

"Finish it off!" Leander shouted, his eyes glowing sharply.

His Nirvana Energy churned wildly, intensifying the blue aura around him.

The punch's force was unmatched.

The wind spikes from Galen shattered under its impact, exploding like dry wood under fire.

"How did Jeff cultivate such strength? He's not even twenty years old, yet his powers are so solid and resilient. I can't even contain him with my Storm-Rending Piercing Thrust!"

Galen narrowed his eyes, watching as Leander's fist surged forward like a hammer, already reaching him.

"Cosmic Strike!" Galen remained calm as he lifted the golden sword and slashed it in the air.

The sword light cut through the deep blue fist imprint, splitting it in two, turning it into countless points of light that dissolved into nothing.

It was a close call.

"No wonder Homer died at your hands, Jeff!" Galen struck twice with his golden sword, then suddenly carried it behind his back, falling into complete stillness.

Leander felt a twinge of curiosity and immediately stopped as well.

They hovered in the night sky, separated by distance, the atmosphere heavy with tension.

"Your strength has truly reached its peak. Among the Transcendent Realm, I doubt you have an opponent under anything short of an Infernal Crown!"

Galen's gaze burned brightly.

Suddenly, he relaxed his grip, and the golden sword plummeted straight down toward the Celestial Pavilion.

The bulletproof glass of the banquet hall shattered like tofu at the sword's strike, the blade sinking deeply into the wooden floor of the hall.

Gareth and the other clan heads were stunned and confused.

Grandmasters usually fought with all their might.

Galen, a grandmaster from the Wanda Sect, had mastered the Eternal Flow Technique and Flowing Sword, both of which were the strongest martial arts.

Yet, he had abandoned his sword mid-battle, effectively cutting off his own arm. His combat power would inevitably drop.

"Don't tell me he's..."

Gareth, the strongest in cultivation and martial insight among them, suddenly narrowed his eyes.

He was the first to realize what had happened, fixing his gaze on the void.

A flash of lightning danced in Galen's eyes.

His white robe shattered into countless fragments, revealing the black battle attire beneath.

Only then did the spectators truly awaken to his presence.

Galen was not only tall and muscular, but every inch of his body seemed packed with explosive power.

"Jeff, ever since our clash in the tavern, I knew I wouldn't be able to defeat you with the Eternal Flow Technique and Flowing Sword alone!

"Today, I'm going to crush you with overwhelming force!"

As he spoke, countless air currents swirled above his head, forming a massive vortex.

Lightning crackled within it.

"You might be unrivaled to most, but you cannot withstand an Infernal Crown Transcendent! Within the Transcendent Realm everything lower than an Infernal Crown means nothing to you.

"Today, I'll show you the real deal!"

Whoosh!

The moment he finished speaking, the vortex above his head exploded violently, condensing the purest essence of heaven and earth, funneling it into his crown.

His aura skyrocketed at an almost terrifying rate, rising several tiers in an instant.

Leander, standing over thirty feet

away, could clearly feel Galen's

breakthrough not just in true

energy or spirit, but in his

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body. Every aspect had leaped in

quality.

If Galen had previously been like an ordinary car, now he had upgraded into a Fresh chapters posted on

limited-edition supercar.

He was in an entirely different league.

"An Infernal Crown Transcendent?"

Even Leander frowned.

He had faced Blaze Stage, Ember Stage, and Kindling Stage Transcendents before, but never a true Infernal Crown Transcendent until now.

"He's an actual Infernal Crown Transcendent!"

Below, Gareth's pupils constricted, his voice trembling with shock.

An Infernal Crown Transcendent was the highest tier in the Transcendent Realm.

Anyone who reached this level was no different from an immortal on Earth.

They could command the essence of heaven and earth at will, drawing endless power, their strength inexhaustible.

A mere gesture could stir the forces of the world itself, rivaling natural disasters in magnitude.

"This is bad!"

Wesley, the Half-Lord of Highcliffe's face paled in fear, whereas Daphne felt her heart sink.

Though Leander had slain eleven Transcendents in the battle at Southern Shore, the strongest among them was only a Blaze Transcendent.

Even ten Blaze Transcendents united could not match a single Infernal Crown Transcendent.

Now that Leander was up against one, how could he possibly win?

Above, Leander's gaze burned with intensity, locking onto Galen, who seemed possessed by a god.

"From the first time we met, I

noticed you were deliberately restraining your power. It turns out

you're an Infernal Crown, Transcendent. The rumors were true," Leander murmured, his tone a mix of helplessness and awe.

A faint halo shimmered above Galen's head.

The man said nothing in response.

Slowly, he extended his hand toward Leander, then gently clenched it.

Whoosh!

The heavens trembled. Countless strands of potent energy surged and converged, twisting and writhing violently around Leander.

Finally, the chaos subsided, and a massive Tai Chi Diagram spread across several feet.

But Leander had already vanished, swallowed entirely within the diagram, leaving no trace behind.

Below, everyone's faces were filled with horror and disbelief.

With just a casual gesture, he could manipulate the forces of heaven and earth, sealing off over three hundred feet.

This was the might of an Infernal Crown Transcendent.

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Chapter 402

The elemental energy of heaven and earth surged violently, freezing the void within several hundred feet, sealing it completely.

A massive Celestial Tai Chi Diagram engulfed Leander entirely.

"The might of an Infernal Crown Transcendent is truly terrifying!"

Gareth's eyes widened sharply, then a shadow of worry crossed his face.

At this moment, the one facing an Infernal Crown Transcendent was his own son.

Though Leander had tried to distance himself from the Ashcroft family, he was still, after all, a member of it.

Gareth and Reginald had long agreed that the future of the Ashcroft family would rest entirely in Leander's hands.

But now, the overwhelming might of an Infernal Crown Transcendent seemed capable of turning all those hopes into nothing but crushed dreams.

A mere gesture could seal space itself.

Who could withstand such power if they weren't an Infernal Crown Transcendent themselves?

Galen's single hand clenched lightly, his gaze sharp, his brows carrying a streak of icy indifference.

"Jeff, you may be powerful and unmatched, but you're not an Infernal Crown yourself. In the presence of an Infernal Crown Transcendent, you're no different from an ant! Face it you can never beat me!

"Now, it's time to settle the score. You will answer for Homer's life!" uttered Galen icily.

Everyone below could feel a pure, chilling killing intent emanating from him.

This killing intent carried no hatred nor anger, for its sole purpose was to take Leander's life.

It sounded as simple and natural as opening a can of soda.

The instant he finished speaking, he clenched his fists.

Whoosh!

A whirlwind of elemental energy swept across heaven and earth.

The massive Tai Chi Diagram spun violently, forming two extremes, black and white, then constricting inward.

This move resembled the Infinite Silken Trap once wielded by Grayson, but the difference in power was astronomical.

Grayson had expended all his internal force to form the net atop Hawksridge Summit.

Galen, by contrast, formed it effortlessly with a casual motion. There was simply no comparison.

The Tai Chi Diagram constricted rapidly.

Countless strands of elemental energy compressed the space within, threatening to explode at any moment.

Leander, trapped inside, would naturally be caught in a chaotic surge of destructive forces.

"Ander!"

Daphne clenched her pale hands tightly, unable to contain her alarmed cries.

She wanted to intervene, but her cultivation was too weak, and Galen hovered high above.

She was powerless, forced to watch as the Tai Chi Diagram shrank smaller and smaller.

Just as the Tai Chi Diagram contracted to a few dozen feet across, a low shout erupted from within. Blue light burst forth, like something breaking free from a

cocoon.

Bang!

The sound of a massive explosion shook the place, and blue light blossomed across the void, illuminating the night.

The Tai Chi Diagram, formed from the essence of heaven and earth, was utterly shattered from within outward by a force unlike anything before.

"What?"

Galen's eyes narrowed, shock etched across his features.

The blue light gradually faded, revealing Leander standing proudly and unscathed.

"Did you just break through my Celestial Tai Chi Diagram?"

His expression shifted again, disbelief flooding him.

Ever since assuming the position of Wanda Sect's grandmaster decades ago, he had never descended into the mortal world.

He spent all his time on the highest peaks of Wanda's seventy-two summits, cultivating martial insight and attuning to heaven and earth, pursuing ultimate power.

Five years ago, he finally broke through Infernal Crown Transcendent, becoming one of the strongest in the Transcendent Realm.

From the moment he ascended, he could feel the transformation.

It was an all-encompassing evolution, like a silkworm emerging from its cocoon as a butterfly—a transcendence beyond description.

At this stage, he could suppress anything casually.

Yet, not only did Leander survive the Tai Chi Diagram formed from his own energy, he'd even shattered it completely, leaving Galen utterly stunned.

"Are you an Infernal Crown Transcendent too, Jeff?" Galen stared at him, his tone filled with shock.

A Transcendent under twenty years old was already enough to shake the world, but an Infernal Crown Transcendent under twenty?

That could set the Earth itself ablaze.

"Of course not," Leander said calmly as he shook his head.

His fingers flexed slightly, the crisp cracking of his joints echoing faintly.

"Even if I were one, why would that matter?"

Boom!

He stepped down, and the air beneath his feet erupted like an explosion. New novel chapters are published on

A streak of blue light tore across the sky, moving so fast that it was almost impossible for the naked eye to track.

Galen's pupils constricted sharply, and one sleeve lashed toward the empty space ahead.

The explosion echoed with a bang. Blue light shimmered, scattering tiny ripples along its tail.

Galen's right sleeve, condensed with

his undying innate vitality like a pillar of steel, was shattered instantly exploding into fragments across the night sky.

The force shook Galen's entire body. He was thrown ten feet backward, stumbling.

"How is this possible? Did he not even use his full strength?" Galen's chest trembled in shock.

The blue light flashed again. In an instant, a fist, white and jade-like, struck toward him.

"Argh!"

As Wanda Sect's grandmaster, Galen had never been cornered like this.

His right arm bulged with muscle, his innate vitality surging, fused with the concentrated essence of heaven and earth.

He hurled a punch with devastating force.

Bang!

In the night sky, Galen's fist glowed crimson.

The color was caused by the high-speed rush through the air, a visible mark of the raw, overwhelming power behind the blow.

This was Galen at his absolute peak.

Not even the Eternal Flow Technique or Flowing Sword could compare to the sheer force of his fully unleashed body.

The two fists collided violently, and a deafening explosion reverberated.

At last, the bulletproof glass above Celestial Pavilion's banquet hall could no longer withstand the shockwave.

It shattered, sending fragments raining downward.

Seeing this, Gareth and the others quickly sprang into action.

They used a round table to shield the guests inside from the falling shards of glass, narrowly saving them from disaster.

Above, blue and red energies clashed continuously, two utterly opposed forces colliding with such ferocity that the night sky itself seemed torn in two.

Leander struck with a punch, then retracted, and struck again, his body wrapped in Nirvana Energy as the blue light flickered incessantly around him.

Galen was pushed back by Leander's blow but did not panic.

Instead, he unleashed his innate vitality, summoning the power of heaven and earth, bracing to meet Leander's next punch.

Though the two seemed evenly matched, Gareth and the others could clearly see that with every strike Leander delivered, Galen stepped back, his

back, his crimson aura dimming slightly each time. Content"

Leander unleashed nine punches in rapid succession.

Galen fell back nine steps, his crimson light now fully extinguished.

"What's with his cultivation? I've fully mobilized my innate vitality and amplified my heaven-and-earth essence as an Infernal Crown Transcendent. Yet, he's unstoppable!"

Galen widened his eyes in shock, his mind reeling with disbelief.

But there was no time to ponder as Leander threw his next punch.

Bang!

In an instant, the world seemed to hold its breath. Blue light surged explosively while the crimson aura collapsed.

Galen's protective innate vitality shattered completely under Leander's tenth punch.

The Wanda Sect grandmaster emitted a muffled grunt, a jet of blood spewing from his mouth, streaking dozens of feet sideways.

Blue light radiated from Leander, his dark eyes piercing the night sky.

Below, the five great generals bore witness.

Before all five, Leander had fought against an Infernal Crown Transcendent.

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Chapter 403

Leander unleashed ten consecutive punches.

With every strike he received, Galen's blood roiled violently, his innate vitality growing increasingly chaotic.

By the tenth punch, he could no longer withstand it, and the barriers shattered completely.

With his defenses broken, the remaining force of Leander's punch slammed into him head-on.

His internal organs were damaged on the spot, blood spraying across the sky as he fell several dozen feet away.

His right hand trembled uncontrollably, already numb after exchanging ten blows with Leander.

Nonetheless, he found it hard to believe.

How could Leander possess such terrifying strength? How did he defeat an Infernal Crown Transcendent?

Everyone knew that within the Transcendent Realm, no one could compare to them. After all, they were untouchable and impossible to beat.

But Leander, who wasn't even an Infernal Crown, managed to suppress his attacks and even injured him. Read complete version only at [find~novel~net](#)

Such a feat was something even the Dragon Emperor, who once swept across all of Asyara's Transcendents, had never achieved.

Galen simply couldn't fathom what kind of monster Leander was.

What he did not know was that after Leander's battle with Douglas at Stormcairn River, he'd absorbed the latter's cultivation and broke through to the Transcendent Realm.

And what rose wasn't just his cultivation.

His physical strength, speed, and every bodily function had soared.

Previously, if Leander wanted to fight an Infernal Crown Transcendent, he might have needed to fully unleash his Devourer Form.

But now, he could still overpower one of them without using his entire form, relying solely on his physical body.

Leander did not pursue after injuring Galen. Instead, he withdrew his fist and clasped his hands behind his back.

"Mr. Pierce, I don't think this fight needs to continue."

He shook his head lightly. "As you already know, you won't be able to defeat me."

If it were anyone else, Leander would have crushed them without hesitation.

He never showed mercy to his enemies, but he couldn't just kill Galen.

Galen's gaze flickered, but he didn't deny it.

He had met each of Leander's ten punches with full strength, yet his barriers had been shattered, and he had been grievously injured.

His organs were damaged, his combat power drastically reduced.

How could he possibly contend with Leander now, whose momentum seemed unstoppable?

The force around Leander dissipated completely, as though he had merged into the night.

Only his calm voice echoed through the air.

"Mr. Pierce, you have shown me great kindness. Without you, Jeff Ashcroft might not even exist today. As for Homer's death, it doesn't matter anymore. It was simply the law of the martial world, where the weak are prey to the strong. You know this well."

He continued, "In your current state, revenge is impossible. I have no intention of killing you, so why not end it here? If you still wish to seek vengeance another day, I'll be ready for it."

Leander prepared to descend.

But suddenly, Galen shouted sharply, "Stop right there, Jeff!"

A cold light erupted in his eyes, his aura surging again. He had no intention of giving up.

"I might not be able to defeat you, but I must avenge Homer's death!"

He seemed very determined. "Even if it costs me my life, I will drag you down with me!"

As his voice fell, the Wanda Sect's Golden Sword inside the banquet hall suddenly shot into the air, flying straight into his hand.

innate vitality surged from his palm into the blade, flooding it with radiant golden light.

The surrounding air filled with razor-sharp sword intent, and a few birds that happened to fly past were instantly sliced into drifting blood mist.

Leander narrowed his eyes, for something felt terribly wrong.

He had seen this opening stance before.

On the peak of Hawksridge Summit during his battle with Tsaric Dubois-Briggs, the final desperate sword strike Tsaric had unleashed looked exactly like this.

"Is Galen about to turn himself into a sword, delivering the final, killing blow?"

Gareth and the others' faces all changed.

Though their cultivation wasn't on par with Galen or Leander, they were seasoned martial practitioners and immediately understood Galen's intent.

They never imagined Galen would go this far—recklessly risking his life, even to the point of shattering his body, just to drag Leander down with him.

"Gosh..." Leander tilted his head and sighed lightly.

"For revenge, for the honor of the Wanda Sect... Is it really worth it?"

Galen ignored him. His innate vitality surged violently, enveloping his golden sword in a scorching heat that turned it blood-red.

His entire body trembled under the high-temperature energy, and the edges of his flesh seemed to ripple, almost on the verge of breaking down.

"Jeff, this battle is not about grudges. It is about the honor and prestige of the Wanda Sect! As the sects grandmaster will never allow tyself to be defeated by some junior!"

"Receive my sword!" he roared.

His voice was harsh and resolute, and he prepared to literally become the sword itself.

Leander snorted coldly, his expression turning grim.

He braced himself, charging forward to stop Galen.

But at that moment, he abruptly paused, slanting his gaze toward the horizon to one side.

"Mercy!"

A solemn proclamation echoed from the distant horizon.

Then, a golden light streaked across, striking Galen.

It slammed his golden sword from his hand, scattering the innate vitality he had accumulated around his body stopping him from completing his final self-sacrificing strike.

Everyone below was stunned, unable to grasp what had happened.

Only Leander could clearly see the string of prayer beads inscribed with ancient writings.

It was these beads that completely thwarted Galen's self-destructive final move.

"What?"

Galen had intended to die alongside Leander, yet someone had interrupted him mid-action.

He looked up and saw a tall, slender figure in robes standing on the horizon to the side.

The golden light recoiled and settled into the newcomer's hands.

With a gentle sweep of his sleeves, the beads rotated slowly.

His face radiated serene benevolence—an elderly cleric, completely bald, exuding the aura of a living divine being.

He stood atop a glowing wheel, hovering in the sky.

Points of sacred light adorned him, amplifying his solemn authority.

Below, Gareth and the others gaped in shock, staring blankly at the scene.

None of them recognized the cleric, and they had no idea who he was.

Yet the five top-ranking generals, including Darrow, seemed to regard the cleric with knowing consideration.

Leander fixed his gaze on the elderly cleric, his fists trembling slightly.

It was an instinctive reaction his body produced in the presence of a formidable opponent.

Just a moment ago, the cleric had, seemingly from nothing, launched a single string of prayer beads that stopped Galen's self-sacrificial sword strike.

Leander knew that even if he had intervened personally, he could at best have shattered Galen's innate

vitality around his body, yet he would never have been able to stop him as effortlessly as this cleric had.

This cleric was undoubtedly a supreme expert, with cultivation far surpassing Galen's.

His powers might even exceed that of an Infernal Crown Transcendent.

"Is it really you, Master?"

Galen recognized the cleric instantly. It was clear they were long-time acquaintances.

"Mercy!" The cleric intoned, then turned his gaze to Galen.

"Mr. Pierce, why would you treat yourself so harshly? A fleeting success or failure is but smoke in the wind. Why destroy your own life?

"I was a close friend of your late master. Had you taken your life before me today, how could I ever answer him if I were to ascend to immortality?"

Galen's eyes widened in realization.

He recalled how he had impulsively tried to shatter his own body into a sword, and a cold sweat ran down his spine.

Reflecting on the teachings of his predecessor, Master Cohen, he felt a deep pang of regret and shame.

The cleric's words had shaken Galen awake.

Then, with a single step, he shifted his position, turning his attention to Leander. "Young and already renowned, unmatched across the heavens and earth... You're truly

deserving of the title of the Iron Sovereign bestowed by the Divine Loom!" He continued, "Pleasure to meet you, Sovereign Ashcroft. I am a humble cleric who goes by the name of Master Branson. It seems fate has finally brought us together." Only then did Gareth and the others below realize who the cleric was, and their faces drained of color in shock.

"Master Branson? Isn't he the current head of the Ancient Lingster Sanctum?"

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Chapter 404

"Master Branson?" Gareth's eyes trembled slightly, his voice heavy with awe.

In the ancient martial world of Astria, Silvermoon Sect, the Ancient Lingster, and Wanda Sect were recognized as the three sacred grounds of martial cultivation.

Over thousands of years, the prestige of the Silvermoon Sect and Wanda Sect had gradually waned, but the reputation of Ancient Lingster never declined.

Even when the legendary Laughing Monk of West Ridge single-handedly assaulted Ancient Lingster and killed the abbot, he could not diminish the sect's renown by even a fraction.

All of this was due to the countless masters and abundant talent within Ancient Lingster, making it a true powerhouse in Astria's martial world.

It was a foundation as solid as the mountains themselves.

David was the current abbot of the Ancient Lingster Sanctum, the presiding instructor and transmitter of the sect's teachings.

He was over a hundred years old. Six decades ago, he had traversed the entire Astrian martial world, defeating many foreign adversaries.

He was a supreme master of the Ancient Lingster path, highly respected and celebrated across the martial world.

Particularly, he had been a contemporary of the Dragon Emperor of Astria, representing the pinnacle of supreme martial strength.

Yet, after the great battles between East and West, in which the East prevailed, David had retreated into seclusion within the Ancient Lingster, disappearing for decades.

Gareth could never have imagined that such an unparalleled master would suddenly appear here, and seemingly for Leander.

"Master Branson?"

Hearing this somewhat unfamiliar name, Leander lifted his gaze. "You're from the Ancient Lingster?"

Although he had never faced an Ancient Lingster directly, over the years of traveling and fighting across the land, he had encountered a few.

Their internal cultivation methods bore remarkable similarity to those of David, though none could compare in mastery.

This man's cultivation had reached a level of purity and refinement beyond measure, and a unique force radiated from his entire being.

He seemed like a benevolent divine being who could at any moment transform into a wrathful deity.

"Mercy. Sovereign Ashcroft, your vision is most discerning!"

David nodded slightly at Leander, then turned to point at Galen behind him.

"This is Galen, sect master from Wanda. His late master and I go back a long way. I do not know what grievances exist between you and him, Sovereign Ashcroft, but allow me to request a favor. I ask that you exercise restraint and let this matter end here."

He smiled gently, his gaze fixed on Leander.

Leander gave a faint smile, neither confirming nor denying.

He had never intended to kill Galen. Rather, it was the man who had pressed the issue repeatedly.

"Master Branson!"

Galen regained his composure, a dark shadow flickering in his eyes.

"Jeff killed my junior, tarnished the Wanda Sect's reputation, and this I must settle! I ask that you do not interfere!"

Though fury surged in his chest, he did not dare act rashly.

Even as the sect master of Wanda, David was a contemporary of his late master, Atticus Cohen, and his cultivation had long surpassed an Infernal Crown Transcendent.

What level he had reached now was beyond reckoning.

"Mr. Pierce," David said, his tone calm but firm, "if you wish to seek vengeance, I will not stop you. But allow me to be frank-you cannot harm him.

"Even your attempt of becoming one with your sword to seek mutual destruction would've been impossible! He has not yet unleashed his full strength, do you understand? If he did, you'd be dead by now!"

David turned slowly, his expression stern, and Galen felt his body tremble.

"What?"

Galen's mind raced. He had intended to sacrifice himself with his sword, wielding the power of an Infernal Crown Transcendent.

He was confident he could die alongside Leander, but now, this unparalleled Ancient Lingster expert was saying he couldn't do so.

Though his heart seethed with unwillingness, he had no choice but to remain silent. David's cultivation, perception, and insight far exceeded his own.

If even he could not harm Leander, then Leander's strength was far more profound than anyone could imagine.

Leander, meanwhile, regarded David with mild amusement as he smirked.

Indeed, he had not used his full power against Galen, yet the latter hadn't realized it.

Meanwhile, David had discerned it in a single glance, sensing Leander's true combat potential. This level of insight alone was astonishing.

In Leander's perception, a dangerously potent aura radiated from David, one that even posed a slight threat.

The master's cultivation had clearly reached an unimaginable pinnacle. THIS CHAPTER IS
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He grinned, finding it all rather intriguing. "The land of Astria truly harbors hidden dragons and crouching tigers. I have never before encountered someone like you!"

David no longer regarded Galen and turned to Leander, smiling slightly. "Sovereign Ashcroft, a talent like yours is rare even in my lifetime. Had you been born in our era, you would surely have stood unmatched among the world's elites!"

He stepped forward, the light of his wheel shining beneath his feet. "To be frank, I came specifically to seek you out, Sovereign Ashcroft."

"Oh?" Leander looked up slightly.

David joined his hands and smiled. "In recent years, you have risen to unprecedented heights, your name reverberating across the world. At less than twenty, you have already reached the fifth spot on the International Combat Units. Su achievements have piqued my

curiosity!"

He continued, "Though I have secluded myself for decades, I could not resist seeing you for myself, to determine if the rumors of your invincibility are true.

"By my count, it has been 18,245 days since I last engaged in combat. Today, I wish to exchange a few moves with you. What do you say, Sovereign Ashcroft?"

At these words, Gareth and the others froze in shock.

Even Galen hung in the sky, stunned.

Was David, a living legend of the martial world, proposing to spar with Leander?

Daphne's eyes widened in alarm.

She had thought Leander's victory over Galen sufficient, but now, this unparalleled master of the age was about to challenge him!

Leander clasped one hand behind his back and smiled.

"You are in high spirits! I've long wished to witness the supreme techniques of the sect that's been dominating Astria's martial world!" Leander said, his voice calm but edged with excitement.

"Let's do it," he added, extending a single palm toward David in a polite, inviting gesture.

"Very well. You're truly worthy of being the Iron Sovereign!"

David's eyes flared with brilliant energy, and the light wheel beneath his feet spun with precision.

He extended his hand, curling his

fingers into a precise formation the index and middle fingers together, the ring and pinky fingers together, forming a three-claw dragon shape.

"A Dragonclaw?" Leander narrowed his eyes.

With a single sweep, David unleashed the technique.

Whoosh!

Three slashing imprints tore through the void.

A roar like a dragon's echoed across the heavens, shaking the surroundings violently.

A colossal dragon-shaped claw surged toward Leander, and in a heartbeat, it sealed off the entire space around him.

One claw engulfed nearly a thousand feet wide. It was an ironclad seal of power!

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Chapter 405

Galen stared after them, his mind reeling. His entire face contorted in disbelief.

The power contained within that single claw made the Tai Chi Diagram he had used to ensnare Leander seem feeble by comparison.

It wasn't just a little stronger; it was on a completely different level, magnified tenfold.

Confronted with such an attack himself, he knew with chilling certainty what would happen. He would be cleaved in two without a moment's hesitation, his body carved into pieces.

"Impressive!"

A ferocious wind screamed around Leander as the Dragonclaw descended, cutting off every possible escape route.

Instead of fear, a spark of fierce excitement ignited in his gaze. With a sharp tug of one hand, he leveled his other palm and thrust it forward.

"Flamebreaker!"

A thunderous whoosh filled the air as a conflagration erupted from the golden dragon-claw imprint.

A colossal hand, wreathed in crimson fire, surged through the sky to meet the attack head-on.

The two colossal forces wrestled in mid-air, grinding against one another for what felt like an eternity.

Finally, the great golden claw began to falter.

It fractured, then shattered into nothingness, leaving only the brilliant, roaring flames victorious.

Leander stood astride the tide of fire like a war god clad in blazing armor.

The onlookers could only stare, their minds utterly blank.

Even Master Branson's usual composure broke, his face a mask of open astonishment that slowly melted into a deep, contemplative look.

"A true Iron Sovereign, indeed."

He brought his palms together in a calm motion, allowing his power to dissipate. He made no move to continue the fight.

Seeing this, Leander gave a casual curl of his fingers. The sea of fire snuffed out in an instant, and he regarded the master from across the space.

Master Branson studied him for a long moment, then offered a frank, respectful smile. "Sovereign Ashcroft, I am here at the behest of an old companion. He asked me to deliver a message to you.

"However, before today, I was not convinced you had reached our... level. I believed his judgment was misplaced.

"Now, I see I was profoundly mistaken."

Leander seemed largely indifferent, a faint, cool smile touching his lips. "An old friend sent you with a message for me? Who would that be?"

Master Branson's gaze grew sharp and intent. His smile vanished, replaced by a grave and solemn tone.

"The one who sent me," Master Branson continued, "is someone you have never met. But I am certain you know of him."

"Throughout the martial world of Astria, he is known as... the Dragon Emperor." The moment that name left his lips, the air itself seemed to freeze.

Gareth, Darrow, Leif, and even the Grandmaster of Mount Martial, Galen-every face solidified in shock.

The title landed with the weight of a fallen monument, evoking the standard of an entire era.

A profound, heavy silence swallowed the great hall.

Leander slid a hand casually into his pocket, his gaze thoughtful for a fleeting moment.

"The Dragon Emperor? Astria's Dragon Emperor?"

He was not personally acquainted with the man, but the stories were impossible to avoid.

Even during his years traversing the world's most dangerous frontiers, tales of this legendary figure had always found him.

It was said his rise to prominence began in the final, waning years of the old monarchy.

The number of powerful masters he had defeated was beyond counting.

His martial prowess was the stuff of myth, capable of shaking the heavens and splitting the earth.

He had witnessed history unfold-the collapse of the old dynasty, the birth of the republic, liberation, and reform.

Through it all, his position at the absolute pinnacle of Astria's martial arts world had never wavered.

The depths of his strength were unknowable.

He was like a true dragon; you might catch a glimpse of its head, but its tail remained forever hidden from sight.

"So the Dragon Emperor dispatched Master Branson himself. For them to seek out General Ashcroft... this matter must be of grave importance."

The five high generals exchanged uneasy glances, the shock plain on their features. Nearby, Logan was still reeling from the display of Leander's earth-shattering power. Hearing the title "Dragon Emperor" now, he couldn't suppress his curiosity.

He turned to Leif and asked in a hushed tone, "General, who exactly is this Dragon Emperor?"

Leif gave him a cool, appraising look, but answered nonetheless. "To be perfectly frank, an individual of your current standing has no right to know of his existence. However, in light of your past service, I will make an exception."

He then continued, "The Dragon Emperor is the former recipient of the Guardian Medal. His career began in the final years of the royal family where he served as the inner court chief. When foreign powers invaded our shores, he single-handedly defeated mine Westeria Transcendents. During the war of resistance, he beheaded six supreme swordsmen from Jesund.

"In the early days following liberation, remnants of the rebellion conspired with the War God

Sanctum. They gathered thirteen Weštēna Infernal Crown

Transcendents to sow chaos across our land. He tracked every last one of them down and eliminated them.

"For his unparalleled contributions to the nation, the king himself bestowed upon him the title of National Hero."

Logan trembled uncontrollably, the information hitting him with such force that he nearly turned to stone on the spot.

A former recipient of the Guardian Medal—that distinction alone elevated the Dragon Emperor far beyond the reach of a family like the Riverstones.

But to be personally honored as a national hero by the king?

This was a titan whose very name had once made global leaders and monarchs step back in caution. What kind of unimaginable being was the Dragon Emperor?

High above, Leander simply rolled his shoulders, his reaction a world apart from the stunned silence below. The legendary name had not shaken him.

He regarded Master Branson with a calm, level gaze. "The Dragon Emperor and I are strangers. We have no connection. What is this message he tasked you to deliver?"

The luminous glow beneath Master Branson's feet dimmed, and he seemed once more like an unassuming monk. A gentle smile touched his lips as he spoke.

"For decades, I have lived in seclusion at the Ancient Lingster Sanctum. Three days ago, the Dragon Emperor came to me unexpectedly. He told me that Astria had given birth to a new hero, one with the power to shake the world.

"He asked me to come to Highcliffe, to find you, and to relay this. He said the future of Astria's martial world will be carried on your shoulders. You are the one who will guard our nation's martial path."

A faint light shimmered in Leander's eyes, but then he shook his head in quiet refusal.

"Master, hearing that changes nothing for me. I walk this martial path for my own reasons.

"I am not a savior, and I have no interest in playing the part. I am not like the Dragon Emperor, fighting for the nation and populace. Please relay this back to him: for a duty of this nature, he should find another."

Most men would feel their blood ignite with pride at such words, would eagerly shoulder the honor and shame of an entire nation's martial legacy. Leander felt nothing but apathy.

He had never aspired to be a hero. Every step he had taken was for himself—to gain the strength necessary to protect the few he cared for—not to rescue the world. Even when the Celestial Mirror warned of a future calamity facing the Earth, his only thought was to strengthen his own cultivation and ensure the safety of his own. Read full story at

He had no intention of single-handedly holding up the sky or delivering all of humanity.

Master Branson did not seem surprised by this rejection.

He chanted softly, his voice even and composed. "I have delivered the Dragon Emperor's words. How you choose to proceed is not for me influence. However, the Dragon Emperor did say that in terms of raw, innate talent, three of you could not equal one Jeff Ashcroft.

"Where great power exists, great responsibility often follows. It is possible the Dragon Emperor will soon come to Highcliffe to meet you in person. When that day arrives, I suspect you may reconsider your position."

With those final words, he brought his hands together in a formal salute to Leander.

Light flared once more beneath his feet, and in the blink of an eye, he was a distant speck on the horizon, then vanished completely.

Galen, his eyes narrowed to slits, shot a long, measuring look at Leander.

He knew any challenge today was futile. Transforming into a streak of light, he fled into the distance.

Leander stared in the direction the two had disappeared, his expression thoughtful. "The Dragon Emperor, is it?"

After a long moment, a soft chuckle escaped him. Then, he dropped from the sky like a stone, landing gracefully back in the Celestial Pavilion's banquet hall. Inside, the way everyone looked at him had fundamentally changed.

Their gazes were now a mix of raw envy, profound awe, and deep reverence.

Even Arden, who had previously looked down on him, now watched him with starry eyes, as if she wanted nothing more than to stay by his side forever.

After exchanging a few brief words with Darrow and the other generals, Leander turned. His focus settled squarely on Logan and Dorian.

"The side show is over. So now, tell me... what should I do with the Riverstone family?"

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Chapter 406

Under the weight of Leander's gaze, Logan and Dorian went pale. They stood frozen, scarcely daring to draw breath.

It was only in this moment that they understood the true, terrifying influence of a supreme Martial Practitioner.

A man like Leander, whose very presence seemed to dominate the heavens, held a stature in the eyes of Astria's leadership that their family could never hope to challenge.

They had called upon five additional generals. They had allied with two provincial governors to formally petition against him.

They had even stationed a hundred thousand troops on standby.

Yet, none of it had contained him; he had executed with a single, effortless blow.

Logan, in a final, desperate move, had personally journeyed to Mount Martial to beseech Galen as their ultimate safeguard.

But even Galen had been effortlessly maneuvered, reduced to a mere stepping stone.

Every card the Riverstone family held, every last shred of their influence, had proven utterly meaningless before this man.

Politics, commerce, military might, the martial world—Leander had dismantled the Riverstone family on every conceivable front.

Breaking the limbs of two of their younger members was a trivial matter.

If he willed it, if he decided to erase their entire lineage from existence, it was likely that not a single voice in all of Astria would dare to speak in their defense.

"G-General Ashcroft... the fault was ours."

The old general, a man who had spent a lifetime on the battlefield, finally lowered his proud head. A single, clouded tear traced a path through the grit on his cheek.

The Riverstone family was powerful, their strength rivaling that of Highcliffe's four great elite families. Yet today, before the assembled nobility of the city, they were forced to offer this humiliating apology.

"My grandsons were the ones who foolishly challenged you. They must face the consequences of their own actions. As for rallying forces against you... that was my decision, and mine alone. I beg of you, General Ashcroft. Take my life as recompense, but let the Riverstone family live."

A collective, sharp intake of breath rippled through the onlookers. Their faces tightened with stunned disbelief.

Logan's status was immense, a pillar of the establishment. Yet here he was, bowing his head to a man so much younger.

In that moment, everyone's hearts bowed once more to the sheer, intimidating power Leander commanded.

"But-"

Dorian's fists clenched until his knuckles were white, a tempest of shame and anger warring within him.

"Be silent!"

Logan's voice cracked like a whip, cutting off his son. He looked back at Leander, his expression grave, a silent plea in his eyes.

"Kill you, and let the rest of your family go?"

Leander let out a soft, humorless chuckle.

"The matter with Quincy and Skelly was finished. I had no further interest in your family. But you... you rallied a mob against me. You sought my utter ruin-to have me exiled and stripped of my rank. And now you believe you can pin all the blame on a single man and call the debt settled? Do you truly think it's that simple?"

His gaze turned icy. His voice dropped, each word sharp and frigid.

"You have three days. The entire Riverstone family will leave Highcliffe. For the next ten years, not a single one of you sets foot back in this city."

"Disobey a single word of this, and you know precisely what I am capable of." This content belongs to

With a seemingly casual flick of his wrist, he gestured to the side.

A thunderous boom shattered the silence.

The entire side wall of the hall imploded. From Leander's feet, a fissure several dozen feet deep tore through the floor, carving a ravine straight through the Celestial Pavilion and ending only at the far edge of the terrace.

A dead, hollow silence filled the hall, replaced only by pure terror on every face.

Logan and Dorian looked like men already walking to their graves.

With one sentence, Leander had just torn out the Riverstone family's century-old roots in Highcliffe.

Logan let out a long, weary breath.

He remained quiet for a long moment, then finally gave a slow, resigned nod.

In the back of his mind, a thread of hope remained. Even exiled from Highcliffe, their core power structure could survive.

With Dorian as a general and Lachlan a governor, they could still rebuild their influence elsewhere.

Just as he was clinging to this thought, Gideon's voice cut through the heavy air, cold and official.

"Logan, you instructed Lachlan to conspire with two other provincial governors and level false charges against a national Guardian. The Central Authority has launched a full inquiry. You will be held accountable for the consequences."

Logan stiffened. Before he could process this, Leif added his own verdict, his tone flat and final.

"Logan, you pressured five of

Astria's decorated war heroes to unjustly judge' General Ashcroft. Your

ir actions nearly cost the nation. one of its most brilliant

commanders. This will be addressed with the utmost severity. The official ruling will be announced shortly."

Logan's mind went utterly blank. He knew, with a final, crushing certainty, that this was the end.

Both the government and the military had now formally intervened, and they stood squarely behind Leander.

With such colossal institutions backing him, the Riverstone family's fate was sealed.

It didn't matter that they had a general and a governor among their ranks; they were plummeting straight into ruin.

A wave of bitter regret washed over him.

His fury toward his two foolish

grandsons burned even hotter. If not for their blindness, how would their family ever have provoked this living incarnation of death from the Astria martial world? How could they have fatten so far, so fast?

Logan, a veteran of a lifetime of battles, seemed to age a decade in a single moment, his spirit utterly broken. No one in the opulent hall felt a shred of sympathy

for him.

The moment they had chosen to make a move against Leander, their fates were locked in a duel with only one possible outcome. It was simply their misfortune that the man left standing was Leander, and not the Riverstone family.

Ethan, standing among Leander's supporters, stared in a daze, the words a soft murmur on his lips. "Number one on the Astria Power Index Fifth on the International Combat Roster. Chairman of Jeff Enterprises Chief of the Wyvern Blade. The Wyvern Blade General. A Guardian Medal recipient."

He shook his head slowly, a profound sigh escaping him.

Any single one of those titles was the culmination of a lifetime's striving for an ordinary person.

Yet Leander wore them all, a cascade of honors and power.

Whether in politics, commerce, the military, or the martial arts, he occupied the summit.

His strength was undeniable, but his web of connections and influence now dwarfed even the Ashcroft family's, his wealth rivaling that of nations.

A low, self-deprecating laugh escaped Ethan a mix of bitterness and a strange, fierce pride.

To have such a man as a brother gave him a lifetime goal to pursue.

But with such a brother... When would he ever catch up? Could he even hope to reach the edges of the shadow Leander cast?

Nearby, Mira's gaze drifted to the suitor a classmate had introduced an heir from a second-tier Highcliffe family, a match she had considered acceptable.

But measured against Leander now? The young man seemed insufferably dull, a flickering firefly trying to compete with the brilliant, unapproachable moon.

They weren't even in the same league.

Ginny's lips parted in quiet astonishment. She knew Leander was formidable, a force of nature, but she had never grasped the true scale of his power. To see seven generals and three governors humbled by one man.....

She shook off her stupor and turned to Arden, a teasing glint in her eye. "Well, Arden? Still doubting if he's truly peerless?"

Arden's heart hammered against her ribs. She swallowed hard, utterly speechless.

If he wasn't peerless, then who in this world could possibly be? Meanwhile, Daphne stood a short distance from Leander, her eyes shining with a soft light. Her mind drifted back through the years, to a dusty childhood memory.

Back then, Leander was only eight.

He'd stood atop a small dirt mound, his small face tilted defiantly toward the sky, and shouted with all the conviction his youthful voice could muster:

"Dani, just you wait and see! One day, I'm going to stand above the whole world!"

Her eyes settled on him now, standing amid the wreckage of his enemies'

ambitions. An irrepressible, playful smile curved her lips.

"Leander... is this what you meant by standing above the world?"

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Chapter 407

The banquet hosted by the Riverstone family ended with Leander crushing them completely.

Three days later, the Riverstone family disappeared from Highcliffe entirely. Their once-famous, bustling villa was now an abandoned husk-silent halls, no one left.

"My God, who exactly is Jeff Ashcroft? Even a powerhouse like the Riverstone family got wiped out in one blow?"

In a Highcliffe teahouse, several top-tier figures who hadn't attended the banquet gathered, each wearing the same unnerved expression.

"Come on. Jeff is the chairman of Jeff Enterprises, and he's also a Wyvern Blade General. Even Mr. Frostwell—one of the scions' own secretaries-personally came to pin the Guardian Medal on him. The Riverstone family walked right into the fire. They brought this on themselves."

A middle-aged man holding a small jade statue nodded, shock flickering in his eyes. "There's more. He kicked the Riverstone family out of Highcliffe with a single sentence. Reliable sources say the military issued orders from above-Dorian Riverstone, one of their second-generation general, was dismissed. Lachlan Riverstone, their provincial governor, has been taken in by the Central Authority for investigation."

"The Riverstone family's two main pillars are gone for good."

Silence fell. A chill settled over the room.

A giant like the Riverstone family had been crushed in an instant. Their foundation was wiped out, revealing just how terrifying Jeff truly was.

After the banquet, Highcliffe lost an old noble clan but gained a name that now made every elite family shudder-Jeff Ashcroft.

Meanwhile, the man at the center of all this was lounging in the farthest corner of Highcliffe University's library, legs crossed, reading a book.

It wasn't a novel. It was a collection of strange sights and events from around the world.

Most people saw those stories as mysteries, full of superstition. For him, they were prime material for strengthening his spiritual strength.

He skimmed through odd incidents recorded across Astria until his gaze stopped on a report from the Warring Era.

"A dragon falling at Whitville?" His eyes narrowed.

The report claimed that over eighty years ago, near the river mouth at Whitville in Stillburn, several fishermen had seen a dragon drop from the sky and die right in front of them.

The weather had been scorching, and the corpse decayed fast. Only a skeleton remained after a few days.

Experts investigated back then and concluded the bones belonged to a whale. Others insisted it was an ancient elephant. Everyone pushed a safe explanation.

Leander closed the book, a faint smile touching his lips.

"So Deepcoil Dragons really exist."

Most people would shrug off the report as a quirky old story. He knew better. That thing wasn't a whale or some ancient elephant. It was an actual Deepcoil Dragon.

Deepcoil Dragons resembled true dragons and carried ancient dragon blood, yet weren't full dragons. They could only glide low to the ground. They couldn't ride clouds or breathe fire and water like real dragons. They appeared only rarely across Astria's long history-maybe once in a century.

If a Deepcoil Dragon died at Whitville, it means more could still be there. Deepcoil Dragons were magical beasts with true dragon blood. Old texts recorded that their bodies contained a core—and that core was one of the best catalysts for strengthening spiritual strength.

"If I get a Deepcoil Dragon Core and refine it, my spiritual strength will soar. Even if I can't reach Spirit Breakthrough immediately, I'll at least hit peak Spirit Convergence."

His eyes burned with determination.

David's appearance had shown him that the strong people he'd met so far were only the beginning. His Dragonclaw had clearly not been used at full strength. If he had gone all out, Leander would have had only one option—the Devourer Form at its peak.

There were more threats-the

Dragon Emperor, who once stood at

the top of Astria's Chapters first released on

world, the

Arbitration Office, which nearly killed.

even him, and the Celestial Mirror's

warning of an upcoming doomsday. The pressure was real.

Standing still wasn't an option. Leander needed more power to protect the people around him.

"Looks like it's time to visit Whitville."

He stood and returned the book to the shelf. His phone buzzed just then.

A reminder popped up, and his pupils tightened.

"December eighth... Tomorrow is Ms. Shire's memorial."

Two years ago, when he returned to the Mornwick-Cloudveil Edge, he learned Hazel had died from illness. Last year, on December ninth, he was deep in seclusion, training the Devourer Form, and missed the memorial.

He had regarded her as his second mother, and she had treated him like her own son. Not making it back in time to save her was the regret of his life. He wasn't going to miss it again.

He dialed Daphne.

"Dani, come with me to the Mornwick-Cloudveil Edge. I'm taking you to visit someone important."

...

At the airport near the Mornwick border, Leander and Daphne stepped off the plane. Daphne held his arm and looked up at him, curious. "Ander, who are we meeting? You have family here?"

Leander paused, his expression shifting.

"She's the person I respected most in this life besides my mom. When I lost my martial power and nearly died, she saved me, fed me, and treated me like her own child's

fell sick two years ago and passed. We're here to pay our respects.

Today is her memorial."

Daphne had been with him again for over two months, yet she had never seen him

look like this. She squeezed his hand gently, offering silent comfort.

He steadied himself and gave her a small smile. They headed toward the exit— when a figure suddenly crossed their path.

A tall man in a blood-red trench coat, his shoulders broader than most. He had a striking, sharp-featured face and deep blue eyes with flecks of red stirring within.

As he passed, he tilted his head slightly toward Leander, a strange smile touching his lips.

Daphne's heart thudded wildly. Meeting his gaze felt like getting pulled into a black hole.

Leander lifted his eyes. That odd sensation he'd felt a week earlier surged again. "A spiritual master?"

His heart tightened. One glance was enough—the youth was a peak-level powerhouse, stronger than even Galen. He was also the only spiritual master he had met who possessed such frightening strength.

His age made it even more shocking. He looked twenty-six or twenty-seven, yet his power surpassed the top transcendent masters.

Why would someone like him show up at a remote Mornwick border airport?

The blond youth stepped into the sunlight, his hair glowing gold. His smile deepened.

"Jeff?"

He flashed a row of snow-white teeth.

"First time meeting. Let me introduce myself. I'm Fergus Lynch. You can also call me Son of Judgment."

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Chapter 408

"Fergus Lynch, Son of Judgment?"

A faint glimmer flashed through Daphne's eyes. The stranger who appeared out of nowhere carried an almost overwhelming confidence. His gaze fixed on Leander-steady, cool, and superior, like he was looking down from a throne.

She couldn't sense the terrifying surge within him as clearly as Leander could, yet she understood he was far stronger than she had imagined.

"Son of Judgment? Never heard of it." Leander lifted his eyes, calm and unreadable. "You came here for me?"

A smirk played at Fergus' lips.

"Yeah. I came specifically for you. Since becoming a Son of Judgment, you're the first person important enough to make me show up myself."

"Jeff, I'm here today for two things-to see you, and to deliver your death notice."

"Oh?" Leander's eyes narrowed slightly.

Fergus gave a short, cold laugh and pointed at him.

"I've spent the past week in Astria asking about you. Your story's pretty legendary. A waste you chose to stand against us."

A bloodthirsty chill flickered in his eyes as he stepped aside.

"The more legendary you are, the more I want to hunt you. You have five days. Enjoy whatever time you have left."

He vanished through the airport exit in an instant.

"Ander, who is he?" Daphne asked with a worried frown.

Leander remained steady. "He's from the Arbitration Office."

Fergus hadn't revealed his strength outright, yet even at first glance, Leander sensed a shockingly pure Doomlight within him-denser and more concentrated than any Arbitrator he had encountered. They were several feet apart, yet the sinister force inside Fergus rolled outward like crashing tides.

"The Arbitration Office?" Daphne's heart tightened after hearing the name of the ancient organization that had dominated the world stage for centuries.

The last time, at the Southern Shore, the Arbitration Office had sent five Elite Arbitrators, and barely two weeks had passed before another powerful figure appeared.

"Don't worry about him."

Leander wrapped an arm around her and turned. His voice stayed firm.

"We're going to pay our respects to Ms. Hollis."

A so-called Son of Judgment wasn't worth concern. Throughout his life, countless people had tried to kill him. None had succeeded. With his current strength, unless one of The 16 Supreme Arbiters appeared personally, the rest were beneath notice.

They left the airport and took a country bus to a small mountain village near the Mornwick-Cloudveil Edge.

The village was called Greenstem. The bamboo there grew tall and straight, full of vitality. Every home was built from giant bamboo tubes, warm in winter and cool in summer. No matter how much the villagers cut, the bamboo shot up wildly after every rainy night.

At the village entrance, Leander paused, staring at the mountain path lined with towering bamboo. His expression turned distant.

He pointed toward a lush grove. "Dani, that's where I ended up after dragging myself out of Highcliffe. I was wounded and barely conscious when I collapsed there. Ms. Shire found me and saved me."

Daphne nodded softly. Thinking of a ten-year-old child bleeding alone in the bamboo made her chest ache.

Leander held her hand as they walked into the village. Many of the villagers turned to look at the unfamiliar pair.

Their clothes were plain to stay low-profile, yet even simple clothing couldn't hide their looks—he tall and handsome, she graceful and striking. They stood out so much that villagers quietly wondered whose relatives had come to visit.

Leander hadn't lived in the village long, so most faces were unfamiliar. He still offered each of them a polite smile.

He and Daphne walked through the village toward the

hilltop behind it, where Hazel's grave rested.

"Someone's here already?"

Reaching the hilltop, Leander stopped.

slope

Hazel's grave used to be a simple mound marked by a headstone. It had now been rebuilt with a neat concrete border and carefully maintained grounds.

Three people stood beside it—a middle-aged couple and a young woman in her early twenties, gentle and graceful. They were cleaning the gravesite and placing offerings.

The young woman happened to glance up and noticed Leander and Daphne nearby. "You are..."

The couple turned as well, startled.

Leander looked at the young woman and smiled. "Stella, it's me-Leander."

"Leander?" She searched her memory, the name faint and distant.

The couple behind her reacted immediately.

"Leander? It's you? You're finally back?"

The woman hurried over, disbelief on her face.

"Mdm. Murphy, it's me. I'm here to pay respects to Ms. Shire."

He bowed politely.

Her name was Gemma Murphy, third in her family. When Clement cast Hazel out, she came to Greenstem alone while pregnant. Gemma cared for her the most.

After Hazel rescued Leander and took him in, Gemma brought food and clothes often. He had never forgotten her kindness.

The clean, well-kept gravesite made it obvious her family tended it regularly, which moved him deeply.

The man beside her was her husband, Francis Wilson. The young woman was their eldest daughter, Stella Wilson, whom Leander had often played with years ago.

"It really is Leander!"

Gemma lightly smacked his shoulder.

"You came back the year before last, then disappeared for more than a year. Now

you finally show up—and bring such a beautiful girl with you!"

Her expression softened, tears gathering.

"It's a shame Ms. Shire can't see it."

Leander exhaled and nodded to Daphne. They bowed and offered incense at Hazel's grave.

"Ms. Shire, I came back to see you. Madeline is doing great. She's a star now, working hard toward her dreams. The daughter you raised is a household name."

Leander pulled Daphne closer. "Ms. Shire, this is Dani, my future wife. I brought her here today so you could 'meet' her."

He bowed deeply, his forehead striking the concrete with a heavy thud.

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Chapter 409

Gemma stood nearby with her husband and daughter, observing Leander and Daphne, and suppressed a sigh. "When Hazel was still alive, she treated Leander like her own son. Her words clearly showed that she genuinely hoped Madeline and Leander would end up together. But life changes so quickly. Now he has brought home an incredibly beautiful girl—honestly, even more attractive than Madeline. It seems Hazel's wish will never be fulfilled."

Francis shot her a disapproving look. "You're too old to be spouting nonsense like that. Hazel cared for Leander as if he were her own child, and Madeline is her biological daughter. That makes Leander and Madeline like siblings. Since when do siblings end up together?"

Gemma, being a straightforward village woman, didn't care about such distinctions. She retorted immediately, "So what? They're not connected by blood, so how are they siblings? If they were to marry and have children, what would be wrong with that?"

He was left speechless, not knowing how to refute her.

Meanwhile, Stella's gaze shifted as she looked back and forth between Leander and Daphne, a peculiar feeling stirring within her.

In those days, she, Leander, Madeline, and her little sister used to explore Greenstem together. The four shared a deep bond.

Being the oldest, two years senior to Leander, she had always kept a watchful eye on him. His quiet depth and an occasional air of weariness had captivated her without her even realizing it.

She once dreamt of a future where he would marry her in a traditional ceremony, dressed in vibrant red wedding attire.

Yet, eight years had flown by in the blink of an eye. Everything had transformed. He now had his partner, and she, too, was on the verge of starting her own family. This brought with it a gentle sense of regret.

Though he had been absent for eight years, she had still thought of him from time to time. Now, seeing him again as a tall, attractive young man caused her long-buried feelings to resurface even more.

However, remembering that Stella was already engaged and had her engagement ceremony tomorrow forced her to look away and steady her emotions.

"Mdm. Murphy, Mr. Wilson!" Leander shouted.

After he and Daphne paid their respects at Hazel's grave, they turned towards Gemma.

"When I returned two years ago, Ms. Shire's grave didn't appear like this. It looks completely redone now. Did you all fund the renovations?" he inquired.

Gemma and Francis quickly shook their heads and explained, "We just come by to clean whenever we can. We didn't pay for this. A few months back, a group of influential people came and had it restored. They claimed to be from Hazel's family."

"Oh?" Leander touched his nose, and it dawned on him: the Barret family must have arranged for the grave to be rebuilt.

He chatted a bit more with Gemma before preparing to leave with Daphne to get ready for their trip to Harrowside, when she suddenly stepped in his way.

"Leander, the last time you visited, you hurried off so quickly that you didn't even stop by my house for a proper meal. This time, you can't leave without stopping by!" she declared.

"Tomorrow is Stella's engagement ceremony. Relatives and friends from our village and nearby are all coming to our house. You must stay for the celebration and share in the joy!" she continued.

He hesitated for a moment. "Stella's engagement ceremony?" Chapters first released on

He turned to Stella, who gave him a shy smile and nodded slightly.

"So it's Stella's engagement. I really need to congratulate you!" he exclaimed.

His smile was genuine, and his well-wishes carried sincerity.

"Leander, thank you." Stella appeared somewhat uneasy, but she still responded positively.

He then introduced Daphne to her. "Dani, this is Stella Wilson. You can call her Stella. When I lived here, she was like the big sister of our group, always looking out for me. Since it's her engagement ceremony, we definitely can't miss it."

Daphne smiled warmly and sweetly addressed, "Stella!"

Stella returned the smile, though her heart felt a slight ache.

At one time, she had envisioned herself as the one beside Leander in the future. But now, that role was filled by a woman even more beautiful and graceful than she was.

Still, when she thought of her fiancé a well-known scholar, very wealthy, with ten apartments in the county and her future father-in-law ranking among the top twenty richest individuals there, she gradually came to terms with it.

She thought, No matter how much I once cared for Leander, it's nothing more than a childhood dream now. People should look to the future, not the past.

I met my current fiancé during my university years. He appreciates me for who I truly am and pursues me without pause. Talented, adaptable, worth tens of millions, and even an amateur Sanda fighter-eventually, I can't resist anymore and agree to be with him.

Stella thought, Being naturally conservative, my fiancé and I only held hands and hugged throughout college. But he consistently treats me with kindness and respect, never overstepping any boundaries. Even so, our relationship has reached the stage of engagement.

I'm confident he truly loves me.

She watched Leander and Daphne interact so harmoniously, then took a glance at his simple attire and felt increasingly reassured about her decision.

"Perhaps this is the best fate that heaven could have bestowed upon us. Even if I had ended up with Leander, it might not have been an improvement over what I have now," she whispered to herself.

After visiting Hazel's grave, Leander and Daphne proceeded directly to Gemma's house as guests.

It was no longer the small bamboo hut that he remembered. Instead, it had transformed into a four-story building, which genuinely astonished him.

Gemma noticed his reaction and

couldn't help but smile slightly as she explained, "Leander, this is all

thanks to Stella's fiancé and his net

family Mr. Wilson and I don't possess much ability. We simply got fortunate and had a daughter like Stella, who allied herself with a good family."

She hadn't intended to boast to him, but as a villager, there was a certain pride in her voice.

He understood completely and responded with a gentle smile, "That makes perfect sense. Stella is the renowned beauty of the village-naturally, she would marry into a good family."

"I really need to offer my congratulations to you and Mr. Wilson once more!" he said, congratulating them.

That single remark was enough to make Gemma and Francis beam with delight. Gemma quickly encouraged him, "You've been away for such a long time, and yet you've picked up the art of sweet-talking!"

"Come on inside. Stella will sit and converse with both of you. I'll prepare something for you to eat," she insisted.

Just as she finished her sentence and before he and the others could step through the door-suddenly, there were loud noises coming from the village entrance.

A commotion erupted, with people arguing, pushing, and hurling insults at one another.

"Those b*stards are back again!" someone shouted.

Gemma's expression changed instantly, her face darkening. Francis didn't hesitate

-he grabbed a sturdy wooden stick and charged out of the door.

Leander furrowed his brow slightly. "Mdm. Murphy, what's happening?"

Gemma's demeanor was tense, her voice dripping with anger. "Ugh, it's those thugs from Grandhawk

Properties again. They're trying to

pressure us into selling the village so they can construct some so-called 'eco resort.' Since nobody wants to sell, they keep showing up every few days to create trouble."

She gestured towards Leander as she concluded, "It's alright, Leander, don't stress about it. Mr. Wilson and many of the village men are out there. Nothing serious is going to happen; it's not the first time this has happened, anyway. And besides, they won't be causing trouble for much longer."

There was a note of pride in her voice as she patted Stella's shoulder.

"Stella's fiancé has already intervened. Tomorrow, he and his future father-in-law will be coming over from the county with some associates.

"His family is worth tens of millions, and he ranks among the top twenty wealthiest in the county. He has connections everywhere. With their involvement, this whole situation will be resolved swiftly," she explained.

"Come on, let's have dinner," she encouraged.

Leander remained mostly quiet after hearing this. He simply nodded, followed her inside, and took a seat calmly on the couch.

Stella entered behind him. She noticed how composed and still Leander was and felt even more certain about her choice.

She thought, When the village faces difficulties like this, my fiancé can resolve everything with just a word and a phone call, while Leander, when he hears about it, can only sit there quietly, unable to change anything. The contrast between them feels striking.

She suppressed the last remnants of her feelings for Leander with a soft exhale.

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Chapter 410

Gemma hurried off to the kitchen, leaving Leander and Daphne in the living room with Stella.

Leander reclined back, hands placed behind his head, grinning. "Stella, when I returned a couple of years ago, you were still studying in the city and hadn't come back home at all. If you think about it, it's been eight years since we last saw each other."

He had always regarded her as a big sister he admired. Back when he was in Greenstem Village, she had looked after him in every conceivable way.

"Yeah, that's true." A touch of nostalgia appeared in her eyes as she chuckled softly, covering her mouth. "You used to be about my height. Now, you've grown into a full-fledged adult—and you even brought your girlfriend home."

He glanced at Daphne, his voice taking on a teasing tone. "Stella, I haven't introduced you yet—this is Dani."

Then, he shifted the conversation with a playful remark. "Back then, when I was always following you around, I would see the guy from the neighboring village come by to deliver love letters to you. And now, just like that, you're about to get engaged. Aren't you going to share how you met your fiancé?"

She hesitated for a moment. The appealing young man before her slowly merged in her memory with the boy from eight years ago—the one with the deep-set eyes who would sometimes flash a cheeky grin at her.

She relaxed, letting go of her reservations and embracing the carefree spirit of years past, and began to discuss with him about everything that had transpired in the last eight years, including how she and her fiancé had met.

When he returned to Greenstem, he had decided to put everything else on hold temporarily. He was no longer the undefeated Sovereign, the chairman of Jeff Enterprises, or the legendary Wyvern Blade. At that moment, he just wanted to embrace the identity of a regular village boy.

He listened intently, occasionally interjecting with a joke, while Daphne sat quietly beside them, taking it all in.

They chatted for over half an hour. Just as Gemma entered with the dishes and placed them on the charcoal brazier, Francis came through the door.

"Francis, how did it go? Did those people leave?" she inquired as she set the plates down.

"Yeah, they've gone," he replied with a disdainful snort. "Those thugs came with a large group more than twenty of them. Alfred had a confrontation with them at the village entrance and ended up with a minor scrape on his arm. Thankfully, everyone else is fine."

Francis frowned, his voice laced with frustration. "But they were shockingly arrogant. They claimed they would return tomorrow with excavators to flatten the entire village. I'd love to see them try."

Gemma's expression darkened upon hearing that. "What? Destroy the entire village? Come on. Hudson and his parents are visiting tomorrow I'm eager to see who still dares to cause trouble in our village then."

Her tone made it clear just how much confidence she had in her future son-in-law.

"Exactly!" he turned to Stella. "Stella, you must ask Hudson to deal with these guys tomorrow. They have become far too arrogant. If we allow this to continue, we won't have any peaceful days left in the village." Follow current novels on

She nodded quietly. Those troublemakers at the village entrance seemed intimidating, but to her, handling a bunch of petty thugs would be a breeze with her fiancé's family background and connections.

Her long eyelashes fluttered as she glanced at Leander. To her surprise, he was simply sipping his water, not sharing any thoughts at all. This left her feeling a mix of disappointment... and an odd sense of relief.

She thought, The man I intend to marry might not be Leander, but at the very least, he needs to be better than him. Only then do I feel I haven't made a compromise.

"By the way!" Leander suddenly looked up. "Is Margot not home?"

During his time in Greenstem Village, Leander had three close friends: Madeline, Stella, and Margot Wilson, Stella's younger sister.

Margot was the youngest of the four. Back then, she was always by his side, idolizing him. He reflected on the passage of time; she should now be in ninth grade or perhaps a freshman in high school. Remembering her unexpectedly, he asked at last.

Gemma and Stella both slightly altered their expressions after hearing his question, while Francis's face turned completely dark, anger flashing in his eyes.

"Mdm. Murphy, did I say something inappropriate?" he asked, puzzled.

"No." Gemma sighed. "It's just that... Margot has been causing us quite a headache."

Nearby, Stella shook her head. "Ever since you abruptly left Greenstem without a word six months ago, that girl's lost her passion for life. She kept saying her idol was gone. She couldn't concentrate in class, and her grades plummeted as a result. Now that she's starting high school and we can't keep an eye on her, she's been skipping class, leaving early, and hanging out with a bad crowd at school, adopting all sorts of undesirable habits."

"Even I, as her older sister, can't communicate with her anymore," Stella declared. "I called her yesterday and insisted she come home tonight for my engagement ceremony tomorrow. She still hasn't arrived."

Leander finally understood, with her constant sighing and the looks on Gemma's and her husband's faces, that Margot was pretty much on the verge of becoming a rebellious delinquent, doing whatever she wanted.

He shook his head inwardly. He thought of the cheerful, lively little girl she used to be; he couldn't help but feel a twinge of regret.

"Oh ya!" Stella's eyes brightened

suddenly. "Leander, now that you're

back-she used to pay more

attention to you

than anyone elsen

When she returns, you should try to talk some sense into her. You might

actually reach her in a way that we

can't."

Leander let out a resigned chuckle. Back then, that oblivious little girl looked up to me—as just another goofy kid—as some sort of idol. Eight years later, why would anything I say still mean anything to her?

Before he could respond, footsteps could be heard from outside. A girl sporting numerous ear piercings, tight leather pants, and a leather jacket, her midriff fully exposed, entered the living room.

"I was planning to come back tomorrow, but you all just had to flood my phone with messages. That's so irritating!" She wore heavy smokey eye makeup that made her appear oddly mature for her youth.

She tossed her small bag onto the couch and slumped down carelessly, crossing her legs, and her pale skin was prominently displayed.

Her entire family frowned disapprovingly.

Francis jumped up and shouted. "Margot, what on earth are you wearing? As a young woman, you should understand what modesty and decency mean. Where did you even come across this style? Go change your outfit. Now!"

The girl remained unmoved. She simply raised her hands. "Dad, you're so old-fashioned. What do you even know? This is what's in style."

Her gaze shifted, and she finally noticed Leander and Daphne. She arched an eyebrow. "Well, well, we have some visitors. And who's this handsome guy? Want to exchange Instagram?"

Margot's tone was reminiscent of a jaded bar girl—light, flirtatious, and carefree—almost making Francis explode with anger.

He was about to lose his temper again when Gemma quickly grasped his arm to prevent him from reacting.

Stella hastily said, "Margot, stop it!"

"Do you even recognize who this is? Take a good look. This is Leander. When you were younger, you couldn't stop talking about how he was your idol."

That single statement caused the girl's entire body to jolt. Her expression sharpened slightly, as though she were rummaging through long-forgotten memories in search of someone she hadn't thought about in years.

Leander turned to face her, offering a gentle smile. "Margot. It's been a long time!"

Margot, standing there in her leather ensemble, appeared genuinely unsettled for the first time in years.

However, as her gaze shifted to Daphne beside him, her expression hardened, and her face turned cold. "Leander? I don't know him! Is he even worthy as my idol?"

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