

From Outcast to Overlord The Unyielding Heir (Leander Ashcroft)

Chapter 511

'I'll be waiting for you at 9 p.m. tomorrow at the Yelem Church.'

Leander glanced over the note. A small spark flickered at his fingertips and burned it into thin smoke.

He didn't need to wonder who sent it. It was clearly from Dennis.

Maeve, who stood closest to him, noticed nothing. She only saw a thin wisp of smoke fade into the air. "So, what do you think? Is it okay? Can you go with me?"

She held onto Leander's arm and gently shook it. Her lips puffed out as she acted cute without trying to hide it.

In front of Leander, she was just like a teenage girl with her first crush. There was no trace of her superstar image.

"Tomorrow night."

Leander's eyes shifted as he remembered that Dennis' invitation was also for tomorrow night. The Benjamin family's banquet was scheduled for the same night.

He turned his head and asked casually, "Where is the banquet being held?" Maeve perked up right away. She said, "They haven't set the place yet, but the organizer of the MV shoot will tell me within ten minutes."

As she spoke, her phone vibrated. She opened the message and held the phone out to Leander. "The message just came in. The banquet is at the highest church in Yelem tomorrow night. Can you come with me?"

She looked nervous as she asked. She was afraid he would turn her down.

"The highest church?" Leander gave a light laugh. "Holding a banquet in a church, huh? The Benjamin family really has guts."

Yelem was considered sacred ground by three major religions. A church was seen as one of the most sacred places in people's hearts. The Benjamin family's choice of a church for a banquet was the same as openly disrespecting faith itself.

It meant the Benjamin family no longer cared about God and only prioritized their ambition.

Leander let out a soft laugh and nodded. "Fine. I'll go with you."

He was almost sure Dennis had invited him to the church on purpose. It was probably tied to the Benjamin family's banquet.

Dennis wanted to defeat him at the banquet to achieve some goal.

Leander picked up a piece of fruit. His eyes held a mocking smile. He was starting to feel interested.

When the Lynford sisters saw how calm and distant he looked, they felt annoyed. They coughed on purpose and said to Maeve, "Eve, you still have a night MV shoot. It's almost time."

They didn't want Maeve staying with Leander any longer. They disliked the way he acted as if he were above everyone else.

Maeve made a slight sound as she remembered she still had work tonight.

She held onto Leander's hand and tested the waters as she said, "I need to go shoot an MV at the Yelem Palace tonight. Can you come with me?"

Leander glanced at her. His face stayed calm as he said, "I already agreed to go to the banquet with you tomorrow night. Now you also want me to go with you to your shoot tonight. Aren't you pushing too far?"

He stood up and waved his hand. "I'm full. Go do your job. I don't have time to go with you."

Maeve pouted. She felt unwilling to give up, but she had no choice. Zara and Liana exchanged a look. At Zara's signal, Liana quietly followed behind Leander.

After he left the restaurant, Leander sat on a bench in the garden of the Yelem Hotel and looked up at the star-filled sky.

Liana suddenly sat down across from him.

"You're Leander, right?"

Leander lowered his head and looked at her. She was the woman who had been practicing the Devourer's Flow. His face stayed blank as he said, "You're Maeve's bodyguard. Why are you looking for me?"

Liana took off her sunglasses, revealing her beautiful face. She stared straight at Leander.

"I came to talk to you."

Leander rested his hands behind his

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head and leaned back against the

chair. He found it amusing. He didn't know what this new member of the Southern Wyvern Blade wanted to talk about with him as the Chief Instructor.

Liana didn't know what he was thinking. She spoke coldly.

"Let me introduce myself. My name is Liana Lynford. I'm Eve's bodyguard. I've been

with her for almost three months.

"To be honest, she has mentioned

you many times this past month. My sister and have been curious about you. We wanted to see what kind of man could make Eve so serious about someone. But after seeing you, I'm disappointed."

She repeated the same things she had said to Maeve earlier in the room.

Leander didn't care at all. He didn't even look at her.

"Whether you're disappointed or not is your business. It has nothing to do with me. You didn't need to come tell me about it."

Liana's gaze turned colder. His attitude made her feel even more upset for Maeve.

She continued, "Leander, I don't know what you rely on to act this arrogantly. But I want you to know this. These past months, Eve has turned down countless rich young men for your sake."

"Some of them came from powerful families. Some had strong backgrounds. Many were good people. There are plenty who are better than you in every way. But Eve kept her distance from all of them because of you."

Leander stayed calm and said, "So what?"

He spread his hands and looked indifferent. "Who she wants to be with and who she doesn't want to be with is her choice. I never forced her to do anything. What is the point of telling me all this?"

His attitude finally stirred anger in Liana's eyes. Her tone grew colder.

"Leander, don't go too far. Eve's an international star. She's one of the hottest singers in the world right now. She's talented and successful. She even throws away her pride to chase after you. And what about you? You don't have much to your name. Yet you still act picky. You treat her kindness like it is just a tool for you to look cool. Do you think that's fun?"

Leander shook his head lightly. He found her words ridiculous.

"You should say all this to Maeve. Tell her to stay away from me. Tell her to treat me

like a stranger. Don't come to me with this. From the start, she was the one who kept chasing me. I never had feelings for her."

Hearing this only made Liana angrier.

"Leander, you really don't know what's good for you. Eve is willing to overcome such

a huge gap just to be with you. And you say you don't have feelings for her."

She pulled the chair back and stood up.

"I wanted to have a proper talk with you. Now it seems clear you don't deserve her care."

She pointed at Leander. Cold light flashed in her eyes.

"Listen carefully. Eve is our good friend. Since you have no feelings for her, stay away from her. Don't show up in front of her on purpose anymore.

"I won't allow you to trample on her pride.

"Don't think that being good at fighting makes you untouchable. If there is a chance,

I'll show you what a real fighter looks like."

Leander tapped the table with his fingers. He had completely lost patience with this self-righteous woman.

"I'm really curious who gave you the nerve to talk to me like this."

A sharp light rose in his eyes. His voice stayed flat.

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"Do you know who I am?" Leander stared straight at Liana, a sharp gleam flashing in his eyes.

"How dare you spout such arrogant nonsense in front of me without even knowing my identity first?"

After all, he was the chief instructor of the Southern Wyvern Blade, the highest commander of its forces. On the other hand, Liana was merely a newly admitted member of the organization, yet she dared to interrogate him face-to-face and even threaten him.

However, Liana showed not the slightest fear. She met Leander's gaze and said boldly, "I don't care who you are. Even if you're the son of some wealthy family or have powerful backing, I will never forgive you if you trample on Maeve's feelings! Let me tell you clearly. Although my sister and I may be Maeve's bodyguards, we have another identity too. We are members of the Southern Wyvern Blade! You can go look it up yourself and see what that identity represents. You'd better remember everything that I had told you before. If you dare to mistreat Maeve again, don't blame me for teaching you a lesson!" With that being said, she didn't wait for Leander's reaction and left arrogantly.

Looking at her leaving, Leander chuckled as he found the whole thing interesting.

He was the dignified chief instructor of the Southern Wyvern Blade, yet he had just been lectured by an ordinary team member. Just the thought of Liana, who learned the Devourer's Flow that he created himself, had dared to threaten him in the face amused him.

Leander didn't take it to heart as he leaned back in his chair and continued waiting. About ten minutes later, Nathan, Luke, and Evander finally arrived.

"Leander, I really can't be at ease. Livia and the girls are terrified that the Benjamin family will retaliate. Let's buy tickets for tomorrow morning's flight and leave, okay?" Nathan pleaded. If it weren't for their friendships, they would have already booked their flights and escaped long ago.

Leander placed his hands behind his head and smiled. "I told you already. Don't worry. The Benjamin family can't stir up anything."

Hearing his words, the trio exchanged looks.

Then, Luke hesitated for a moment before saying, "Leander, we know you influence Highcliffe. You're connected to the Ashcroft family and the Florian family, and even Daphne and Ethan would step up for you. However, this is Yelem. No matter how powerful the Ashcrofts and Florians were, they couldn't affect Yelem."

Evander stepped forward and patted Leander's shoulder. "We're serious, Leander. We know that you're strong, but there's no need to fight the Benjamin family head-on. This is their turf."

Looking at them, Leander suddenly had a big grin on his face.

"Did you guys think that I could be where I was in Highcliffe because I could suppress Wave Alliance with the help of the Ashcroft family and the Florian family?"

The three were confused by his words and asked, "Wasn't it?"

Back then, Leander had beaten Wave Alliance's men in the bar. At that moment, Rodrick had come personally, bringing Tycen with him. Leander faced both alone. Later, Ethan and Daphne arrived to support him, so naturally, the three assumed Leander had powerful backing from those families.

However, now that they heard Leander's words, they realized it didn't seem to be the case.

If it wasn't because of the Florian and Ashcroft families, they wondered why Wave Alliance would be forced into submission. How could even Tycen dare not to lay a finger on him?

Leander took a sip of tea and smiled, saying, "Although the Florian family and Ashcroft family are indeed powerful in Highcliffe, they're nothing more than that. The reason I dared strike Denzel in public was not because of them, but because of myself." He looked at them and continued, "In this world, power and money are what people chase as their ultimate goals. However, all these things are fleeting. Only when you hold a person's life in your hands is the ultimate path. I told you not to fear the Benjamin family because I have the strength to crush them. I alone could topple the entire Benjamin family."

"You... You can crush the Benjamin family by yourself?" The three were completely baffled.

Although they admired the overpowered heroes in fantasy novels who could change the fate of nations alone, this was the reality they were talking about. Thus, how could one match a family that dominated a whole country? They doubted that Leander was some sort of president.

Seeing their bewildered faces, Leander only smiled faintly and raised one finger.

"I know you guys can't understand. Tomorrow night, the Benjamin family will be hosting a banquet for the Dechorians at the Yelem Church. Come with me."

Leander continued smiling as he slowly clenched his fist.

"When the time comes, I'll show you what true power is."

Hearing his words, the three exchanged looks and were stunned. However seeing Leander's unwavering gaze and recalling how neither Wave Alliance's enforcers nor the general could do anything to him, not to mention his trick of catching a gun bare-handed, they suddenly realized something.

"Leander, do you mean martial arts?"

Leander flicked his finger and gave a mysterious smile.

"You'll see tomorrow night."

Livia and the other girls were still shaken by the Benjamin family's incident. However, after Nathan and the others reassured them, they reluctantly agreed to

stay.

Nathan and the others were still

somewhat fearful, but Leander's unshakeable confidence made them increasingly curious. They wanted to witness for themselves what kind of power Leander was talking about.

Soon, a day had passed. As Livia and the others sat in anxiety, evening soon arrived. Maeve had already found Leander and was waiting with him at the entrance.

"Nathan, are we really going to the Benjamin family's banquet? Aren't we walking into a trap?" Livia asked nervously.

"Livia, Leander said we don't need to worry about it. I trust him." Nathan comforted her softly.

Only then did Livia reluctantly nod and get on the bus.

It took Leander's group to the Yelem Church.

The usually solemn building was lively tonight. Outside, a massive open-air dance floor had been built around the church and was

decorated with colorful lightsel.ne

Beyond the dance floor, tall fences blocked off the area, with black-clad guards stationed at every entrance.

High-society guests of Yelem arrived one after another, dressed in extravagant attire.

Maeve appeared while linking arms with Leander, and Zara and Liana followed as personal protection. Both rolled their eyes helplessly, especially Liana, who wished she could kick Leander away from Maeve.

Nathan and the others followed with their partners. Celia and Aurora walked side by

side at the back, temporarily forming their own pair.

The group approached the entrance. Just as Maeve was about to show their invitation, Leander suddenly halted.

He looked down at the ground, then around them. His spiritual strength spread outward, and he narrowed his eyes as he felt something.

"This is... An array?"

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"This is... An array?" The moment Leander stepped into the grounds of the Yelem Church, his expression shifted.

Within his spiritual strength, the vast underground beneath the church unfolded in his mind like a schematic drawing rendered on a computer-clear and precise.

It was an array, one even larger than the ancestral protective array of the black dragons he had seen at the Aorinth Peaks.

A faint but terrifying killing intent pulsed from the earth below. It was concealed, not even leaking half an inch above the ground. However, nothing could hide from Leander's spiritual strength.

The church occupied several thousand square meters, crossing three streets. Yet, the formation beneath it was like chains binding a divine dragon-locking down all directions, with suppression points at every corner.

Within the array, Leander sensed a familiar aura.

It was Doomlight, which belonged to the Arbitration Office.

"It's the Arbitration Office again." Leander's eyes narrowed.

He had already sensed last evening that several extremely powerful individuals had arrived in Yelem, though he hadn't paid much attention. Now, it was clear that they were likely experts of the Arbitration Office.

Thinking of that note fired at him by the Hermit, Leander smiled in amusement.

"No wonder he called me here for a battle. He is planning to use this array and the Arbitration Office's strength to defeat me."

Though Leander saw through the Hermit's scheme, he showed nothing on his face. Without fear or hesitation, he stepped boldly into the array's range.

Even knowing the traps and killing intent hidden within, Leander marched forward unshaken this was his absolute confidence in his own strength.

Maeve held Leander's arm. Under countless watching eyes, they stepped directly onto the large dance floor.

"Isn't that Maeve?"

Many socialites turned to look.

Maeve's fame was already global. Her songs appeared frequently in Dollywood blockbusters, so the upper class of Yelem knew her well.

"Why is she here with a young man?"

"Look at the way he's dressed. It's so ordinary. Is she with him just because he's from Astria?"

"No, I don't think so. He might be just a low-profile person. He could probably be the son of some Astria tycoon."

The Yelem locals whispered among themselves in their own language as they threw curious glances at Leander.

On the other hand, Leander ignored them entirely. He sat with Maeve while Nathan and the rest looked uneasy in such a foreign, high-class setting.

Nathan, despite being from a wealthy family and having attended many banquets, had never been in one abroad-much less one hosted by the Benjamin family. Everything felt foreign and uncomfortable.

"Relax. Just have fun."

Leander swept his gaze around. This banquet had everything-tuna, caviar, truffles, lobsters-luxury ingredients everywhere.

He waved them off and leaned back casually.

"Our Yelem branch's manager is over there. Can you come with me?" Maeve asked.

"You can go by yourself." Leander waved at her dismissively as he closed his eyes to rest.

Maeve huffed and left on her own to greet the executives. Nathan and the others remained seated, all somewhat tense. In the meantime, Zara and Liana looked at Leander with disdain.

"You sure are bold, Leander. Do you know this is the Benjamin family's banquet? How dare you come here with Maeve? Do you really think Denzel would let you off the hook?" Liana mocked.

However, Leander didn't even flinch.

Annoyed, Liana glared fiercely and was about to continue when Zara raised a hand.

"Enough, Liana. Some people won't understand the situation unless they take a massive loss," Zara said coldly. She was also displeased with Leander, though she couldn't be bothered to argue.

Liana huffed and grabbed a drink from a passing waiter, ignoring him.

The banquet had yet to officially begin when noise erupted outside.

A Bentley slowly approached, escorted front and back by three

long Lincoln limousines. Then, a

man in a thick cloak stepped out

His sharp gaze, swept the crowd, and his presence was

overwhelming.

"That's Skur Dalion, head of the Dalion family!"

Many of Yelem's elites turned to look, eyes filled with respect.

The Dalion family was the fastest-rising power of the past decade in Yelem, having absorbed many declining old families and forming a formidable alliance, they could stand toe-to-toe with the Benjamin family.

As soon as Skur arrived, he drew the attention of the entire venue.

Seeing that none of the Benjamin family members had appeared yet, he snorted and walked straight in. Then, he sat at the most prominent table by the dance floor.

Soon, several more major figures from old Yelem families arrived. They all joined Skur, forming a clear faction.

"The Pittle family, Jones family, and Raddon family are all here. Looks like there'll be a showdown tonight.

It might turn into a major

confrontation between the Benjamin family and several alliances!"

Those who understood the political landscape whispered excitedly.

Although Leander kept his eyes closed, he heard every whisper clearly.

"Interesting. The Hermit didn't just lure me into this array, but he also wanted to help the Benjamin family establish dominance and crush all the families opposing them."

Thinking about it, Leander couldn't help but sneer.

The Hermit might have made all his plans, but in the end, the only thing that decided anything was power.

Soon, more elites continued to arrive. Livia and the other girls grew more nervous while Nathan and the boys tried to comfort them. Only Celia and Aurora stayed

calm.

Half an hour later, more commotion sounded outside.

A tall man entered wearing a world-class designer suit, hair slicked back perfectly.

He walked with long strides, surrounded by over a dozen bodyguards.

Denzel had finally arrived.

The moment he entered the church, he spotted Maeve across the hall, who was

chatting with several renowned directors.

"Maeve, I will make you mine tonight."

A cold glint flashed in Denzel's eyes as he took a step toward her.

Just then, his gaze shifted as he caught sight of Leander leaning back in his chair

with eyes closed, as if napping.

In that split second, his eyes widened in shock.

"Why is he here?!"

Shock washed through Denzel. After all, this banquet was hosted by the Benjamin

family, yet Leander sat there as if in his own home.

A surge of killing intent shot up inside Denzel.

"I was planning to deal with you after the banquet, but since you came on your own,

don't blame me for being cruel."

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Nathan and the others sitting beside Leander had been nervously scanning the room the entire time, terrified that someone from the Benjamin family might notice them.

The moment Denzel arrived, their expression changed drastically.

Livia clutched Nathan's arm tightly, her face as pale as a ghost

"Nathan, it's Denzel. He's here!"

Luke and the rest were shaken to the core, their expressions twisting with terror. When they realized Denzel was looking directly at them, their hearts sank.

In the meantime, Nathan stole a glance at Leander, only to find him still had his eyes closed and resting.

Helpless, Nathan lowered his voice to soothe Livia.

"Hmph." Denzel noticed their fear. Then, he dragged a finger across his own throat

in their direction, revealing a cruel, bloodthirsty grin that scared everyone half to death.

"Leander!" Nathan patted Leander urgently.

"Denzel noticed us!"

Hearing his words, Leander slowly opened his eyes and glanced in Denzel's direction. Then, he closed his eyes again.

"Don't worry. If anything goes wrong, I'll handle it."

Hearing his words, Liana couldn't help but snort.

"I truly admire your ignorance, Leander. Denzel has his eyes on you, yet you are still talking nonsense. If I were you, I'd have slipped out the back already."

Even as a member of the Southern Wyvern Blade, the Benjamin family's influence still made Liana feel immense pressure. Thus, she doubted that Leander had any capability to defy them.

However, Leander stayed utterly unmoved. His silence only fueled Liana's annoyance, and she wished Denzel would teach Leander a harsh lesson.

Denzel cast Leander one more chilling look but didn't act immediately.

Tonight's banquet was hosted by him, so maintaining appearances was the top priority.

With one sweep of his imposing presence, he moved toward Maeve.

As he passed, wealthy elites instinctively stepped aside, giving him an unobstructed path.

He walked like a crowned prince—highborn, authoritative, untouchable.

Standing before Maeve, he gave a courteous bow.

"Miss Reyne, we will meet again."

Hearing his voice, Maeve turned her head around. Upon seeing Denzel, her smile disappeared instantly.

"Mr. Benjamin, what do you want?"

To Maeve, Leander was everything. The Benjamin family had once crossed Leander, so no matter how prestigious Denzel was, she would never show him any respect.

Denzel's eyes darkened at her icy tone, but he forced a smile and said, "The banquet is about to begin. As tonight's host, I would like to invite you to the opening dance." Then, he extended his hand toward her.

Around them, countless socialites and noblewomen looked at Maeve with jealousy. They wished they could be in Maeve's place.

In Yelem, being favored by Denzel meant being a crown princess candidate—perhaps even the future queen. Yet, this honor had fallen to a woman from Astria.

Denzel extended his invitation to Maeve in front of everyone with confidence.

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Before this, the Royal Entertainment had already reached an agreement with him that they would arrange for Maeve to dance with him. In his eyes, although Maeve was an international superstar, she was still an artist under Royal Entertainment. Artists were expected to comply with the company's arrangements. Thus he wasn't worried that she would refuse him. After all, for a celebrity, the company's resources were the foundation of their career in the

entertainment industry. If she offended the company, the consequence would inevitably be being sidelined.

Just when Denzel thought Maeve was going to accept his proposal, a cold voice cut through the air.

"Sorry, Mr. Benjamin. I already have a date tonight," Maeve said before walking away.

Her rejection stunned the entire hall.

Denzel froze mid-gesture. Fury flashed in his eyes as he glared sharply at the Royal Entertainment manager beside him.

The manager, Icana Wrenn, apologized quickly before chasing after Maeve.

"Maeve, what are you doing!?"

To open the Yelem market, Icana had already promised Denzel that Maeve would dance with him. He assumed Maeve would obey for the sake of her career, but never did he expect she would reject Denzel so bluntly.

He looked at Maeve and said angrily, "Denzel is the heir of the Benjamin family! Dancing with him is a huge boost for your MV promotion here.. You would be the center of attention tonight, so why would you refuse it?"

"Mr. Wrenn, I already have a partner." Maeve's voice remained cold.

"I will only dance with him tonight." With that, she walked straight back to Leander

and leaned on his arm affectionately.

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At the sight of this, Icana's pupils shrank. He rushed over and stared at Maeve, saying, "Maeve, stop this nonsense! Although your father shares in Royal Entertainment we've given you priority in resources, that doesn't mean you are the top celebrity here! You're an entertainer, and you will follow the company arrangements. I don't care who this young man is. You cannot refuse Denzel's invitation tonight!"

Icana had long been fed up with Maeve's haughty and self-righteous behavior, and

he finally revealed his true colors today.

"Is that so?" Maeve rested her chin lightly on Leander's arm.

"From this moment on, I am no longer an artist under Royal Entertainment. I am terminating my contract."

Hearing her words, Icana was in disbelief.

"Terminating your contract? You still have a year and a half left! You'll have to pay a penalty!"

"I'll pay whatever the amount is, just stop bothering me." Maeve didn't even flinch.

Icana stood frozen, unable to process what had just happened. He never imagined that agreeing to a single dance on her behalf would lead to this. Before he could say anything, he heard a heavy series of footsteps approaching. Then, he turned around and saw Denzel striding toward them with a cold expression.

Initially, Denzel was going to deal with Leander after the banquet. However, when

he saw Maeve publicly reject him and walk straight into Leander's arms, he could no longer withstand this absurdity anymore.

His chilling gaze swept over Nathan and the others, making them hold their breath in terror. Finally, his eyes locked onto Leander, and his lips curled in a vicious smile.

"I told you before that this isn't over. Since you dare walk into my banquet, I'll show you what happens to those who offend the Benjamin family."

Then, he raised his hand.

In that split second, dozens of black-clad enforcers stepped forward.

"Grab them. Tie them up and throw them into the Volga River!"

After one day of simmering rage, Denzel finally struck.

The moment his words fell, Livia and the girls trembled violently, and their faces

drained of all color.

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"Tie up every one of these Astrians and dump them in the Volga River." Denzel's eyes turned cold as he stared straight at Leander's group. He was done pretending.

He had hosted tonight's ball, and he hadn't planned to cause a scene before the main event even began. But Maeve ignoring him while showering Leander with attention had pushed him past his limit. The anger he had been holding in finally snapped.

Besides, tossing a few Astrians out of a massive ballroom like this was nothing. With the Benjamins running the whole event, he had every right to decide who stayed and who got dragged out.

As for throwing Leander and the others into the river, disappearing a few people in the Sahar Wastes never made much noise anyway.

Denzel lifted a hand. Dozens of men in black security gear stepped forward. Their sunglasses caught the light with a sharp, icy glint.

Nathan and the others immediately tensed. The girls, especially Livia, went pale on the spot. Deep down, they had already been blaming Leander. They had no idea why he insisted on attending a high-society party run by the Benjamins. If they had just flown out of Yelem yesterday and gone back to Astria, they wouldn't be standing in the middle of this mess.

With those men closing in, Nathan, Luke, and Evander all turned to Leander.

Now that Denzel had made his move, the only person they could rely on was Leander. In a place like Yelem, a few students from Astria had no chance of standing up to the Benjamins.

"These Astrians really drew the short straw. I wonder what they did to piss off Denzel."

Plenty of local elites shook their heads. The heads of the families who hated the Benjamins just watched from the side. They looked almost entertained by the idea of Leander and his friends getting crushed.

There was no point in talking about resistance. The Benjamins had people stationed everywhere in the ballroom. A handful of foreign students from Astria had nothing waiting for them except helpless resignation.

That was the difference between power and insignificance. The weak had no choice except to bow their heads.

The two women standing beside Maeve, Zara and Liana, didn't move at all. They weren't the least bit worried that anyone here would dare lay a hand on her.

Maeve was an international star. Anything that happened to her inside a Benjamin- hosted event would explode across global media. Even major nations hated dealing with international outrage. A single family had even less room to take that hit.

"Hmph. That foolish boy. Now that Denzel really came for him, I want to see how he plans to get out of this." Zara and Liana folded their arms. They were ready to step in if things became critical. Before that, they wanted to watch Leander pay for his stubborn pride.

Just as the security team closed in on Leander's group, a sudden gust ripped across the ballroom. The men were thrown backward all at once, smashing into tables and chairs until everything around them shattered.

The horror didn't stop there. When the men hit the ground, blood seeped from every orifice. Every single one of them died where they fell. Dozens of lives were wiped out in an instant.

The entire ballroom froze. No one understood what had just happened. When they finally snapped back to reality, a slim figure rose slowly at Leander's side. Touch my Master Leander and die."

Celia's complexion had gone cold. She was usually the picture of soft, delicate beauty, yet the moment she stepped forward on her own, a sharp chill rolled off her and spread through the room. Everyone watching sucked in a breath the second they felt it.

So this was the woman who took out dozens of people in a heartbeat?

"Infernal Crown Transcendent?" Denzel's eyes tightened. He was already a Transcendent Realm master, and the moment the wind surged around them, he had felt that wild pressure rolling out of Celia's body. The power in her was at least on his level, maybe even stronger.

He never saw this coming. He had no idea someone like that was traveling with Leander's group.

What really shook him was the way Celia stood there. Her position and the direction she faced made it obvious she was treating Leander as the one in charge. The "Master Leander" she spoke of could only mean him.

She's a Transcendent Realm master, and not just any master but an Infernal Crown Transcendent at the very top. Yet she still calls Leander "Master Leander." So who exactly is Leander supposed to be? How terrifying does his background have to be for someone like her to speak to him that way?

The moment Celia rose to her feet, Zara and Liana's expressions shifted. Both of them looked genuinely shaken.

She doesn't make a sound. She doesn't even move, and in an instant, she wipes out dozens of people. Even our Southern Wyvern Blade captain wouldn't be able to pull that off. And this girl who looks like some gentle, soft-spoken college student turns out to be a fighter who's way stronger than our captain could ever hope to be? They couldn't stop staring at Leander. It suddenly dawned on them how ridiculous their earlier assumptions had been.

That was why he acted as if he owned the place. With someone like that at his side, of course, he didn't care who he offended. Zara and Liana exchanged a glance, their eyes flickering with a mix of shock and disbelief, and for a moment, they struggled to find their words.

The air in the hall turned heavy. Every gaze drifted toward them, and no one dared make a sound. Even Zendel, the one caught in the middle of it all, froze. His pupils tightened, and that usual swagger dropped right off his face.

He never would have imagined that, among this group of Astria college kids on a casual trip, there would be an Infernal Crown Transcendent hiding in plain sight.

Even the Benjamins, as powerful as they were, had only produced one Infernal Crown Transcendent in their entire recorded history, the Hermit. These people, whom he thought he could crush like insects, suddenly had someone beyond anything he could handle watching over them.

Livia and the other girls from the various institutions finally snapped out of their fear. When they looked at Celia, their expressions were filled with pure disbelief. They never would have guessed that the sweet Stanton Academy beauty who had been traveling with them was carrying the kind of power that could end a life without blinking.

Nathan and the others were just as shaken. Their eyes kept shifting, trying to make sense of what they were seeing.

The room stayed silent for a long beat. Leander finally lifted his head after taking a bite of watermelon. His eyes were cold when he looked straight at Zendel. "I told you yesterday I didn't just dare hit you. I'd kill you too. You remember that?"

Zendel's expression twisted the moment he heard it. He shot backward almost instantly. The Primordial Energy he had kept hidden for years burst out all at once, and he pushed his speed to the absolute limit.

He had barely moved when Leander lifted a finger. Celia was already in motion. She shot forward twice as fast as Zendel and drove a punch straight toward his chest.

A violent blast ripped through the hall. Tables and chairs flew everywhere. Wealthy guests scattered across the floor like someone had dropped them into a hurricane. Zendel's innate vitality surged around him and formed a shield, but Celia's punch cut through it like a blade cutting into soft clay. Her

fist slammed into his right chest, and the impact echoed through the entire space.

"Pwah!" Zendel spat a mouthful of blood. He might have reached the Transcendent Realm, but he was only barely inside it. He had no chance against an Infernal Crown Transcendent like Celia. One punch was all it took to send him flying a hundred yards away.

Celia hadn't even tried. That casual hit had already crushed him. She stepped forward once more and threw another punch from afar. That one swing alone would have erased ten Zendels on the spot.

Her force roared out like an enraged dragon. At the last second, Zendel let out a desperate scream. "Great-great-grandfather, help me!"

The moment his shout tore through the air, a surge of wind dropped from the dark sky. It slammed down between Zendel and Celia and shattered the incoming punch.

The remaining force was so strong that it sent Celia skidding backward. She only stopped when she reached Leander's side.

A wave of shock rippled through the crowd. Everyone looked up, and there he was, standing on the church's bell tower like some kind of solemn divine figure.

The Hermit had finally shown himself.

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At the very top of the clock tower, a middle-aged man in a flowing robe stood with his hands clasped behind his back, a faint smile playing on his lips.

Even though it was night, the Yelem Church was blazing with lights. Every corner was illuminated, and everyone could clearly see his face.

Countless people froze, their expressions filled with terror and awe. The Yelem Church was massive, towering high above them. For ordinary people, even trying to climb it with a ladder would be nearly impossible. Yet here was

this man, standing atop the green bricks as if it were nothing. It was beyond comprehension.

"The Hermit!" Celia whispered, her expression tightening with concern. Just that single strike earlier had already made her painfully aware of the insurmountable gap between her and the King of Assassins.

If The Hermit hadn't intended to rescue Denzel, that one move alone would have been enough to wound her severely or even end her life.

With the Hermit's appearance, Leander barely moved. He leaned back in his chair, a sly, almost sinister curve tugging at the corner of his mouth.

Under the gaze of everyone present, the Hermit floated down from the top of the clock tower, landing as silently as a feather.

The sight shook the entire crowd again. Nathan and the others stared in disbelief, unable to process what they were witnessing.

They had seen high-flying Martial Practitioners in TV shows and movies, but this clock tower was over a hundred meters tall, as daunting as a cliff. Even the most agile heroes in those dramas had never dared to leap straight off such heights.

The Hermit's presence completely upended everything they thought they knew. Compared to the shock of the others, Zara and Liana managed to keep their composure. Coming from the Southern Wyvern Blade, they were familiar with martial arts taken to its extreme, capable of walking on air. But even they had never imagined that Yelem's group would encounter someone like this.

The Hermit stood with his hands behind his back, exuding an aura that felt as if it held the sky and earth itself. His eyes swept over Celia, calm and measured. "When I blocked your punch earlier, I could feel your innate vitality. It reminds me of the King of Assassins back in the day, Terek Shelton. You must be his disciple, right?"

"Yes." Celia nodded softly, a flicker of hatred sparking deep in her gaze. She had heard Terek mention it. A century ago, the Hermit had defeated him and seized the title of King of Assassins, forcing Terek into hiding and out of the Assassin's World ever since.

Hearing her answer, the Hermit showed no surprise. He said lightly, "Good. With a disciple like you, Terek's name as the King of Assassins is still well defended."

Then in an instant, his tone shifted. His eyes became as cold and sharp as blades. "But since you are Terek's disciple, you should know me. Even at his prime, Terek fell to me a hundred years ago. And you, his disciple, dare to spar with me?"

He let out a single, low shout. Celia's pupils shrank, and she stumbled back a few steps, nearly losing her focus.

This was the gap between an Infernal Crown Transcendent and a triple-turn Half-King.

As Celia retreated, a long, pale hand rested lightly on her shoulder, calming her mind once more. Leander held a cup in one hand and drew her behind him, a faint smile playing across his lips. "The Hermit, now that you're here, it means you're ready. Our wager is about to be settled."

The Hermit smiled and nodded, spreading his hands casually. "Tonight, with everyone gathered here and Yelem Church right by, isn't this the perfect place for our showdown?"

Nathan and the others who had followed Leander all the way there turned pale, stunned by what they were hearing.

The Hermit rides the wind, like some immortal descending into the mortal world, clearly a terrifying presence beyond imagination. Yet Leander stands opposite him, speaking as an equal. Could it be that Leander is on the same level as him?

Zara and Liana froze, their expressions a mix of shock and disbelief as they stared at Leander.

The Hermit just lands from the wind, clearly a top-tier force in the world, yet he says he wants a showdown with Leander. That word 'showdown' is only used between equals. Does that mean Leander is strong enough to match the Hermit?

Liana's eyes trembled slightly. She could only feel like everything around her was just a hallucination.

The guy I've roasted and even gone to threaten personally turns out to be an unrivaled master?

The Hermit and Leander locked eyes for what felt like forever. In the next instant, a gust of wind exploded beneath the Hermit's feet, transforming into a streak of light that shot straight into the sky, carrying a thunderous, sweeping sound with it.

"Jeff, let's do this. To put it in your Astria Martial Practitioner terms, today we settle who's stronger and who survives!"

Leander grinned and shot a glance at Celia, silently telling her to watch over Nathan and the others. Without any visible motion, he turned into a blue streak and shot up into the sky.

The two beams of light pierced the heavens, leaving everyone on the ground frozen in horror. Nathan, Luke, and Evander-the three who knew Leander best could only gape upward in that moment it felt like they were meeting him for the very first time.

"Jeff?" Zara and Liana's hearts raced, but even through the shock, they caught the

name. It rang a strange kind of familiarity to them.

In the next instant, their bodies shuddered as they both turned toward Maeve. "Maeve, could he really be..."

Maeve blinked, a mix of pride and glee radiating from her as if she were showing off

her boyfriend. "Yep, that's him. The legendary Chief Instructor you've all been talking about."

Zara and Liana just froze, mouths agape.

Denzel, badly wounded and

breathing shallowly, still had enough

clarity to process what he was

seeing When Leander and the Hermitvanished into the vōrd together, his face drained of@olor. He could never have imagined that the young man he had provoked was actually the sole legend of the International Combat Units.

A sharp roar of wind tore through the sky. The two beams dissipated, revealing

Leander and the Hermit standing tall.

"Jeff, I've been sitting in the Artic

plains for fifty years. Today, I'll test your Supreme Martial with my Frostbound Reversal!" The Hermit's eyes glimmered with an icy on clenched his fist, and a wave of frost poured from his arm, forming a

chill He

massive ice spear tens of feet long

in the sky.

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The spear split into two, then four, then eight, until eventually hundreds of ice spears streaked across the sky like frozen hailstorm blanketing the night. Even from hundreds of meters below, the crowd shivered from the sheer cold.

"Frostborne Halo!" The Hermit raised his palm. Hundreds of ice spears began spinning at speeds barely visible, merging into a gigantic ice crystal wheel hurtling toward Leander.

The Frostborne Halo tore through the night sky. The Hermit had thrown everything he had into this attack, holding nothing back.

A few kilometers away from Yelem Church, seven figures stood in a line atop a tall building.

After seeing the Frostborne Halo in the sky, Deo's lips curved into a sly, victorious grin. "The Hermit's done it. The prey is trapped. Now it's our turn to show how the hunters strike."

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"Frostborne Halo!" the Hermit shouted.

Huge crystalline wheels of ice spun across the sky. As they turned, violent downdrafts ripped air from every direction, and a biting cold spread out to blanket the heavens.

The Hermit had sat unmoving on the Artic plains for fifty years. He had not shifted a muscle, not spoken a single word. As the revered master had put it, this was the peak of meditative discipline.

Few seasoned mystics could keep such a regimen for even a season. The Hermit endured it for five decades through sheer will and extraordinary power. Over time, his aura fused with the frozen wastes. He had become, in a way, a walking piece of the North itself.

Now the chill that had lived in him poured outward. The sky froze in a three-hundred-meter dome, and the ice crystal wheel dove straight at Leander.

Ice chips skittered under Leander's feet. He raised one hand. The instant the wheel struck, he threw a punch.

Whoosh!

A brutal, upward surge of force, so fierce it cut through everything, hit the center of the wheel.

Crack!

The wheel's core caved in under Leander's blow. Hairline fractures spidered outward, racing across the surface.

"Hmm?" The Hermit's eyes narrowed. For a heartbeat, then, boom, the giant wheel detonated.

Shards of ice exploded outward. Those watching looked up. It seemed as if frost and snow had started falling for no reason. Under the lights, the crystals

caught the glow and glittered like a river of stars. The spectacle was beautiful, but nobody there seemed to care about the view. All eyes were fixed on the two figures in the sky.

No one in the crowd was willing to look away. Even as they marveled at Leander and the Hermit, curiosity rooted them to the spot.

The Hermit barely reacted when the wheel shattered. He stamped the ground, and his body shot dozens of zhang. He brought his palms together, and the cyclonic cold behind him detonated into eighteen streams of ice wind.

"Frostbound Dragon!" The eighteen streams of icy wind layered over one another and twisted together until they merged. Each one stretched for dozens of feet, and together they wove a web that sealed off every inch of space around Leander.

This was one of the Hermit's signature techniques learned on the Artic plains. Ten years earlier, while sitting over the frozen waters, a strange blue whale had slid past beneath him. With a single thought, he condensed eighteen ice currents, plunged into the water, and froze the whale solid.

A decade later, the technique had only sharpened. The Hermit was confident he could bind even a mighty azure dragon.

The air erupted with sonic booms. The eighteen currents rolled and boiled. Even before they arrived, their cold had already started to crystallize the atmosphere.

Ten feet, twenty feet, fifty feet, layers of ice stacked over one another. They had already started closing in on the space around Leander. In the end, a massive ice sphere formed in midair, trapping him completely inside.

The sphere was a prison, much like the Blood Demon's blood coffin. Yet while that coffin slowly corroded its captive with blood power, this ice sphere was purer. Its absolute cold could freeze flesh and steel in an instant. It could even congeal a person's internal energy in a blink.

If the Blood Demon's blood world collided with the Hermit's will, one thought from the Hermit could freeze the world as a whole.

"Is this what fighting closest to King Phase looks like?" Celia breathed below, panic plain on her expression. She was an Infernal Crown

Transcendent at the very summit of the Transcendents, yet watching Leander and the Hermit left her feeling utterly outmatched. This level was beyond anything she could touch.

Zara and Leana stood frozen. They had mocked Leander earlier as an arrogant materialist. Now they realized the man they had idolized, the Chief Instructor they had always bragged about, was the same Leander standing at the center of that storm.

They had missed Leander's duel with the elder from the Tarlyns at Stormcairn River by a week and regretted it. Tonight, atop Yelem Church, that regret was finally being erased.

Suddenly, a sharp, high-pitched note cut through the night.

A seam appeared along the side of the giant ice sphere. A cold wind spilled out from that crack.

The Hermit stared, and another piercing tone rang out. A blade of light flared from the seam. In that instant, the great ice globe split apart.

A massive ice sphere split in two as it plummeted from the sky, smashing several buildings along both sides of Yelem Church. Leander appeared in an instant, his fingers forming a sword seal, the faint remnants of a dissipating sword glow flickering at his fingertips. One slash, and it was over.

"Impressive, Jeff!" The Hermit didn't rush to strike. A faint smile tugged at his lips, his eyes glinting with a hint of approval.

A century ago, he had already ruled The Assassin's World. Even the King

of Assassins, a name that had dominated for decades, had fallen to him. In the fifty years since, he had witnessed world-altering events like the First and Second World Wars. His shadow had touched countless places. He had assassinated many pillars of powerful nations and was once the highest-rated fugitive in the Agylae.

But whether he faced a whole Agylae fleet or went toe-to-toe with the world's renowned warriors, he had never encountered anyone with the sheer strength of Leander.

Even though Leander was his target, he couldn't deny it. Leander was the strongest being he had met in a hundred years.

"The Hermit, no need for games. Tricks this small won't even pique my interest, let alone settle a score. Leander's palms rested behind his back as he floated in the air with an you ye already reached the Half-King Realm and surpassed the Blood Demon, it's time to show me your Domain. I've already seen the Blood Demon's Domain. Don't let me down with yours."

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Hidden in the shadows of night, the Hermit suddenly laughed. "Hahaha! Jeff, in all these years, you're the first one who's dared speak to me like that!"

In the next moment, his gaze sharpened, and an icy chill swept over his expression. "Since you want to see my Domain, you shall have it." His words barely faded before he stomped his foot. Ripples of energy radiated outward from where he struck, naturally carving an ice crystal lotus beneath him.

At first, the lotus was just a bud. With each stomp, it unfurled a little more. Nine stomps in total, and the lotus had fully bloomed, a breathtaking ice flower suspended in the air.

"Jeff, witness the ultimate Domain I mastered in the King's Triple Turn. Frostborne Epoch!"

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"Frostborne Epoch!" With a low, sharp shout from the Hermit, everyone below felt their vision blur for a moment. Hundreds of meters above their heads, a Frozen World, entirely out of place in the surrounding environment, suddenly took shape.

It was like a kingdom carved entirely from ice, floating in the sky. The air itself seemed frozen solid. The bitter cold swallowed everything within hundreds of feet. Life had no place here, only a sense of desolation and death lingering in every corner.

The Frozen World appeared abruptly, almost like a mirage, yet the ten-foot-thick frost coating the peak of Yelem Church proved that it was genuine.

"What kind of power is this?" Zara and Liana stared at the scene, faces blank, rubbing their eyes in disbelief.

They were part of the Southern Wyvern Blade, so Martial Arts World wasn't unfamiliar to them, but they had never imagined a Martial Practitioner could reach this level.

With a single gesture, he trapped an entire stretch of sky and earth, crafting a miniature world that floated outside the mundane. He could alter its environment and structure. To them, this was the kind of thing only Divines and Immortals could pull off.

The Hermit stood with one hand outstretched, a massive ice crystal lotus blooming beneath his feet. The Frozen World ahead had already swallowed Leander. He and Leander were now in the same world, but this was his territory. Here, he was the master.

Leander stepped onto a stone block formed from solid ice, surveying the Frozen World. His eyes barely flickered. "Frostborne Epoch, is this your Domain?"

The Hermit stood over ten feet away, a smile tugging at his lips. "That's right. This is Frostborne Epoch. It can bury any legendary Domain." His gaze sharpened, and without a hint of courtesy, he lashed out. "Ice Sphere!"

In the Frozen World, dozens of massive ice spheres, tens of feet across, converged from every direction toward Leander. They slammed down like a torrential hailstorm.

Shhhh, shhhh, shhhh!

The spheres fell relentlessly, one after another, pounding like giant hail, enough to crush anything within hundreds of feet. Even concrete structures would collapse under their own weight.

The first Ice Sphere hit directly above Leander's head. He didn't defend himself. The sphere slammed down. Then the second, third, fourth.

Countless Ice Spheres rained down at near impossible speeds, like bullets from a machine gun, striking the spot where Leander had been. In an instant, he vanished beneath the torrent.

"Foolish mortal. Thinking you can take this with your body?" The Hermit had tracked every move, his smile twisting into something cruel and savage.

Each Ice Sphere weighed tens of thousands of tons, enough to crush tanks and armored vehicles. Leander might withstand one or two with sheer strength, but hundreds, even a King Phase master, would hesitate to try.

Crunch, crunch.

The Ice Spheres fell like a relentless storm for ten whole minutes. Leander never reappeared. He seemed completely submerged.

After ten minutes, the falling finally ceased. The Hermit stood with hands behind his back, eyes cold and proud. In his Domain, a thought could summon destructive attacks. Every piece of ice around him was a weapon.

He thought, back when Agylae's navy hunts me, if I had already mastered my Domain, there's no way they could force me to flee in disgrace.

"Jeff was always just a single-turn Half-King in his realm. His win against the Blood Demon was barely earned." The Hermit's gaze swept across the space. He shook his head.

There is no need for the Arbitration Office in my fight with Leander.

"Hmm?" In the next instant, his eyes snapped wide. A blast echoed as the ruins buried under the Ice Spheres exploded. From the debris, a figure emerged like a god-level being. Standing tall, perfectly straight, draped in white that flowed like silk. "How is this possible?" The Hermit's expression froze, disbelief written across his complexion.

Just now, I hammer Leander with a storm of Ice Spheres, and I can feel that through it all, he hasn't tapped a shred of innate vitality. That means he's relying purely on his body to take it. But no matter how strong a body is, it

can't compare to armor. These Ice Spheres crush one after another, enough to deform even reinforced metal. How could he possibly come out unscathed?

"God-level being?" After seeing the faint blue sparks dancing across Leander's body, the Hermit finally reacted, his face drained of color.

A god-level being meant a body with god-level power. Such a physical form was reserved only for Divines and Immortals. Even many who had reached the King Phase would dream of having one.

He hadn't expected Leander to possess such a formidable body.

"Is that all?" Leander's expression remained cold. He beckoned the Hermit with a finger, full of provocation.

The shock in the Hermit's eyes slowly receded. A grim curve spread across his lips as the ice lotus beneath him began spinning at a terrifying speed. "Jeff, even if you are a god-level being, today you will meet your end in this Frozen World."

He bellowed, then opened his mouth to unleash a sharp blast of icy air. The frost shot forward like a spear and, astonishingly, condensed into a crystal sword that he gripped in his hand. "This is the Ice Soutsword, forged from my own Essence Core and Brey's chilling energy. For fifty years, it has been nurtured

constantly by my innate vitality and the natural cold. Today, I will baptize it with your blood."

The Ice Soul sword bloomed with a flaring sword flower. At the exact moment, the ice lotus beneath him exploded, sending streams of chilling air surging toward the sword from every direction.

Countless currents of cold converged, and the sword, already gleaming crystal clear, now blazed brilliantly. Its radiance shone across the Frozen World, drawing in the surrounding frost, its dangerous aura growing ever more intense.

At this moment, Leander finally let his expression shift, a hint of amusement curling

at the corner of his mouth. "Now that's more like it. This is exciting."

After seeing Leander remain still, the Hermit's killing intent flared. He leaped into the air, conjuring twin icy blades that vibrated the void behind him he held the sword with both hands, the surrounding cold rolling like the birth of the world itself. Amidst the chaos, he finally swung, bringing his sword down toward Leander's head.

Shing!

The sword radiated icy energy, like a massive dragon hunting its prey, roaring through the sky. Everything in its path was cleaved in two. The grand cathedral of the holy city was split apart and instantly frozen.

The blade cut a path hundreds of feet long, destroying everything in its wake. Even the Frozen World, which the Hermit had painstakingly formed over fifty years, was cleaved. The sword energy sliced across it in a grand display.

The Hermit had spent fifty years nurturing the sword with his Essence Core and the natural chill. Now, it had finally reached its peak, its power indescribable.

Zara and Liana watched as the devastating strike tore through the night sky, their expressions frozen in stunned silence. They knew the Chief Instructor was strong, but the Hermit's strength was like that of a god of ice and snow. In that moment, even they couldn't help but wonder if Leander could withstand such a world-shattering blow.

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The massive Ice Soul sword erupted across the sky, slicing through everything in its path. The Frozen World ahead split in two right before everyone's eyes, the thick layers of frost shattered in an instant.

Everyone watching from below saw nothing but the icy blue glow of the blade, dazzling the sky so fiercely it was almost blinding. Zara and Liana, for the first time, felt a flicker of doubt toward the Chief Instructor they had always admired. Facing an opponent like the Hermit, they had no clue just how strong Leander had to be even to stand a chance.

The other Yelem elites thought the same thing. They couldn't imagine anyone capable of standing against a creature with such terrifying power. Almost everyone assumed Leander couldn't take that strike and would be cleaved in two just like everything else.

Only Maeve, Celia, and Aurora felt a measure of calm. They had never doubted Leander's abilities.

With a sharp hiss, the sword's glow slammed down, aiming to cut everything in its path. Leander's black hair whipped around wildly in the wind as his eyes narrowed. Just as the massive crystalline blade was about to crush his face, he finally moved. He lifted his palm slightly, extended two fingers, and then snapped them together with force.

A crisp, ringing click echoed across the sky. The ice-blue sword, which had come crashing down like an unstoppable force, seemed to freeze midair, as if someone

had hit pause.

Those with sharp eyesight could see it clearly. The blade was caught between Leander's two fingers, held like a vise, unable to advance another inch. It hung there just a hair's breadth from his forehead.

For a moment, the entire scene froze in horror.

It wasn't just the spectators. Even the Hermit's eyes went wide, pupils shrinking as he struggled to believe what he was seeing.

Just two fingers. That's all it takes to snap through any ordinary weapon without much effort. Yet the Ice Soul sword, a strike that could slice a tank in half, can't even break through Leander's two fingers?

"This is impossible!"

The Hermit's expression kept shifting, twisting with every passing moment. The Primordial Energy building up inside him surged wildly, and the sword light from the Ice Soul sword flared even stronger. The icy blue glow stretched across the sky, but no matter how brightly it shone, it couldn't be forced down even an inch.

"You've spent fifty years refining your sword with Essence Core, that's impressive," Leander said, a sly, almost wicked smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "But sadly, your blade still isn't sharp enough." With a flick of his wrist, his two fingers held their pose, and the long, hundred-foot ice-blue sword light exploded into a thousand shards, scattering across the sky.

Crack!

The sword light shattered inch by inch. Ice crystals rained down from the sky, and the Hermit staggered, stepping backward in the air, his face still reeling from the shock.

He had spent fifty years on the Arctic plains nurturing his sword with his Essence Core. Every ounce of his strength had gone into this strike. One swing was meant to release decades of painstaking effort. But even that was not enough to break through Leander's defense. His attack had been torn apart with just two fingers.

For the Hermit, all those years of dedication felt like nothing more than a fleeting illusion. The moment Leander shattered his sword strike, he knew the fight was over. He had lost. Completely and utterly.

Even though he had reached triple-turn Half-King, facing the young Astria before him, he wasn't a match. From start to finish, Leander hadn't even used a single move at full strength.

"Is this really the Chief Instructor's true strength?" Below, Zara and Liana, who had been worried about whether Leander could handle that strike, froze. Their eyes locked on him, and they didn't move or react for a long moment.

"Your Frostborne Epoch," Leander said, scanning the icy battlefield. "It's stronger than the Blood Demon's Blood World by far. But it's still not the true King's Domain. It has the form, but it lacks the essence."

Leander stayed rooted in the Frozen World. His eyes flicked over the surrounding surge of cold, a hint of mockery in them. Then he lifted a single hand, clenched it, and brought it toward the air in front of him.

A tiny flame sparked between his palms, stretching into a long tongue of fire. The flame shot across the sky, turning into a roaring wall of fire that spread until the heavens were covered.

The fire raged without stopping. A massive fiery hand emerged from the blaze, like some ancient flame giant, slamming down toward the Frozen World.

The snow-white sky instantly turned molten red and dazzlingly bright. Ice and frigid air evaporated before anyone could blink.

In an instant, the Frozen World was entirely engulfed by the inferno. Flames roared, and Leander stood at the center, commanding everything.

At the moment the Dragonfire tore through the Frozen World, the Hermit coughed up a mouthful of blood, his face drained of color.

Frostborne Epoch was not the fake Domain he had shown yesterday with Umbral Court. This was the real thing, a valid Domain underpinned by his Primordial Energy.

Leander had destroyed the massive Frozen World with a single move. That strike had struck at the Hermit's core, wounding him instantly.

Below, Denzel's complexion was pale with shock. He had grown up hearing tales of the Hermit, the greatest legend in Benjamin's history. He had always held the man in awe and curiosity.

And now, Denzel was witnessing the Hermit's first real battle against another person. But the result was hard to accept. The Hermit lost, and he lost to a young man whom Denzel saw as his rival.

Even my nearly invincible great-great-grandfather could only swallow defeat, so how much of a gap is there between Leander and me?

"Je.....Jeff!" Denzel ground out the name through clenched teeth, his voice shaking with a mix of fear and disbelief.

"He still came out on top!" Celia's

eyes sparkled with excitement. The Hermit had long been hailed as the untouchable king of the International Assassin Leaderboard the one even terek couldn't best And now Leander had stormed onto the scene, raw and unstoppable, showing the world that whether it was the International Combat Units or the Assassin Leaderboard, he could claim the crown without fear.

Maeve was practically bouncing with joy, clapping her hands like a little girl. Once again, Leander had displayed a level of combat prowess that seemed almost otherworldly. This was the man she loved with all her heart.

Aurora's eyes were sharp with unwavering resolve. She knew deep down that her life's goal was clear: carve out a place in Leander's heart, no matter what it took.

As for Nathan, Luke, Evander, and the rest, they were frozen in shock. Only now did they begin to grasp the true nature of their roommate, who vanished for ten, fifteen days at a time. Leander was no ordinary man.

The Hermit's eyes darkened. In over a century of fame, he had never tasted defeat. Not even against the mighty naval fleets of Agylae had he faltered. He had always handled threats with ease, slipping away unscathed. But today, he had been beaten by an up-and-coming Astria talent.

"I lost." The Hermit's voice was

rough, each word spat out with effort. Yet by the time he finished, a cold glint flashed in his eyes, twisted with a cruel sort of triumph. But here's the thing. Even though you beat me, I still win our bet. Because tonight, you're going to be buried right here in Yelem."

The Hermit's sudden declaration left everyone stunned. Even Celia, the strongest

among them, couldn't hide her surprise.

Leander just smirked, a flicker of disdain in his expression. "You really thought your

little tricks could fool me?" He waved his hand lazily, completely calm. "Go ahead. Call in everyone from the Arbitration Office."

Celia's expression shifted dramatically. "The Arbitration Office is here too?"

She tried to sense the energy around her, but everything was eerily still. Not a breeze, not a rustle. It felt off. Then suddenly, a whirlwind tore through the sky, making her pupils shrink in shock.

A thick cloud swept across, swallowing the spire at the very top of Yelem Church. Everyone craned their necks, and through the swirling mist, they could just barely make out seven figures, hazy and flickering in the fog.

"More people?" Zara and Liana stared at the clouds, eyes sharp and cold. As members of the Southern Wyvern Blade, they knew a thing or two about the world's hidden truths. The Arbitration Office was no stranger to them either they had heard countless rumors. Seeing seven figures emerge in the sky, they immediately pieced it together: these people were here for Leander.

Celia's lips twitched. She could feel it deep in her bones-each of the seven hidden in the clouds carried an immense, almost terrifying power. Even as an Infernal Crown Transcendent, she couldn't hope to match them. She was stunned to realize that any one of them could rival the Hermit.

"Jeff, finally, we meet!" A voice carried through the mist. A gust of wind swept past, pulling the fog aside and revealing the seven in full.

Each of them wore different clothing, their appearances varied, but the nobles and elites below immediately recognized the threat. Each one of these people had the power to level a city.

The one speaking was clearly the leader this time, Deo. He fixed his gaze on Leander, a faintly amused smile tugging at his lips. "From the way you talk, it sounds like you already knew we were in Yelem."

Leander's lips curved into a faint smile. His eyes swept over the seven, calm and indifferent. "The Arbitration Office always carries a certain stench of decay. Even from miles away, I can sense it. You seven, Half-Kings all, have arrived in Yelem. How could I not know?"

He pointed at the Hermit, expression unmoved. "The Hermit wanted to lure me to Yelem Church for a fight. That wasn't entirely his idea, was it? You all had a hand in it."

The seven Half-Kings from the Arbitration Office froze slightly at his words. Even the Hermit felt a pang of surprise and couldn't help asking, "If you knew I deliberately brought you here, and you knew they were seven, why did you still come?"

Leander spread his hands casually, unconcerned. "If I didn't come, how else would I make you all show up?"

He grinned, a shadow of mischief in his smile. "If you hadn't appeared, I'd have had to hunt each of you down one by one. Too much work. Now that you're all gathered here, dealing with you is far easier."

At his words, the eight in front of him all changed expression slightly.

"Jeff, you've got some nerve!" Deo's eyes glinted coldly, anger simmering beneath the surface. "Knowing we're all gathered here and still daring to show up, I have to admire your courage. But to claim you could take all of us on by yourself-do you think we're as dumb as those fools from Greed?"

He stepped forward, Primordial Energy erupting from his body, shaking the black clouds above them violently. "The fifteen Chief Arbitrators you killed before? They were the low-ranked ones among our twenty-four. The highest-ranking Master of the Fable Court barely ranked tenth. You think killing those scraps made you invincible against the Arbitration Office? Jeff, today, your arrogance will cost you!"

As he spoke, Gragas, Moffat, and Watz stepped forward in unison, an oppressive, deadly aura sweeping across the land.

Everyone below could feel the overwhelming pressure pressing down from the night sky. Even birds flew lower, screaming as they fled from Yelem Church. The airspace above had effectively become a no-fly zone.

"Is that so?" Leander chuckled softly, shaking his head, giving off the air of someone completely unfazed.

The Hermit wiped blood from the corner of his mouth and straightened. "Jeff, you really are the strongest genius I've ever encountered in over a hundred years."

years. Even the Dragon Emperor doesn't compare. Today, one-on-one fight, I've lost to you. But I'm an assassin. An assassin's duty is to hunt the target at all costs. You're my enemy, the Arbitration Office is your enemy, and an enemy's enemy is a friend. Today, I'll team up with those seven to kill you!"

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As soon as the Hermit finished speaking, Deo suddenly raised his hand and

smashed a vial of pale blue liquid over the Hermit's body.

The Hermit drew a deep breath. The pale blue liquid twisted into spirals, sucked into his body, and in an instant, his aura swelled, his gaunt face flushing with color. The icy chill around him thickened, coiling like a living thing.

Watching this, Leander shook his head slowly. Honestly, before I got to Yelem, held a bit of respect for you, King of Assassins. I thought you were some unparalleled force in the Assassin's World. But now? You're just a disappointment. Turns out the so-called King of Assassins is nothing more than a pawn of the Arbitration Office."

His eyes darkened, sharp as blades. He swept his fingers across the eight figures before him, faint sparks flickering at his fingertips. "Today, every single one of you dies here. Yelem Church will be your grave."

Before anyone could react, he struck first, throwing a punch that stretched across the distance like a raging dragon bursting into the sea. A thunderous roar shook the sky and ground and below, all they could see was a golden dragon apparition streaking through the air slicing through the void.

"Humph!" Gragas, the craziest of the bunch, hugged a massive wooden barrel like it was a toy and lunged forward. He sucked the wine inside the barrel into his mouth and sprayed it out violently.

The dark purple wine transformed into a towering curtain of water, solidifying into a wall meant to block Leander's punch.

"Roar!" The golden dragon apparition barreled forward, smashing into the water wall. The surface rippled briefly before a concave hole was punched through. The dragon didn't slow down and cut straight through the middle.

"What?" Gragas' eyes went wide. He threw a punch instinctively, colliding head-on with the apparition.

Boom!

Gragas had already poured eighty percent of his Primordial Energy into the strike, but when it connected, he felt an overwhelming force slam into him like a tidal wave. He was thrown backward dozens of yards.

"That power... insane!" He struggled to stop, heart pounding in sheer shock. Leander's punch hadn't just shattered Gragas' water wall. It had launched him into the air. His arm throbbed, nearly numb from the backlash.

After that single hit, Gragas wasn't taking chances anymore. He spun to the others. "This guy is way too strong. Don't underestimate him. Hit together. Don't let him pick us off one by one. Today, we're going to make him pay."

Before he could finish, the other six—everyone except the Demon Hunter, Neil—attacked.

Six streams of Primordial Energy shot skyward like the collapse of a mountain, crashing down toward Leander.

The most heart-pounding opening act in Yelem tonight had officially begun.