

From Outcast to Overlord The Unyielding Heir (Leander Ashcroft)

Chapter 471

The affairs within the Ashcroft Family remained unknown to outsiders.

In contrast, news of Leander's feat at the Aorinth Peaks-where he singlehandedly slaughtered fifteen Chief Arbitrators-had shaken the entire underground world. His unprecedented act of occupying the entire International Combat Units by himself became the hottest topic among martial artists everywhere.

But beneath the roaring waves of discussion, a long-forgotten term quietly resurfaced, echoing throughout the international martial world: the King Phase.

The international martial world was instantly plunged into a stormy, turbulent era.

Legends of the King Phase soon began circulating wildly across the forums of the International Martial Network. Countless secrets long buried deep beneath layers of dust began to surface once more, dragged back into the light.

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Inside the president's office of Highcliffe University, Christopher leaned back in his plush leather chair.

His frown deepened as he scrolled through thread after thread discussing the King Phase.

He knew all too well that, in ages past, the ones who truly dominated the world were the King Phase masters, thinking, The King Phase era... Is it finally coming back?

Most of those figures had withdrawn into the shadows after World War I, choosing instead to manipulate global affairs from behind the scenes. But they vanished completely after World War II.

Not a single King Phase master had appeared in the world in the last eighty years, and so the legends surrounding them slowly faded from memory.

It was Leander's recent battle at the Aorinth Peaks that finally brought back memories of the term "King Phase".

"Jeff Ashcroft... So, you're the one who brought back that era..."

He sighed deeply, his gaze becoming profound and unreadable.

...

Boom!

A thunderous explosion suddenly erupted across a remote mountainous region deep within Europa, sending shockwaves throughout the entire mountain range.

High above a mountain peak, hundreds of feet above sea level, a massive handprint — as large as the hand of a colossal titan-sliced horizontally through the air. It cleaved the entire mountain cleanly in half, leaving devastation in its wake.

The impact rippled outward a thousand feet from its trajectory, crushing everything in its path. Six towering peaks exploded in an instant.

A dark palace sprawled out beneath a mountain valley, silent and gloomy. But flames of rage surged violently within the palace walls.

"Outrageous!" A raspy voice shook the air.

"In the past six months, Jeff Ashcroft has not only caused the Arbitration Office tremendous losses, but has even humiliated us in public! Why haven't His Highness and the others taken action? Are we supposed to just let him run rampant?"

At the end of a shadowy corridor stood a burly man in a blue fitted combat suit, his arms folded across his chest. In the dim light, his golden hair was particularly striking.

He was practically radiating with fury, his eyes wide with rage. His voice boomed with annoyance and impatience, his innate vitality surging wildly around him. Behind him, the faint silhouette of a dragon could vaguely be seen, stirring in the shadows. "The Only One in History"? 'The Sole Ruler of the International Combat Units'? Hmph! Jeff Ashcroft is nothing more than an arrogant punk who doesn't know his place! Does he think he's invincible just because he managed to defeat Reefus?

"Compared to a true King Phase master, he's nothing more than a child. It'd be effortless to snap his neck if I truly wanted him dead.

"If His Highness won't act, I don't mind dealing with him myself!"

Dragon energy rippled through his voice, causing the surrounding space to tremble violently. It was as though a terrifying ancient beast were lurking within his body.

Though Leander currently occupied the entire International Combat Units, reigning over the world as the first person to ever stand at the top of the world, this man clearly wasn't

impressed. His words indicated he regarded Leander as nothing more than an ant to be crushed.

"Restrain yourself, Folger!"

A refined, scholarly middle-aged man in white robes stood beside the burly figure, his hands clasped behind his back. He'd barely raised his voice, but the golden-haired man immediately fell silent mid-rage.

The white-robed man continued, "Jeff Ashcroft is not even twenty years old, yet he has repeatedly thwarted the Arbitration Office's plans. That can only be attributed to his skills. Reefus and the others did not lose to him without reason.

"His Highness and the others are already discussing the matter, so you shouldn't act rashly!"

Even though the aura radiating from the golden-haired man had subsided, the flames of fury still burned in his eyes. A disgruntled growl rumbled from his throat.

"Discussing the matter? I knew he would eventually become the Arbitration Office's greatest enemy from the moment he killed the first Arbitrator. But we kept turning a blind eye to his actions-just because His Highness wanted to recruit him. That's how he was allowed to grow to this extent!

"Even Chief Arbitrators have died by his hand now. If His Highness and the others continue 'discussing the matter', allowing him to grow for a few more years... even we might not be able to stop him then!"

The white-robed man was silent for a few seconds, frost flickering in his eyes.

"I understand what you're saying, Folger. The truth is, I'd love to slaughter him myself, but you mustn't forget-we cannot act freely."

The golden-haired man, Folger Barnes, narrowed his eyes at the warning. "Do you mean..."

The white-robed man did not answer, but Folger clearly understood the meaning behind his silence. He closed his mouth, saying nothing more.

A suffocating silence settled over the dark corridor, almost as though time itself had stopped.

...

Leander's reputation soared to the pinnacle of the world following the battle at the Aorinth Peaks. The master behind the International Martial Network even hailed him as "The Only One in History" and "A Man for the Ages".

However, Leander himself had vanished from the public eye after claiming the top spot on the International Combat Units.

Beyond the borders of the Shadowrealm, a small stream flowed, its waters clean

and clear. A handsome young man in white robes sat cross-legged on the ground nearby, meditating quietly.

It was Leander, his black hair

dancing lightly in the wind. Though

his eyes were closed, every cell in

his body

was open to the fullest. The

natural spiritual energy in the world flooded into the crown of his head, drawn toward him like a vortex spiraling into a black hole.

Invisible ripples of energy spread out from his body, covering more than ten feet around him. Every blade of grass, every flower, and every stone within range was enveloped in the sweeping waves of energy.

Those waves were his spiritual strength-surging in dense, layered currents.

His spiritual cultivation was bordering on the threshold of the Origin Realm. Only

one more step, and he could fully release his spiritual strength and advance into the next cultivation realm.

The stream in the mountain ravine might not be a sacred ground, but it was secluded and sparsely populated. The isolated environment was precisely why he had chosen this place for quiet cultivation and breakthrough.

Whoosh!

His spiritual strength surged abruptly, whipping fierce winds in all directions. The sky above his head split into two layers-blue and white-forming two entirely distinct domains.

Spiritual strength was essentially a person's soul, comprised of two components: the spirit and the essence—one blue, the other white. The merging of these halves into one was known as the "return to origin".

Although the spirit and essence

existed together as twin halves that complemented each other, they remain separated by distinct barriers and boundaries. And the Origin Really be achieved by completely fusing spirit and essence into a single, seamless whole—indestructible and eternal.

Shrouded by his spiritual energy, the world around him seemed to fall into an ethereal state: quiet, hazy, and almost dreamlike.

Half an hour later, Leander suddenly opened his eyes. A blinding light burst from his body. Then, the Bloodjade and the Dragon Core flew into the sky as twin beams of colored energy.

He grabbed them with one hand. Flames erupted around his grip, blooming into a dragon that engulfed both treasures.

Under the indescribable heat, the two peerless treasures melted rapidly—refined into two intertwined streams of energy that cascaded down onto him.

He leaped to his feet, his mind soaring into the clouds in a single heartbeat. His spiritual strength expanded exponentially, distorting the very space around him. A low roar exploded from deep within his chest.

"Today, I break into the Origin Realm!"

A pillar of light pierced straight into the heavens, punching a hole through the clouds. It was an unprecedented phenomenon.

Countless ancient monsters across the Shadowrealm opened their eyes, their expressions shifting as they gazed at the distant pillar of light.

A great spiritual master had just been born!

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Chapter 472

Whoosh!

A brilliant pillar of light tore through the sky. Leander was wrapped in a swirling cloud of energy, and his spiritual strength spread outward in waves that reached for miles.

In this realm, even the slightest breeze or rustle of grass answered his will. Every tree and plant seemed to move with his thoughts.

"Today, I reach Origin!"

With a low roar, Leander sent the pillar of light surging into the sky. It split the heavens above him, bathing the world in radiant brilliance.

The creek churned and boiled with fury. Columns of spiritual energy erupted from the water, shooting skyward and encircling Leander.

The energy from the Bloodjadea and Dragon Core crystals flowed into him, merging with his own power. Leander parted his lips, and a thunderous cry burst forth, carrying unimaginable strength.

Roar!

The sound shook the heavens. Beneath the shroud of Leander's spiritual strength, a lifelike golden dragon apparition surged forth.

The dragon resembled the black dragon in the Aorinth Peaks but carried far more majesty and dominance. Its eyes, like the gaze of a god, surveyed the world below.

"Is a spiritual grandmaster appearing in the world?"

Many hidden grandmasters who had long withdrawn from the mortal world went pale with shock when they saw the towering pillar of light.

They understood immediately that this marked the birth of an ultimate being.

Beneath a redwood, an elderly man in ornate robes let out a sigh, his eyes heavy with the weight of countless lifetimes.

"After a hundred years, could another King Phase emerge?"

He was a master beyond ordinary comprehension. Having long detached from the distractions of the mortal world, he instantly recognized that the pillar of light announced the rise of a spiritual grandmaster, a force rivaling even the King Phase.

Across the nearby Myriad Mountains, powerful beings watched in disbelief. Even those who had long vanished from the world felt a ripple of excitement at the event.

Roar!

The creek boiled and twisted as the dragon apparition moved. Leander concentrated, and a water dragon erupted from the waters. It soared into the sky, roaring as it spun around him.

Hum!

In an instant, Leander vanished and reappeared hundreds of yards away.

Flash Step!

His spiritual strength stretched around him, allowing him to shift and move with complete freedom. He now had the power to travel a thousand miles in a single thought.

Huff!

Leander let out a deep breath. The spiritual energy surrounding him slowly faded. His eyes grew deeper, filled with the weight of countless lifetimes. At last, he had reached the Origin Realm.

He marveled at every leaf, every blade of grass, feeling a connection he had never known before. The world seemed alive in a way it never had, vibrant and full of hidden beauty.

So this is the Origin Realm?

A faint smile touched his lips, and the coldness that once lingered in his eyes

softened. Inside him, his Nirvana Energy churned with newfound intensity, signaling the potential to reach even greater heights.

This journey to the Aorinth Peaks had truly been worth it.

With his current strength, even a King Phase no longer seemed untouchable.

Even if a King Phase appears, I can still fight and win.

The power surging through him brought a sense of ease and thrill. The mysterious and formidable no longer stirred fear in him.

It has been over a month in seclusion. Time to head back to Highcliffe.

Since leaving Daphne at the camp gates, he had traveled alone to the Aorinth Peaks, and a month and a half had passed.

Leander stretched and stepped onto a beam of flowing light. In an instant, his figure blurred as he shot into the sky.

At Highcliffe University, Daphne sat by the artificial lake on the lawn, dressed in a teal gown and lost in thought.

Many male students walking by were mesmerized, as if they were staring at a living portrait of divine beauty.

A young man in Versace, an exchange student from Seagate University, could not take his eyes off Daphne.

"She's incredible. I've got to get her number!"

He had just arrived in Highcliffe and had yet to meet Daphne. He had seen many women before, but she was extraordinary.

However, a companion tugged at his sleeve.

"Mr. Morgan-Royce, don't go near her." This chapter is updated by

The young man in brocade was Rodrick. He had run into Leander at a bar before.

Rodrick was not a Highcliffe student. He had many dealings with Seagate Commerce and accompanied the young man today.

"Why?" The wealthy student frowned.

"Her name is Daphne." Rodrick's words were concise. "She is the daughter of the Half-Lord of Highcliffe!"

"Oh?" The young man's expression shifted, but he still smirked. "So? Just because she is Wesley's daughter doesn't mean I cannot pursue her. Beauty belongs to the strong. Whoever has the ability Wins her heart!"

He disregarded Rodrick's warning and stepped forward. Rodrick's eyes narrowed.

He blocked Dylan again. "Listen to me, Mr. Morgan-Royce! The Half-Lord and the Florian family may not frighten you, but Daphne... you'd better not provoke her! Her fiancé is someone even your grandfather would hesitate to offend!"

Dylan laughed lightly. "Ridiculous! Her fiancé? Isn't it Ethan? If he can be her fiancé, why can't I? In this world, beauty belongs to the strong. Whoever's capable gets the girl.

"Ethan is just a junior. How could he make my grandfather hesitate? Even Gareth would still have to show my grandfather respect. What do I have to worry about?"

Rodrick shook his head. "Mr. Morgan-Royce, her fiancé is no longer Ethan! Her fiancé is..."

Before he could finish, Dylan ignored the warning and strode straight toward Daphne. "Hello, Ms. Daphne!"

He bowed slightly, courteous and warm.

"I'm Dylan Morgan-Royce, from Seagate's Morgan-Royce family. You've probably heard of us!"

"The Morgan-Royce family?" Daphne raised her brows slightly and nodded politely. "Oh, Mr. Morgan-Royce, I have heard much of you!"

Dylan's heart swelled at her response, though his expression remained calm. "I am familiar with

Ms.

the Twin Stars of Highcliffe. What a coincidence to meet you today, Daphne. It must be fate!

"I recently invested in a high-end club in Southgate called Riverside Bistro. Would you have time tonight? I would like to invite you to dinner and hear your feedback on the place."

His words were elegant but were clearly a pretext to ask her out.

Daphne hid a smile and prepared to decline. Suddenly, a voice called out from the riverbank behind her. "Sorry, she does not have time today, or ever! You may leave now!"

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Chapter 473

A voice burst across the riverwalk with an authority that hit like a rip current. Dylan's expression collapsed in an instant.

He had grown up wrapped in privilege inside one of Seagate's most established dynasties. People tiptoed around him. Business leaders twice his age treated him like a visiting senator's son. No one had ever thrown a blunt "scram" at him in his entire life.

Daphne heard that voice and froze, her knees trembling. She spun toward it quickly.

A young man in a clean white jacket walked along the riverside path, the night breeze pushing through his dark hair. Daphne's eyes shimmered with emotion.

"Ander!"

Her voice conveyed genuine relief. More than a month had gone by since she last saw Leander in Whitville. The International Martial Network reported that his arrival at Aorinth Peaks had gone smoothly, but constant updates kept knotting her stomach.

"I'm back." Leander offered a warm smile. He had flown in from overseas and driven straight to Highcliffe University without even stopping home.

Daphne stepped into him without hesitation and rested against his shoulder under dozens of curious eyes.

"You get what you needed at Aorinth Peaks?" Her voice dropped to a gentle, soft tone.

"Yeah." Leander chuckled quietly and tapped her lightly on the head. "How about sushi carousel later?"

The usually composed, elegant Daphne nodded like the most obedient girlfriend on earth. Holding his hand, she looked ready to walk into a courthouse and sign a marriage license.

"Hold it." Dylan's voice dropped colder than the lake nearby.

Leander and Daphne stopped and turned as one.

"You got something else to spit out?" Leander tilted his head, a lazy smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

"Something else?" Dylan's jaw tightened. "You opened your mouth and told me to scram. Now you ask if something's wrong?"

His family tree carried weight even back here on the Seagate. The people treated him like a governor's heir. Rodrick Wave-the mind behind Wave Alliance-greeted him with a two-handed handshake and a stiff grin. The senior heirs of the four elite families around Highcliff, including Gareth, Daphne, and the rest, were considered his equals at most.

Leander held none of those titles, yet he hurled the word "scram" at him. No heir of the Morgan-Royce line walked away from that.

Jealousy burned deeper when he watched Daphne lean into Leander like a woman who had already picked her future.

"Dude, I could toss you into that lake for the tone you're using."

Dylan ignored the warning glare on Daphne's face. His focus was entirely on Leander.

"Oh?" Leander had already planned to leave with Daphne. He preferred not to waste breath on people who climbed their own family's influence. Dylan insisted on pressing the issue.

A spark of amusement appeared in Leander's eyes.

A crowd thickened around them—Daphne's fanboys, campus gossip hunters, and every student drawn by the scent of drama. Highcliff University had never witnessed a triangle like this in the open. The curiosity crackled like electricity.

Dylan looked like a lifestyle magazine cover-Versace tailored suit, a Patek Philippe worth hundreds of thousands flashing from his wrist.

Leander wore a plain white tee and a pair of Puma sweats. His face carried calm restraint, yet something sharp and commanding rested between his brows. Standing next to Dylan, he stole the attention without trying.

Rodrick spotted Leander through the crowd. His shoulders snapped stiff before he ducked away into the back row, refusing to get dragged into warning Dylan.

He had known Leander since they were young, and the fear had carved itself into his bones early. When Leander disappeared for a period, Rodrick assumed the nightmare was gone. The nightmare returned—this time wearing titles heavy enough to crush him-Chief Instructor of Wyvern Blade, a major general in the Wyvern Blade, recipient of the

Guardian Medal, top rank on the Astria Power Index, and he was the only one listed among International Combat Units.

Rodrick barely understood what half those titles meant. He only knew Leander operated on a level he would never reach.

The gap between them wasn't a ladder. It was a cliff. He knew he wouldn't even glimpse that level in his lifetime.

Watching Dylan puff his chest at someone like that made Rodrick feel something close to pity.

Dylan felt none of it. His eyes stayed cold, his posture carried an air of entitled confidence, and the air around him shifted with the superiority of someone who believed the world existed one rung beneath his feet.

"I was talking to Ms. Daphne," he pushed on. "You barged in, threw a 'scram' at me, then tried walking off with her. Do you know basic manners? Do you understand about waiting for your turn? Anybody chasing a woman gets in line."

Leander slipped his hand into his pocket and grinned.

"Manners, huh?"

"You tried flirting with my fiancée in front of a whole university. Where I come from, that counts as harassment. Telling you to leave was me showing mercy."

Leander never enjoyed trading

pointless lines. Dylan's dinner offer made his intentions painfully

obvious. If Leander hadn't recently broke through to the Origin Realm or been in an unusually good mood, Dylan would already have been floating face-down in the lake feeding koi.

"Ha!" Dylan burst out laughing, as if he had heard the punchline of an unbelievable joke. "You're Daphne's fiancée? Everyone in Highcliff knows Ethan Leander is her fiancée. Who the hell are you supposed to be?" The source of this content is

He had spent less than half a day in town and knew nothing about the recent events there. He didn't know Daphne had already broken off her engagement with Ethan, much less that her relationship with Leander.

Leander did not bother offering him another glance. He smirked, turned, and began to escort Daphne away.

Dylan stepped forward and blocked their path. "Going somewhere? You think you can walk off because you feel like it?"

His entire life in Seagate taught him that rooms shifted to his convenience. He naturally didn't place a "no-name" like Leander anywhere in his line of sight. Leander's eyes cooled.

When Dylan tried to open his mouth again, Leander lifted his hand in a quick, effortless motion.

A gust slapped sideways.

Dylan didn't even register what happened before his head snapped to the side. His body lifted slightly and slid across the pavement. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

Gasps rippled across the crowd. No one caught the move. Dylan's mind jolted as the pain sharpened.

"You're an inner-level martial artist?"

Fear hit him for a second, but rage hit harder.

"You hit me? In this whole Highcliff, not even Ethan or Daphne ever dared touch me, and you hit me? Do you know who you're messing with?"

He pressed a hand against his cheek as he stepped toward Leander again.

"I'm Dylan Morgan-Royce from the Morgan-Royce family of Seagate. Touch me again, and my family will make sure you regret breathing.

"You get on your knees right now and apologize. My grandfather gives one word, and your entire martial sect vanishes. Kneeling won't save you afterward."

Most students stared blankly. A handful of elite-family kids turned pale.

The Morgan-Royces of Seagate had stood on level ground with the four elite families around Highcliff and the Riverstone lineage in the western region. Their heritage ran deeper, and their influence hit harder.

Highcliff had long been a battleground where the four major families competed for dominance alongside the Riverstone family, competed for dominance in the western region. Each faction carved out its own share of power.

However, Seagate was from a completely different level. As a global powerhouse, it positioned the Morgan-Royce family at the apex suppressing the older families below until they could no longer stand tall. Capping them the true kings was entirely justified.

Foreign investment groups tried to infiltrate Seagate through back channels. Yet, the Morgan-Royces had governed the city for decades and stamped out every effort with ease. Their name traveled with more

weight than Highcliff's major families combined.

Nobody expected Dylan to be a Morgan-Royce heir. His last name alone confirmed he was born into the senior branch.

Tension wrapped around the crowd like an invisible net.

Leander remained the only person unaffected.

He let out a low laugh. "Got to respect how bold ignorance makes you. Alright.

Whose grandfather? I'm curious."

Dylan lifted his chin with full confidence and dropped four words with pride. "Maximilian Morgan-Royce."

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Chapter 474

The instant Dylan spoke the name "Maximilian Morgan-Royce," the atmosphere shifted so hard that conversations stopped mid-breath.

People who recognized the legend behind that name reacted instantly-faces drained, spines straightened, and pupils tightened. A chill ran through anyone who ever heard stories about the man.

Highcliff's elite heirs were not oblivious trust-fund brats. Their families kept them plugged into global networks and private intelligence streams. Most of them never touched the martial path, although they read enough to know which figures towered above the world.

Maximilian sat in a class of his own.

He represented an entire era of dominance. A force so overwhelming that his legend endured decades after he stepped away from the front lines.

His influence ran deepest in Highcliff. Years ago, the Northern Wyvern Blade, the elite unit of the Northern Military District, crashed during the global special forces tournament. The incident embarrassed the entire district, prompting military command to deploy a mysterious chief instructor to rebuild the unit.

Twelve months later, the Northern Wyvern Blade returned to the global stage with a vengeance. They surpassed the Southern Wyvern Blade, stormed through elite forces from multiple countries, and spectacularly seized the top ranking. Their victory spread across the world like wildfire.

The man who resurrected that division carried a single name—Maximilian Morgan-Royce.

The military revered him. After resurrecting the Northern Wyvern Blade, he stayed on and trained an entire generation of officers. Nearly half the generals in Astria's region once learned under him.

People called him the Master of Thousands, and his influence stretched through bases nationwide.

He eventually retired and settled quietly in Seagate. Gareth rose soon after, pulling the spotlight toward a new era, although Maximilian's shadow never truly faded. Every young heir across the city memorized his name long before adulthood.

Regular students might not grasp his identity, yet hearing "Master of Thousands" in his title sent shivers down their spines. The name carried an aura too intense to misunderstand.

"Maximilian Morgan-Royce?" Leander murmured the name under his breath. He had suspected early on, yet hearing Dylan confirm it set everything into place.

Maximilian belonged to the legendary Four Extremes of Astria—figures whose power shaped national military history, although Leander had never met him in person. He learned the man's name as a child through the stories Gareth shared at home.

One sentence never faded from his memory: 'Across Astria, only one man truly earns my respect. He's also the one opponent I cannot promise I'd defeat.'

That opponent was Maximilian.

Gareth seldom acknowledged other martial giants nationwide. Even Grayson Shire, a Martial Sovereign at the top of the Astria Power Index, was rarely noticed by him. However, everything changed when Maximilian's name came up. Gareth's tone grew more respectful, his posture straightened, and his voice carried unmistakable

reverence.

Leander's gaze deepened as memories surfaced. He never fully understood Maximilian's limits, although he knew this much—if there was a single person on the Astria Power Index he could not read, it was Maximilian.

The list ranked Maximilian third, but Leander never trusted that position. He believed the ranking did not accurately reflect the man's real skills.

The earlier Astria Power Index clearly demonstrated this. Maximilian maintained his lead over titans like Grayson without any mistakes, proving his exceptional talent. Nearly twenty years had gone by since that list was published, and it was unlikely that Maximilian's level had stayed stagnant for such a long period.

Evaluating his power with basic logic felt pointless. Leander believed that if Maximilian chose to step into the light again, the International Combat Units roster would place his name at the summit.

Seeing Leander go quiet, Dylan drew the wrong conclusion. He believed Leander had gone stiff from fear.

No wonder he jumped to that conclusion. The name Maximilian Morgan-Royce alone kept nearly every sect in Astria living on edge. For twenty years straight, he stood as the country's living myth of invincibility, a man no rival could touch.

He was the one who truly ruled the age that followed Astria's Dragon Emperor. If Leander had not risen in this generation, even Gareth would have struggled to dim the brilliance Maximilian cast across the entire nation.

Dylan crossed his arms with a smirk.

"Now you get it, right? You touch me, you pay. I'll repeat myself—kneel and apologize. My grandpa gives one command, and your sect vanishes. No one behind you will save you."

His arrogance spiked, fueled by the fact that even Ethan stopped cold whenever Maximilian's name surfaced. Who in their right mind thinks they can stand against a legacy that massive?

Leander stayed calm, his voice unwavering. "Maximilian is a hero of this country; I hold him in deep respect. Having a grandson like you brings disgrace to him."

Dylan expected deference. His grin faded when Rodrick's tone sharpened instead. "What did you just say? You insult my grandpa? You're—"

Leander's voice cut through him. "Get on your knees."

The words dropped like a boulder. A crushing force hit Dylan's legs, slamming them to the concrete before he could finish his rant. The impact echoed across the riverwalk.

He might share Maximilian's blood, although he had zero martial talent. He lived without training or discipline. The invisible force terrified him, yet rage drowned out fear as he glared upward, humiliated.

Gasps rolled through the crowd. Students jumped, startled. First, he flew from a slap no one saw. Now he knelt without warning. No one understood any of it.

Leander's expression didn't shift. Original content can be found at

"You might be Maximilian's bloodline, yet you act without sense. Even if he stood here, he wouldn't. address me with your tone. You're only his grandson, yet you bark like you command the world."

He then wrapped an arm around Daphne's waist and started walking away. His voice carried behind him "For Maximilian's sake, I'll let you live. You remain kneeling for thirty minutes. That is your punishment. In thirty minutes, your pressure points release on their own."

Leander's steps drifted down the path. His voice echoed one final time. "If you're angry, come find me. Before you try, figure out who you're challenging."

The echoes faded. Silence washed over the crowd.

Students gazed at Dylan, awaiting him to rise. His face reddened with shame. He struggled against the unseen hold with all his might, yet his knees remained fixed on the pavement.

The eerie stillness made onlookers back away.

Rodrick lingered for a moment before walking over. He understood Leander's strength well enough to stay by Dylan's side quietly for the full thirty minutes. Once the time passed, Dylan collapsed to one side as the force released.

He rubbed his numb legs, fury twisting his features. Hatred burned hotter than anything he had felt.

"That b*stard forced me to kneel for thirty minutes. I don't care who he is. Even if he comes from the four major elite families, I'll break him. If he doesn't kneel to me next time, I'm not a man."

He carved Leander's face into his memory. He had never despised anyone this deeply, and whatever Leander had told him earlier no longer registered in his mind. Rodrick shook his head with a low sigh. "Mr. Morgan-Royce, calm down. That man isn't

someone you can confront. Even your grandfather wouldn't want to cross him." Dylan's anger surged hotter. "Stop spouting nonsense. My grandfather stands on a level that man can't touch."

Rodrick's tone chilled. "Lower your voice, Mr. Morgan-Royce. Jeff Ashcroft keeps every word he speaks. Don't test him."

Dylan snapped back. "Jeff who? Jeff—"

His tongue froze. Realization hit him like a lightning bolt. His expression drained instantly. "Jeff Ashcroft? You're telling me that man—the ba.... that guy was Jeff Ashcroft?"

Rodrick nodded firmly.

Dylan couldn't move.

All his bravado drained away, and every trace of rage disappeared.

Because he finally grasped the truth—he had just confronted the strongest man alive.

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Chapter 475

On the main path of Highcliffe University, Leander held Daphne's hand as they walked side by side. The air around them carried a fresh, easy campus vibe.

Along the way, he gave her a brief rundown of what had happened on the Aorinth Peaks.

"Leander, are you saying your spiritual strength made a huge leap?" Daphne asked softly.

"Yes." Leander nodded. "Right now, my spiritual strength can cover the entire university. I can span miles in a single thought."

He was being modest. If he went all out, he could sense everything miles beyond the campus as well.

Daphne's eyes shimmered. Looking at the man she had chosen for life, warmth filled her heart. His growing strength only made her feel prouder.

They chatted as they walked. At the university gate, Daphne glanced at the busy street and suddenly asked, "Leander, do King Phase beings really exist in this world?"

Leander kept his gaze forward, expression calm.

"The King Phase is elusive. I'm not sure if it truly exists. Even if a King Phase stood in front of me, what difference would it make? Heaven or earth-there's nothing I fear."

Daphne watched his spirited confidence and smiled, her expression bright as a field of blooming flowers.

The two spent the afternoon exploring the street lined with food stalls along the sycamore-lined lane.

Near dusk, Daphne needed to return home to train, so they finally parted.

Leander continued through the streets alone, passing alleys he had known since childhood. The city had changed, yet memories surfaced all the same.

At the foot of Swallow Hill, he looked up at the sky. A faint chill of loneliness settled in his chest.

For ten years, he had fought to return to the Ashcroft family and rise above it. Now that he had done it, the so-called family meant nothing to him. The world-class powerhouses that once stood above everyone had already fallen under his feet.

With his goals exhausted, a wave of dull emptiness crept in, the familiar coldness of standing too high.

"Maybe only a King Phase existence would make things interesting again."

He sighed quietly and began climbing Swallow Hill.

...

In a secret stronghold, several people in suits sat around a long table. Among them was Highcliffe University's president, Christopher. Next to him sat the "Sky Mantis," Seth, and the "Armored Duo," Keith and Kenneth.

The others were the actual core members of Astria's Shadow Division-veteran elites who had held power for decades.

Across from Christopher sat a straight-backed, middle-aged man in a military uniform. Authority seemed to rest in his very features, his presence powerful and commanding. Even seated, he radiated a mountain-like pressure that drew every gaze in the room.

It was clear he was the division's true commander.

"Everyone, this meeting should have been held half a month ago. Various issues delayed it until today."

His voice filled the conference room.

He looked toward the three operatives. "Report, in full detail, what happened that day at Aorinth Peaks."

Seth nodded and recounted Leander's overwhelming battle—defeating the twin titans of the International Combat Units and cutting down fifteen Chief Arbiters of the Arbitration Office.

The veterans in the room were all seasoned martial experts who had stepped into the Transcendent Realm. Hearing the account still left them visibly shaken. The details sounded unreal.

The world had heard of the battle's outcome, yet few knew how Leander had actually won. Most assumed it was a narrow victory that left him heavily injured.

Since returning, the three had been busy turning over the Verdant Dew and reporting to higher authorities, leaving no time to brief the Shadow Division until

now.

"He defeated the Flame Goddess Halia and God of Madness Khaedor with ease, then killed fifteen Chief Arbiters without a scratch? Is Jeff truly that terrifying?" an old member of the division muttered in disbelief.

Another veteran frowned, his gaze shifting immediately. "During the Southern Shore battle, when he crushed the combined forces of the War God Sanctum and the Arbitration Office and killed eleven Transcendents, that already shook the world.

"I thought he had only brushed the threshold of the Infernal Crown Transcendent. Now, even Chief Arbiters are no match? Who can restrain him?"

Worry crept across his face. Since the Shadow Division was founded, every martial powerhouse had remained under its oversight. Even Gareth, in his prime, treated the division with caution.

Leander, however, was beyond their control. To him, they seemed to hold no weight at all.

The two veterans turned to the man

in uniform. "Mr. Wilder, if Jeff

continues causing turmoil internationally, major powers will definitely lock onto him. He represents Astra I'm concerned the Agyläe, Skarovia, and other nations won't tolerate this."

Anything uncontrollable was a threat in their eyes. Leander felt like a live bomb—dangerous simply because they couldn't predict him.

Jimmy Wilder rested his chin on his hand and thought for a moment before speaking. "The higher-ups already issued instructions regarding Jeff. Their exact words-no interference, no restrictions. Let him act at his own discretion."

The room fell silent.

In ancient times, such authority was reserved for imperial envoys alone. Since the Shadow Division was established, no martial artist had ever received privileges anywhere near this level.

The two veterans stared. "Mr. Wilder, how is that possible? The higher-ups are letting him do as he pleases? Then what is the point of the Shadow Division? This breaks protocol."

Jimmy's gaze sharpened. "Noah, Ricky-people make rules. And sometimes, it's people who have to break them.

"Setting aside the fact that his strength rivals the Dragon Emperor of old, consider what he has

done-he developed the Phoenim et

Essence Pill, created the Devourer's Elow handed the Verdant Dew to the nation, eliminated the War God Sanctum's remaining traitors, and blocked the Arbitration Office from

stepping onto our soil repeatedly.

"Any one of these achievements is enough to name him a national hero. Granting him special authority is well within reason."

Noah and Ricky fell silent. They had focused so much on his international impact that they had overlooked his contributions to the nation.

Jimmy continued. "Jeff's situation is no longer our focus. This meeting is to inform everyone that effective immediately, the entire Shadow Division is moving to red—the highest combat alert."

Every face in the room shifted,

including Christopher's. Their

national threat level ranged from red

to green, red being

the highest

Historically, the division had never

gone above yellow, even during the chaotic influx of foreign agents in the sixties and seventies

It was the highest alert level in the Dark Division's history. Red alert meant something beyond precedent—an event capable of shaking the nation. Silence fell for several long seconds. Realization slowly dawned across the room.

Jimmy gave a firm nod. His voice dropped, heavy with pressure.

"The battle at Aorinth Peaks has roused many long-dormant powerhouses from the shadows. The King Phase Accord may be on the verge of being torn apart."

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Chapter 476

"The King Phase Accord may be on the verge of being torn apart."

As Jimmy finished speaking, the conference room fell once again into a deathly silence. Even those senior members of the Shadow Division, usually untouchable, turned ashen, their bodies trembling.

Christopher drew a deep breath, let out a long sigh, and slumped into his chair.

"So it really came to this."

Ever since Leander's battle at the Aorinth Peaks shook the world, he had expected the age of King Phase to return—but he had never imagined it would happen so quickly.

Only a month had passed since the news spread, yet events had already spiraled beyond all expectations.

Jimmy remained calm, though a faint twitch at the corner of his mouth betrayed his unease.

As head of the Shadow Division, he carried authority naturally. "You are all senior members of the division. You know the secrets of Astria's martial world and beyond. [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT find~novel~net](#)

"A century ago, the King Phase Accord kept the King Phase from appearing. Now, after General Ashcroft's earth-shaking battle, the dormant King Phase are stepping into the mortal world. At this pace, the King Phase Accord's control over them will weaken.

"The King Phase Accord being torn apart is only a matter of time. We must be fully prepared. Raise the alert level to the maximum. The return of the King Phase cannot throw Astria into chaos. Understood?"

"Yes!" They answered in unison, though their voices lacked confidence.

The term "King Phase" loomed over them like a mountain. It had not fallen, but its weight pressed down, suffocating-like the presence of death.

The meeting continued for another ten minutes before everyone left. Only Jimmy and Christopher remained.

Christopher laced his fingers on the table. "Jimmy, could the King Phase Accord really be broken? Isn't the top overreacting? For a hundred years, no King Phase has appeared here or abroad. That proves the King Phase Accord still holds.

"It held firm for nearly a century. No King Phase dared move. Even the arrogant Arbitration Office had no King Phase on the board. Do you really think one battle by Jeff would make them tear it up?"

Doubt laced his voice.

Jimmy exhaled slowly. "Christopher, you know this better than I do. Why ask?"

He shook his head and stood. "It's not just us. Agylae, Skarovia, Angleland, Etrax, the Europa Union-every major power is quietly preparing. The age of the King Phase is about to begin. Nothing can stop it now."

Christopher fell silent, unable to respond.

After a long pause, a hard light sparked in Jimmy's eyes. "Christopher, it's time we paid a visit. Time to meet the man who has reshaped the balance of the world— General Ashcroft."

Night on Swallow Hill brought little change from the day. Tourists still wandered, and the mountain remained alive with activity. The darkness added a layer of mystery.

At the summit, Leander avoided neon-lit tourist paths. He chose rough, hidden trails, climbing straight to the top where ordinary people could never reach.

On the lone peak, he stood with his hands clasped behind his back, overlooking Highcliffe. His eyes carried the weight of ages, like a century-old man who had lived through countless lifetimes.

He recited the lines with a quiet melancholy, Heroes rise when storms. gather. Once you step into the world time ships by like the moon overhead. Empires and grand ambitions-they're nothing but jokes over wine. Life itself is just one long, intoxicating journey."

His gaze shifted to the distant horizon.

Under his divine sense, everything within thousands of feet fell under his perception.

He detected two hidden yet powerful auras moving toward him.

Either one could rival the top five of the International Combat Units. One approached the strength of Khaedor.

"It's him."

From the aura alone, Leander recognized one of them. He stayed on the peak and waited.

Two figures landed one after the other, stopping about fifty feet away. One was white-haired but youthful, exuding a sage-like air-Christopher. The other wore a military uniform, posture precise, eyes sharp and commanding.

"General Ashcroft, it's been a long time." Christopher smiled.

Leander kept his hands behind his back, nodded slightly, then turned to the soldier.

The man raised a hand in a crisp salute. "Minister of the Shadow Division, Jimmy Wilder, saluting the Guardian of the Nation."

Jimmy's rank matched a Captain General, yet he saluted Leander because of the Guardian Medal he bore. With that medal, he was the Guardian of the Nation. Every official, no matter rank, owed him respect.

Leander dipped his head in return and studied Jimmy with interest.

"So, what brings the Shadow Division's head and deputy here?"

He was unsurprised they had found him. In a city this large—indeed, across all Astria—the Shadow Division's intelligence network observed everything.

He had just returned to Highcliffe and taught Dylan a lesson. That high-profile action would be impossible to miss.

Jimmy lowered his hand, expression grave. "General Ashcroft, we came to tell you something important."

Leander's eyes remained calm. "I'm listening."

Three of the world's strongest stood atop Swallow Hill, clouds swirling at their feet. Down below, tourists remained oblivious.

Jimmy met Leander's gaze. "You've shaken the world. Standing alone at the top of the International Combat Rankings means your power has already reached the peak of the Transcendent Realm. By now, the term 'King Phase' shouldn't be unfamiliar to you."

His eyes darkened. "The King Phase once ruled the world. Even Anglelang xose to global dominance only because a King Phase moved behind the scenes, driving the world into the Age of Sail. A King Phase views Transcendents as ants, and their lifespan exceeds two hundred years. But for nearly a century there's been no sign of them—no movement, no sightings. Do you know why?"

Leander shook his head.

Jimmy stepped forward, stopping beside him at the edge of the peak. His voice grew heavier.

"A hundred years ago, a colossal war swept across the world. It was a war of the strongest-martial artists, sorcerers, and metahumans. No official history records it. Only

the most classified files of the great powers contain the faint traces that remain. That war is known as the War of the King Phase."

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Chapter 477

"A war of the War of the King Phase?"

Leander's eyes narrowed. He had read countless ancient texts, yet none mentioned even a hint of such a war-not a scrap of record.

The words "King Phase" already represented the pinnacle of human power-older and more legendary even than the Transcendent Realm. A century-old war named after King Phase made him begin to grasp what it implied.

Jimmy's gaze darkened.

"This war engulfed the entire world. Anywhere martial artists lived-every corner, every backwater-was swept into it. The cause is nearly forgotten now. I don't know the whole story either. What's certain is that it was led by the King Phase figures of that time.

"In that battle, the King Phase masters went all out. Each nation's King Phase masters formed factions and waged a war that lasted nearly a year. Even world- class underground powers, like the Arbitration Office and the Church, were drawn in."

He paused briefly. "Nearly all the King Phase masters were drawn into it—a no- holds- barred chaos. The carnage was immense. Sixty percent of the world's top fighters perished. Rumor says there were close to a hundred King Phase masters. When the war ended, dozens were dead, lost to history.

"In the end, the Western King Phase gained a slight edge over the Eastern King Phase. That victory marked the beginning of imperialist expansion, leaving the East almost irreparably weakened. Most people think the Opium Wars started Astria's century of humiliation. They don't realize the defeat of the Eastern King Phase in the War of the King Phase was the true trigger."

Leander's eyes flickered. The kingdom of Orenthall had been in actual decline over a century ago, a time of deepest humiliation for the land. He had never imagined there was such a hidden truth behind it.

Christopher stood silently, listening. He and Jimmy were senior members of the Shadow Division, but Jimmy's clearance allowed access to far more secrets. Much of this was his first time hearing it straight from the source.

Jimmy's eyes dimmed, as if seeing the battlefield again.

"After that war, the East never fully recovered, falling under the pressure of the West. Though the King Phase of East and West had a clear winner, it was a hollow victory. The Church, once at the peak of its power, suffered catastrophic losses during the battle—its King Phase were nearly wiped out. Ten years later, the Arbitration Office seized the opportunity and crushed them completely, rising as the undisputed ruler of the underground world."

Leander stared at the clouds, silent. The War of the King Phase was staggering in scale.

Transcendents were already far beyond ordinary humans, wielding power enough to intimidate entire nations. A century ago, nearly a hundred King Phase—far surpassing the Transcendent Realm—wielded forces that could shape the world. Just imagining it made the blood run hot.

The power of a King Phase defied description. Even he could not grasp it fully. If over a hundred King Phase fought at once, the entire world would become a battlefield. Cities would crumble wherever they went, as if leveled by a storm. It was, without a doubt, one of the greatest disasters in human history.

After a long silence, he finally spoke.

"So because of that war, too many King Phase masters were killed or crippled, and the rest went into hiding? Is that why no King Phase appeared for nearly a hundred years?"

The war had been brutal, but not enough to wipe them all out. If King Phase masters still existed, any action by them would have shaken the world. Yet they had remained completely silent.

"Yes and no," Jimmy said, his voice low.

"King Phase power is terrifying. That war left entire regions in ruins. Nations became rubble and ashes wherever they clashed. Millions were displaced. Death tolls were unimaginable. It was a global catastrophe. Both East and West suffered immense losses.

"The surviving King Phase

understood the consequences. They realized that unrestrained battles

could destroy the world. So the set

gathered at Aurion Peak and drafted

an accord to restrain the actions of King Phase masters. The accord strictly forbade them from

appearing in public or taking any action that could trigger widespread destruction.

"Anyone who broke the accord would be considered an enemy of all King Phase and hunted relentlessly. The accord was quietly announced underground a century ago. People called it the King Phase Accord."

Leander tilted his head, surprise evident. This text is hosted at

"So that explains why King Phase vanished for nearly a hundred years."

Jimmy nodded. "Yes. That was the beginning of their disappearance. After the King Phase Accord circulated underground, every King Phase went silent. None dared stir trouble. Even the Arbitration Office held back. No living King Phase Phase believed they could survive a united hunt by the rest."

He paused, then continued. "Time passed, and fear faded. A few reckless King Phase masters began moving again. In the 1920s and '30s, there were still signs of King Phase masters operating in the shadows. By the mid-20th century, they vanished completely. No one dared show themselves again. Precisely, King Phase masters fully disappeared after World War II."

Leander propped his chin, thinking. Moments later, his eyes sharpened.

"Nuclear weapons?"

Jimmy nodded firmly.

"Exactly. Nuclear weapons. Their emergence marked the start of the modern arms era. Agylae leapt to global dominance. The advent of nuclear weapons ended the age when King Phase ruled the world."

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Chapter 478

In the mid-twentieth century, the world had witnessed an earthshaking event.

Etrax and Jesund launched a brutal and shameless campaign of aggression against many nations. The Second World War erupted soon after.

Among the countless major events of that cruel war, the appearance of nuclear weapons stood out as one of the most shocking.

At the time, Jesund held great power. With Etrax at its side, it expanded its invasion across the world. In the end, Agylae dropped two nuclear weapons on two of Jesund's major cities and brought the war to an end.

"Nuclear weapons."

Those three words alone were enough to make ambitious King Phase masters fall silent and disappear from sight. Leander could not think of anything else that could achieve that.

Nuclear weapons had only just emerged during that era, and the technology behind them was far from mature. Yet a single detonation could destroy an entire city.

The destructive force was terrifying and awe-inspiring.

Even the strongest Infernal Crown Transcendent could only sever a skyscraper at full strength.

A city held countless towers. For an Infernal Crown Transcendent to destroy an entire city and leave nothing but scorched ruin, the effort alone would likely kill them. Even a King Phase master would struggle to accomplish such devastation. Jimmy shook his head with a sigh.

"A King Phase master had great power. People saw them as godlike, but they were still made of flesh and bone. How could they survive a nuclear blast?"

"One nuclear weapon could kill more than ten King Phase masters. And they don't even need that. A single supersonic missile can threaten the life of one King Phase master.

"The birth of nuclear weapons and Agylae's unstoppable rise made every King Phase acknowledge reality. They hid themselves away and refused to show their faces again."

Leander did not argue. He could rip a tank apart with his bare hands and halt a speeding train without protection with his current strength.

Even a direct hit from a heavy rifle would barely scratch him, yet he had no confidence that he could survive a direct missile strike. The latest_episodes are on_the

He knew he stood no chance against a nuclear blast.

A mortal body had limits. It was nearly impossible to stand firm against high-energy weapons. Even King Phase masters had to bow their heads before such force.

"That's interesting."

His tone rose with a quiet thrill. A faint smile touched his lips.

A martial artist's strength could topple mountains, yet the world remained under the control of the great nations. Facing an entire nation alone was pure fantasy.

Still, nuclear weapons did not frighten Leander. They awakened something else in him, and his blood seemed to burn with excitement.

In that moment, he realized he had found a new goal.

Nuclear weapons had pressured the world, terrifying King Phase masters into retreat. If one day his strength reached the point where he could stand against a nation's might and feel no fear even in the face of nuclear fire, what kind of overwhelming presence would that be?

He blinked and let the surge of excitement fade. His face settled back into calm.

"Mr. Wilder, you came all the way here just to tell me this? What's your point? You didn't climb Swallow Hill in the middle of the night just to tell me a story, did you?"

Jimmy finally let his expression grow heavy.

"General Ashcroft, I told you this because you need to know about a piece of history that even our nation sealed away for more than a hundred years.

"And now, because of your battle at Aorinth Peaks, many things that should have stayed buried have started to return.

"Those hidden King Phase elders have been meeting again. They look ready to reemerge."

Leander turned his head, surprised.

"Why?"

He could not understand it.

His battle at Aorinth Peaks had been astonishing, and he had wiped out more than

fifteen Infernal Crown Transcendents. Yet it had still been a battle between Transcendent Realm masters. Why would King Phase masters care?

Jimmy offered a helpless smile.

"General Ashcroft, what you did was too shocking. Everyone knows that only above the Infernal Crown Transcendent level does the King Phase begin. Even if two Infernal Crown Transcendents fight, it's nearly impossible for one to kill the other.

"But you didn't just kill one. You killed eighteen. And you did it alone.

Your combat strength is already being ranked as King Phase combat power by classified agencies around the world.

"Not long ago, we received intel that Agylae and Skarovia described you as not quite a King Phase, yet stronger than one.

"Europa Union has also been discussing you in private. They called you the first man since the birth of nuclear weapons who dared to act openly like a King Phase."

Leander finally understood.

Those adjudicators he killed had all been extremely close to the King Phase. Even Khaedor, the God of Madness, had stood one step below it. Killing them all with one person made others assume he belonged to that level.

He let out a soft laugh.

"I'm not a King Phase master. I never expected my battle to cause such a storm." He looked at Jimmy again. "You still haven't told me why you came."

Jimmy let out a deep sigh at Leander's fearless composure. "General Ashcroft, you're one of Astria's strongest. Your service and contributions are beyond measure.

I came here not only by my own will, but also under direct orders.

"I'm here on behalf of the nation to warn you not to leave Astria without careful thought.

"The whole world is watching you. Beyond the King Phase masters, every major nation has already put you on their Level-One Danger List.

"As long as you stay in Astria, King Phase masters won't dare act recklessly, and no foreign nation will risk crossing our borders to harm you. Leave Astria, and we might not be able to protect you."

By the end, Jimmy's voice grew solemn.

Leander was a rare treasure of Astria. If he fell, the loss would be immeasurable.

Leander understood his situation clearly. His battle today revealed power equal to a King Phase master. Naturally, the other nations felt threatened.

They wanted him dead.

The hidden King Phase masters had survived by letting the world forget they existed. When time passed and tension faded, they could return and move in the shadows.

Yet his battle dragged the idea of King Phase masters back into the light. Their plans shattered. How could they not hate him?

Both the King Phase masters and the great nations now saw Leander as an obstacle.

Jimmy and Christopher waited in silence for his answer.

A fierce wind tore across Swallow Hill, sending clouds flying. Moonlight washed over

Leander as he stood alone on the peak. His eyes glimmered like twin stars.

"So they want me trapped in Astria just because the King Phase might return and the world is watching?" He laughed. "I understand the nation's concern, but I never fear anything. Whether it's a King Phase master or great nation, it doesn't matter. If someone wants my life, they can come and try."

Leander raised his hand and curled his fingers into a fist that seemed to seize the air itself. "Once, this world belonged to the King Phase. Now it belongs to the great nations but in the near future, will write a new name across this era-Jeff Ashcroft."

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Chapter 479

"This world rolls on my clock now."

Leander's quiet declaration left Jimmy and Christopher rooted to the ground. Neither man expected him to throw a line that bold.

A century back, the world listened to King Phase masters. In recent decades, global superpowers dictated the rules. Every era had been claimed by nations, alliances, or entire factions working together.

Leander wanted an era under one name-his name. The sheer nerve of it would've sounded insane coming from anyone else.

Both men would have cracked a joke if another student, officer, or even a respected fighter had said it. Hearing it from Leander turned their throats dry. Nothing in his tone hinted at exaggeration.

He had climbed so fast during the past year that anyone in his path-organizations, elites, rival families—had been flattened without pause. Neither man felt confident that even a returning King Phase master or a coordinated global strike would truly corner him.

Christopher eventually broke the silence. "General Ashcroft, the higher-ups can only shield you and the people close to you. Every other choice belongs to you alone."

He folded his arms.

"Our duty as the Shadow Division ends there."

His tone shifted once more.

"I'm still the president of Highcliffe University. You're a Highcliffe student. As your mentor, I need you to watch your back."

He had only interacted with Leander once before, yet he already sensed that fearless streak. The heavier the storm looked, the more Leander pushed toward it. No warning would slow someone wired like that.

"Thanks." Leander dipped his head toward him, offered Jimmy a quick nod, and stepped off the lone peak without hesitation.

Jimmy watched his figure vanish into the clouds swirling below. "Christopher... feels like we came here for nothing."

"Yeah." Christopher released a slow breath, eyes sharpening with resolve. "We work from the shadows now. Every arrow aimed at him from the dark gets intercepted by us."

Jimmy locked his hands behind him, jaw clenched. "I'm only worried the Shadow Division might not be enough."

...

Leander landed effortlessly on the trail below, dropping straight into a crowd of hikers and tourists. Dozens of people surrounded him, yet nobody realized a young man had materialized out of thin air.

He followed the downhill path, unhurried. Whatever Christopher and Jimmy warned him about—King Phase masters resurfacing, the attention from major nations—floated out of his mind the moment he stepped off that cliff.

To Leander, life always delivered enemies. This time, they were simply stronger—King Phase masters and national forces. People that other fighters would never dream of provoking.

His only job was to break them.

Real power meant nothing without the nerve to wield it. History proved that much. During the Droskar Missile Crisis, the Agylae president made it clear he would push the nuclear button if forced, which forced Skarovia's generals to back down almost overnight.

Old crime tales showed the same truth. Brilliant detectives with unmatched talent got teased for overthinking everything. The action heroes of those same stories, armed with equal skill, became icons for standing tall without flinching.

The difference lived in the heart.

Pressure from King Phase masters and national forces didn't crush Leander's spirit. Their attention ignited it. His blood stirred like he had stepped into an arena built for him alone.

"This is what makes life interesting."

A grin pulled at his lips as he quickened his steps.

Swallow Hill grew busier halfway down. Hikers filled the narrow paths. Leander flowed through them like a shadow sliding across water-visible to the eye, yet somehow unnoticed.

"Leander?"

A familiar voice called from his right.

He halted and glanced over.

Under a wide old locust tree, a young couple sat on a stone bench. The moment Leander turned, the guy jumped up, startled and excited.

"Liam?" Leander blinked. Liam Preston stood there, the same friend he grew up with back in Ravenridge, Mornwick.

Months had passed since they last crossed paths, during their Ravenridge High School reunion at the Sky Hotel.

"No freaking way—it really is you!" Liam bounded toward him, Shirley trailing behind with a bright smile.

Liam had spotted someone who resembled Leander and called out on instinct, but luck threw him the real thing.

He threw his arms open for a hug, then froze halfway, suddenly remembering Leander was now the chairman of Jeff Enterprises.

Leander saved him from drowning in awkwardness. He hooked an arm around Liam's neck and tugged him in a jerk. "You came to Highcliffe and didn't even text me? Don't tell me you lost my number."

The tension in Liam's chest evaporated instantly.

He grabbed Leander by the shoulder and laughed. "Dude, you're busy running a whole corporation. I figured you wouldn't have time! I didn't even know you were here at Highcliffe!"

"I didn't exactly spell it out." Leander's grin softened, pulling him right back into their high school dynamic.

They swapped updates—how Liam and Shirley crushed their exams and made it into Stanton Academy, and how Leander ended up at Highcliffe University.

"Hold on, you're telling me you just walked into Highcliffe? No SAT? No recommendation? Nothing?" Liam shot him a dramatic glare "Don't lie. You definitely flashed that Jeff Enterprises chairman status at the front desk."

Leander smacked him between the shoulder blades. "You clown. I ranked first in our entire school. Getting into Highcliffe University was nothing."

Liam burst into laughter. "Leander, everyone knows you're the legend of Ravenridge. You don't miss."

Shirley watched them bicker, relieved to see nothing had changed between the two.

She had worried after the reunion that life would drag them apart.

Leander's warmth toward Liam told her that fear had been pointless.

When they reached the foot of Shallow Hill, Liam slung an arm over Leander's shoulders Alright listen We haven hung out in forever Get wasted tonight. Then, we'll hit a cybercafe till sunrise. No excuses."

Verhaven, out in

Highcliffe had broadened Liam's horizons. He grew up fast. Even so, he missed

those nights of cheap beer and late gaming sessions with Leander more than he wanted to admit.

...

Back at the Shadow Division base, Christopher and Jimmy had barely stepped

inside when Jimmy's custom receiver buzzed.

He checked the screen. His pupils tightened instantly. "D*mn it..."

Christopher moved closer, brows furrowed.

Jimmy's jaw locked. "A few minutes ago, the Arbitration Office uploaded a two billion bounty to the global assassin network. They just turned Jeff into an international contract target."

He lowered his voice. "The one who accepted the job is the Netherweb."

Christopher's expression froze.

His eyes narrowed until they were nothing but sharp slits.

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Chapter 480

"What? The Netherweb?" Christopher's pupils tightened. His composure cracked for the first time that day, proof of how serious that name had become across the world.

"Heaven-Slayer, Earth-Breaker, Ghost and Ghouls... that's the old line tied to them," Jimmy voiced the old saying under his breath while tension pressed deeper across his expression.

During the Warring States Era of Astria-long before the territories unified-an assassin ring with that same title moved through seven rival regions. They slipped across borders, hunted envoys, and left every ruler terrified of the dark. Their presence blanketed the land like a web nobody could escape.

That ancient branch vanished from history books. The Netherweb Jimmy referred to was of a later age, yet it carried a reputation that spanned more than a century.

No one had ever uncovered their numbers or hierarchy. Their strength remained a mystery. Even the Shadow Division, with its deep intelligence network, held only fragments.

They lacked the Arbitration Office's global visibility, though no power on Earth dared to treat them lightly. Even the Arbitration Office maintained distance, the same way one predator watches another across the canyon.

Decades earlier, a horrifying event had shaped their legend.

Three Infernal Crown Transcendents were discovered dead on a small farm in the northern Agylae. Not a single sign of a struggle remained. The bodies looked placed rather than killed.

The martial world spiraled into panic. Assassins whispered the Netherweb's name like a death omen. Every top-tier fighter started checking over their shoulder.

Shadow Division archives held something even worse. More than a century ago, the Netherweb eliminated over ten King Phase masters of that era.

They stood as a hidden colossus, matching the Arbitration Office in influence, coiled silently at the top of the world.

Their acceptance of Leander's bounty meant danger followed him like a second shadow every moment.

"We need to warn Jeff right now!"

Christopher lifted his phone and stepped toward the exit, but Jimmy pulled him back sharply.

"Christopher, it won't matter." Jimmy's tone dropped low. "Letting him know won't change anything."

He rubbed his forehead. "The Netherweb's work is unnatural. Their kills leave no breath, no footprint, no echo. You never learn when they appear or when the job ends. Everything rides on Jeff now. Whether he makes it through depends on his own strength."

Christopher froze in place, unsure what to argue. A cold heaviness spread inside him. Wherever Leander stood in that moment, a battlefield waited to erupt.

"Leander, you better not ditch me tonight."

At the base of Swallow Hill, Liam latched onto Leander with a wide grin.

He shot a quick look at Shirley. "Babe, I'm clocking the whole night with Leander. You're good with that, right?"

Shirley laughed behind her hand. "You two haven't hung out in forever. Go crazy. I'll tag along. No reason to be upset."

If it had been any other friend dragging Liam into bars and cybercafes until dawn, she would have snapped. Leander wasn't just some friend. If he wanted Liam at clubs, lounges, or any questionable after-hours hangout, she would look the other way with a smile.

Any connection to the power behind Leander could change their entire future.

Leander chuckled. His last stretch of days had been filled with training and travel. He barely remembered what it felt like to unwind.

"You trying to drink me into the floor?" He nudged Liam's shoulder with a grin. "Alright. Tonight we stay out until we drop. Whatever you want, count me in."

Liam threw an arm around Leander and waved down a car.

"There's a bar near Stanton Academy. Great vibe, clean design. Let's hit that one. I know the owner." Inside the car, Liam turned.

"You pick the place, and don't pay a penny." Leander nodded, which earned a dramatic groan from Liam.

They reached the bar street by Stanton Academy's north gate. Liam guided Shirley into a sleek three-floor music bar. Leander followed behind them.

Inside, chandeliers glittered overhead. Glass wallpaper reflected slow-moving lights. Soft electronic music drifted across the room, giving the place a warm, nighttime glow.

It wasn't even the weekend yet, and most tables were already filled with college students. The whole place hummed with youthful energy.

"Mr. Preston!" A middle-aged man hustled over the moment Liam stepped inside, smiling widely.

"Chuck, give us something private. I'm catching up with my best bro," Liam spoke like someone familiar with the place.

Chuck Massey nodded quickly and guided them to a third-floor balcony enclosed by reflective, soundproof glass. They had a clear view outward though no one on the lower levels could see who occupied the space.

"This place looks sharp." Leander leaned back on the couch, taking in the view.

"Didn't oversell it, right? Classy spot." Liam grinned and ordered a bottle of Remy Martin Louis XIII with snacks.

They clinked glasses once the drinks arrived. Stories from high school flowed easily. Shirley sipped slowly, smiling whenever the two got loud.

An hour passed. Louis XIII mixed with Sprite wasn't the strongest, yet more than a dozen glasses nudged Liam into a slur-heavy haze.

Footsteps echoed from the stairs.

A crowd made their way to the third floor.

A young man and woman walked at the front. The woman wore luxury brands head to toe. The guy beside her carried the air of old

money handsome features, sharp.. posture, an Enatria-tailored shirt, and a natural aura of entitlement.

More than ten people trailed behind them.

The guy reached the top and spotted the trio inside the glass balcony.

His eyes skimmed over Leander as if he were scenery, then locked directly onto Liam.

He approached with a slow, practiced confidence. Once he stood before Liam, he spoke with an arrogant calm, "Liam. There you are."

He gestured toward the tables. "A few department heads from the student union are meeting here. Do something for me and move your girlfriend and yourself elsewhere."

His tone carried the weight of command, almost like Liam existed to follow orders.

Liam's expression changed instantly. He clearly recognized him. Read complete version only at find-novel.net

He stood straight.

"Mr. Dunphy, my apologies." He attempted a respectful smile. "I'm with an old friend I never get to see. We're catching up. Could you pick another table instead? I'll govern everything for you." '

Nervous caution colored every word.

The young man, Linton Murphy, didn't shift. His eyes sharpened into thin blades.

"I told you to move. You didn't understand?"

The sudden chill in his tone stiffened the air a dark line cut across Liam's brow.

Anger flickered, although he kept himself restrained. His fist trembled beside his leg.

Everyone stared at Liam.

No one noticed the frost settling in Leander's eyes.

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