

Chapter 11 - 11. Cheat

The following morning Noah woke up at dawn, the first lights of the day disturbed him.

He got out of bed and was ready to go wash his face when he stopped in place.

'I had never been disturbed by the first daylight before!'

He entered his sea of consciousness focusing on the center of his brain. When his half-transparent figure opened his eyes he could see that the level of the sea resumed the original level of half of the sphere.

'So one night of sleep is enough to replenish half of the sea! I will test again late in the afternoon for how long I can endure the training'

What he didn't know was that since he was a transmigrator his mind was far stronger than the one of an average kid of his age. Overall, his mental age was about 35 years and the events of both his lives contributed to strengthening his mind even more, so it could endure looking at the rune for far more time than any young man. If a 10 years old child was to look at the Kesier rune for 4 hours straight, his mind would shatter.

When he neared a bowl of water and washed his face, he shivered a little. The water seemed colder than usual.

"Why is the water is so cold?"

He asked a passing servant pointing at the bowl.

The servant put her hand on the bowl and looked at Noah with a confused expression.

"The water feels of the same temperature as always, young master. Is it possible that you caught a cold? Do you want me to call the madam?"

Noah was a bit surprised by her answer but then he thought of something.

'Is it possible that my senses got more sensitive with only one session of training? That shouldn't be so fast right?'

"No, it's fine, keep going with your work."

He dismissed the maidservant and went to eat breakfast.

'I will ask Master when I see him. Now I should focus on the twin saber style.'

He went back to his room, opened the martial art book and picked the two sabers.

He did the same thing he used to do whenever a guard would "give" him a martial form or a technique: closing himself in his room and practice till those movements became a habit.

This time though, he found difficulties in managing two sabers at the same time.

'I guess it's really harder to get used to it, as Master said. I can only practice more until I can use these moves in an actual fight'.

Like this, his day passed by.

Noah went out of his room only to get his lunch and spent the dinner reading the Forging of Seven Hells closed in his room. When he felt that he had digested it was already night. He closed his book and took out the Kesier rune from his clothing. As his most important asset, he would always keep it with him.

He stared at the rune sitting on his bed and kept going until the level of the water inside his sea of consciousness dropped below one-fifth of the sphere then he folded the sheet.

Some retches ran through him but he suppressed them with his eyes closed until they were gone. Only then, he looked outside the window to understand how much time he had spent training.

'About four hours again, even by reaching my absolute limit. It seems that practicing all day has its toll on the mind otherwise I'm confident I could have held for about five hours.'

Even though he had reached the limit his body could withstand, of about one-fifth of the sphere, he stayed in the sea of consciousness for the same time as the previous night. He added another question to the list of those he had to ask his Master once he saw him.

'If tomorrow morning I wake up completely fine too, I will keep going like I have done today. Training all day is tiring and this terrible headache is discouraging but I can hold on! What is a bit of sweat and pain if compared with power?'

Reaffirming his determination, he lied in bed completely exhausted both in body and mind and slept soundly.

In the morning, Noah woke up at dawn again, as soon as he noticed the light on his window.

Checking that everything went smoothly in his sea of consciousness and that apart from some soreness from his limbs he had completely recovered, he chose to repeat the same actions of the previous day. He trained from morning till mid-afternoon in the twin saber style, read the Forging of Seven Hells while eating dinner and digesting it and practiced with the Kesier rune during the night till his body was on the verge of throwing up.

Like this, the day of his meeting with William arrived.

In the same spacious room from the week before, Noah was sitting on his knees looking at his Master standing in front of him. He was waiting for William to finish his yawn before asking him to clarify some of his doubts.

"Master, ever since I have begun training my mental energy I can notice the light of the morning through the window during my sleep. Moreover, everything seems colder or warmer than it used to be and I'm pretty sure I can hear some servants whispering in other rooms if I concentrate enough."

Noah never slacked off in those days and the changes in his perception grew every day more evident.

William was a bit surprised when he first heard that but then remembered how stubborn his disciple was when it came to training. He thought that he should impose more limits on his training habits before Noah hurt himself due to exhaustion.

"It seems that you practiced really hard on the Kesier rune. I remember that when I first started practicing my mental energy at the age of 15 I could not keep going on for more than 2 hours before collapsing. I remember the captain called me a rare genius! Haha, don't worry, as you grow up your mind barrier will solidify and become sturdier, allowing you to train for more time."

Noah was speechless, staring at his Master with wide eyes. William put a proud expression and thought:

'Yes, that's right, your Master is a genius. Are you comparing yourself with me right now, right?'

A slight smirk was on his face as he thought that he had finally obtained some respect from the kid.

'Wait wait wait wait, is he saying that he collapsed ONLY after 2 hours? A rare genius, him? What is the double of a rare genius? Maybe because my mind has already undergone another life it can be considered as a fully formed

mind, so I can train for the same period of time of grown-up men while being still 10 years old. Isn't the same as saying that as long as I don't slack off, no one of my very age will ever reach me?'

Noah's mouth became a little dry and then he gulped. Trying to shift the focus of the conversation away from the hours of training he questioned William about another one of his doubts.

"How much did you take, Master, to memorize the first rune?"

William smile grew and said with a proud smile:

"About 6 years, but I could have done it in 5 if it wasn't for the captain always sending me in missions"

'So, if I keep going like this I might actually become a rank 1 mage in 3 years! Maybe the process will be slower due to my still unformed dantian, yet it's extremely good!'

Noah already wanted to drop this talk with his master and go back to his room to train, he was eager to understand what it felt like to cast magic spells.

William dropped his prideful pose and looked at him smiling.

"You have trained in the twin saber style too, right?"

"Yes, Master"

Noah answered, remembering the main reason he had come for that day.

"Do you want to show it to me?"

"Yes, please! Master, don't go easy on me."

Noah stood up and picked 2 training sabers from the wall behind him.

"Don't worry I won't."

William said, putting his left hand behind his back and raising his right one to his chest, the side of the hand pointing at Noah.

Immediately, the atmosphere in the room changed.

Chapter 12 - 12. Smile

The atmosphere became heavier, Noah felt a little like suffocating.

He looked at the stern expression on his Master's face and gulped, then released a long breath and got in a charging position with both his sabers pointing ahead.

'He is strong, way stronger than any guard I've faced and they are stronger than me already.'

William was unmoving, he didn't even seem to breathe. He stared fixedly at Noah's figure waiting for his move.

'He won't underestimate me like Micky.'

Noah's eyes became full of resolution.

'So I can only charge ahead and see how it goes.'

Once decided, Noah didn't waste any more time.

He charged ahead, in a moment he was in front of William aiming for a horizontal double cut.

A loud THUD resounded in his mind.

"Reckless, what's the point of wielding 2 sabers if then you use both of them to attack against an opponent of whom you know nothing?"

Noah found himself on the ground, his left shoulder hurting.

'I didn't even see his attack'

"Again!"

William ordered. Noah stood up pointing with his right arm and went back into an attacking position.

Then he charged ahead again but made a feint before entering William's range of attack and twisted to his left slashing with his right saber, the left one was held still to cover his head.

THUD!

"A feint can only work if your ability to perform it surpasses your opponent's ability to see through it. Again"

This time it was his right leg to hurt. Noah slightly sensed something after he made the feint but it was too fast for him to react and so he ended up again on the ground.

Like this, the day went on.

THUD

"If you use a jump attack on someone faster than you, you are just cutting off your road of retreat."

THUD

"Whenever you try to use your height to your advantage, your opponent will do the same with his peculiarity."

THUD

"Aiming for my blind spot was smart but I'm a cultivator! I don't have blind spots because I can clearly sense you with my mental energy."

THUD

"I'm almost moved by your perseverance but even throwing your saber won't work"

THUD

"You sure are stubborn but that won't get you anywhere until you understand today's lesson"

THUD

This time William didn't speak, he just looked at the kid full of bruises in front of him. He was pointing with trembling hands and legs at the floor with his sabers. His breath ragged and his whole body full of sweat, yet his eyes were still staring at William with fervor.

"And... Cough... What would be today's lesson about?"

Asked Noah confused.

"Tell me, my disciple, what can you do against a faster, stronger opponent that you cannot outsmart?"

Noah lowered his eyes and thought for a long time, then he answered with a questioning tone:

"Nothing?"

William half-smiled sighing softly.

"Quite but not totally right. The only thing you can do is giving up. You must understand that sometimes you simply can't win, even if you put your everything on the line, no matter how unfair it can be."

Noah looked at his Master's smile. He had nothing to say, he was right.

"Today I wanted to make you understand this and also train you a bit, but your stubbornness carried on for three hours so it's better to call it a day. I'll see you again in a week at the same hour and in the same room. Now go to rest and don't do works that require your body."

And then, William left. The atmosphere relaxed and Noah could not hold on the sabers anymore and fell on the floor. He coughed a couple of times and then went in a cross-legged position.

"Fuuuuuuu"

He strongly exhaled with his eyes closed and then tried to resume a normal rhythm of respiration.

A smile appeared on his tired face.

'He is incredibly strong! From start to finish I never saw his movements and only sensed them a little. This mental energy stuff is incredible, a cultivator is incredible! I wonder if he would be able to stop a bullet from my previous world. Hahaha, I love this! The more I see a cultivator the more I want to become one! So much strength in just one man! A hand to stop 2 swords, a hand to stop a dragon! I want to train more, I want to get stronger, I want to forge my life with my own power! Who cares if I die again, this is the first time I feel so alive in two lives!'

Then, the image of Lily appeared in his head and his smile became more complicated.

'I guess I should first solve her situation otherwise I won't be at peace'

The smile disappeared and he opened his eyes, resolution was literally pouring out of his expression.

'Either way, I need strength to do both things, so my course of action can only be more training.'

He stood up with difficulty and carried himself back in his room. He ate a large meal and studied both the manuals till after dinner, then he carried on looking at the Kesier rune.

The next morning, he woke up with his body hurting all over the place but he didn't care. He stuck with his schedule with even more passion. Steadily but surely, he was becoming stronger.

The next week he arrived even earlier at the appointment with William. This time he actually had to wait for his Master to come.

When he entered the room he looked at the disciple staring at him with expectations and could not help but to shake his head.

'And here I thought that he learned something last time.'

He yawned shortly and then took a wooden stick from the wall behind him.

"Today we will exchange defense and attack and I will point out every mistake you make by hitting you with this."

He pointed at the wooden stick in his hands.

"Come on, start attacking me."

Noah hurriedly stood up and took two training sabers. Then he directly charged at William with his sabers crossed in front of him.

THUD

The tip of the stick hit his head as he fell back in guard.

"Your body must be more crouched to use that type of charge so to protect your whole upper body. Again"

Noah tried again with the same charge but following his Master's advice this time.

THUD

The stick struck the point where the sabers crossed and pushed them back on Noah's chest.

"Put some strength in those arms. How can your weapons protect you if you let them hit your body"

And so, Noah charged again.

THUD

The stick hit the same spot as before but this time Noah held on and deflected the stick entering William's guard but when he was about to strike he heard a voice coming from behind him.

"That wasn't bad, now try with a different form."

The William in front of Noah had disappeared and reappeared behind him.

Noah looked at the smiling figure behind him and shook his head to suppress any thought of cursing him.

This way the morning passed by with William perfecting Noah's technique.

"Today has been good, see you next week."

Noah was in a pitiful state but this time managed to make a bow before his Master exited the room. He was really grateful for the time William was investing in him, and that day he really did some great progress. He could not wait for seven days to pass!

Chapter 13 - 13. Small success

Life went on peacefully in the outer ring of Balvan mansion, the only peculiar thing was a little kid going to the guards' building every week.

At first, he would always come out of the building full of bruises but as time went by, the wounds on his body diminished and a faint pressure was created around him.

That day, that same little kid was seen early in the morning again as he marched towards that guards' building.

'It's been two lessons since I last got hit. I wonder if in today's sparring Master will raise his level again.'

Since his second lesson, William had kept on engraving the forms of the martial arts on Noah's mind. After 3 months of conditioning, his techniques were nearly perfect in their execution so his Master chose to raise the level of the training. They started to spar freely as William would hold himself back only to raise his level when Noah managed to consistently hit him. By that time though, the condition was fulfilled twice already by Noah but his Master would still not raise his level.

Entering the usual room, Noah was surprised to find his Master sitting cross-legged on the floor waiting for him.

No traces of his usual sleepiness was present as he was staring at a fixed point of the room with vacant eyes, probably in deep thought.

"Master, you're early!"

William's eyes regained its focus as he stood up and looked at his disciple with a complex expression.

"Can you use the "Breath" in your style?"

Noah was taken aback by this question.

Since the "Breath" in his body was limited, his Master always forbid him to release it during their spar or his personal training. Noah's schedule was always so full that he could not find the time during his day to refill it with the Ice-Fire revolving technique. His Master knew this, so he chose to forbid its usage and let it focus on nourishing the kid's body. As such, Noah only manipulated it during his training, without ever releasing it. Today tho, things seemed different.

"I think I can, even if I have never used it in an actual fight I should get the hang of it in a couple of tries. Why is that?"

William did a light smile as a bit of warmth leaked from in his expression.

During these months he began to understand his disciple better. He would always smile and speak seemingly without thinking too much but he knew how things really were. Noah was ruthless, he treated his body and mind like a piece of metal going through forging. If the body would not bend he would hammer it till it did, no matter how much pain he would suffer in the process. If his mind was weak, he would heat it till its effects would reverberate to the body, causing a constant nauseous feeling lingering on him.

He knew how much Noah trained and how determined he was in his search for power, so William could not help but give birth to some kind of affection and even respect for him.

'This kid says that he might do it in a couple of tries, does he know how much does it usually take to do it? What a pity, if his position was different he could have taken things slowly and have a bright future, with his talent and perseverance it's just a matter of time before he even surpasses me. Yet, the guys in the inner circle will never allow someone from outside the family to become too strong, especially someone that might have reasons to get revenge on them.'

The complicated expression on William's face became more evident as he exhaled a sigh.

"Do you know how much time has passed since our first meeting?"

Noah thought for a little and then realization dawned upon him.

He was so engrossed in his training that he forgot about the passage of time but when his Master asked the question he understood.

"That's right, almost six months have passed and your progress with mental energy have long surpassed the standard I had set for you. Next week we will begin the treatment, so the "Breath" in your body is not that useful anymore. It's better to start with the real martial art so to have some advantages if you manage to survive next week."

Noah's expression became serious.

'The time has indeed come, the life I was living was too perfect to continue, I almost forgot that all my training will be useless if I don't push my body to the next level.'

Thinking this, he went to the usual wall to pick 2 sabers as he stared at his Master with resolution.

"No reasons to waste time then, right Master?"

The slight smile on Noah's face was a blow delivered to William's mind.

'Doesn't he really care about death?'

He shook his head to repress the thought and took the usual wooden stick and pointed it at Noah.

"Then come at me like we always do, but this time try to mix some "Breath" attacks in the spar. You should be able to do three or four of them before the "Breath" in your arms depletes."

Hearing these words, Noah waited no more. He swiftly charged at William with his body crouched so low it seemed he would fall on the floor anytime.

When his Master entered his range of attack, he thrust both his sabers in a diagonal uppercut infusing "Breath" according to the art's instruction.

Yet, his timing was a bit off and the result was only a simple double uppercut that William blocked easily positioning his stick horizontally.

"Almost, again."

Noah rushed again, this time in a cross-slashing position but the result was the same as before.

"Concentrate! You can do your forms almost perfectly and I know you can move your "Breath" according to the instructions, you only need to synchronize them!"

William knew that the process of synchronization wasn't so easy as he said but wanted to increase the pressure on his disciple. The only thought in his mind was how to increase the chances of the survivability of his disciple. He wanted to increase his handling of the "Breath" even of just a little before the treatment.

This time, Noah didn't immediately rush to attack him but closed his eyes to sharpen his mind, his only thought became the rhythm of the twin saber style.

When he opened his eyes he was ready for the last attack.

He slowly exhaled and then charged at William with a horizontal slash.

William mentally nodded and received his attack.

A piece of wood fell on the ground, it was half of the stick in William's hands.

William stared astonished at the saber laid on his throat.

'That... That's a perfect execution! I aimed for him to slightly dent the stick, never would I imagine that he could cut right through it with some blunt weapons!'

Noah realized the situation he was in and hastily retracted his sabers. Some sweat was on his face and back, apparently using a martial art synchronized with "Breath" was way more tiring than what appeared.

"I'm sorry Master! I didn't realize I could actually cut through it, luckily I stopped myself at the last moment."

William cleared his throat and touched the spot where the saber was lying just the moment before.

"Don't... Don't worry, it's fine. Do you think that your Master is so weak that a mere disciple could hurt him? Hmph! I have a rank 3 body, do you think that a martial art of rank 2 powered with your poor "Breath" can actually-"

He had to interrupt himself seeing Noah pointing at his throat. A drop of blood was slowly falling from there.

"You wretched disciple don't be so smug about it!"

Noah could not help but laugh a little when he saw his Master lose his cool but then William calmed himself and looked seriously at Noah.

Noah understood that it was the time for his last instructions before next week so he listened attentively.

"Next week don't climb the stairs for this floor but wait at the bottom of them, I will meet you there. I will perform the treatment in another place, after all the screams of a kid are not the happiest sounds to hear."

Noah gulped when he heard the word "screams" but then focused again, he had already decided to put his life on the line.

"If you survive, you will probably spend a week bedridden in order for your body to get used to its new acupoints, so remember to inform your mother about it. The day before the treatment don't practice anything, and I'm talking seriously here. The only thing you are allowed to do is rest and read the tome about the Forging of Seven Hells, your condition must be at the peak when you undergo the process."

William looked again at Noah, smiling this time.

"Now go, sharpen your mind even more if you can. Next week it's life or death."

Chapter 14 - 14. Lie

When he went back to his room, Noah felt tired.

Even if the meeting was short and only half of the morning had passed, the depletion of "Breath" from his body caused tiredness to envelop him.

'To think that with just that little "Breath" that I have I can make a blunt weapon cut, I wonder how much more powerful the twin saber style can be with an actual dantian. It's understandable why cultivators give so much importance to the dantian; if it can accumulate a higher quantity and quality of "Breath" every technique will be exponentially more powerful. The difference will be really too big.'

Sitting on his bed he engraved the sensation of the execution of his last attack.

'That sharpness of mind must be my normal state from now on, no! It must be my starting point! I can't only rely on the sheer quantity of my mental energy, I must also refine it in an orderly way in order to speed up my thoughts and my learning process.'

One of his biggest secrets was that his mental energy was progressing at an astonishing rate, in these 6 months since he started training it he raised the time he could stay in a training session by half an hour. The effects of this increase were evident as he would learn faster every lesson his Master imparted him and his ability in manipulating the "Breath" became more precise and smooth.

Inside his sea of consciousness at the center of the sphere, there was a slight disturbance in the space above the sea. It seemed that something was about to appear but could still not consolidate itself.

'During this week, I must completely focus on the Forging of Seven Hells and on increasing my mental energy. Training in the twin saber style will be used as a form of rest when I need to take a break. I can't lose any more time.'

Deciding himself on the new schedule for this week he immediately got to work and used all his attention to read and memorize the body-nourishing method.

At night he practiced hard on the Kesier rune.

In the morning he spent some time in meditation, trying to maintain the sharpened state his mind experienced with his Master, then he would practice the forms on the twin saber style for about 2 hours. The rest of the day was dedicated to the memorization of the nourishing method and the night was used to increase his mental energy.

Like this, days went by till the day before the appointment with William.

As per instructions, Noah didn't practice the martial art nor trained with the Kesier rune but spent the day reading the Seven Hells tome and focusing his mind to sharpen it.

During lunchtime, he went to see his mother.

Noah lightly knocked at his mother door saying with a firm voice:

"Mum it's me, I have something to talk to you."

After some moments, the door opened and Lily's figure appeared with a radiant smile and said:

"It's so rare of you to look for me, I believe that if it wasn't for your need to eat you would spend all your time training."

Noah instinctively looked at her body before focusing again his eyes on her face.

'Four more since the last time I saw her.'

His father was growing more violent as time passed, and Noah had the sensation that it was linked with his success in entering the guards.

"It is actually about training. I will go on a special training with my Master tomorrow and he said that it will take a week or so for it to be completed. So I'm not coming back here starting tomorrow."

Lily instantly got worried and wanted to ask more about this training but then realized that her son had somewhat changed. His eyes were more focused, his presence was more imposing, he seemed like a rock standing in a river constantly resisting the flow of water.

She knew her son. She knew that he had decided to take part in this training and that nothing would make him change his mind, so she limited herself to touch his cheek and ruffle his hair a bit.

"Promise me that you won't do anything reckless or dangerous."

"Don't worry mum, my Master will be with me all the time and he is really strong so there is no real danger that can affect me."

"I don't care, promise it to me anyway"

His mother plea was resolute and unmovable.

"Ok mum, I promise, I'll be careful"

He lied as her mother kept on staring at him. Then she hugged him and adjusted his clothes a bit.

"Then you are free to go but remember not to force yourself too hard, the job of a mother is to take care of her children while they are still young after all."

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Back in his room, Noah was inside his sea of consciousness.

He was not training, he was simply focusing all of his mental energy on the treatment of the following day, reviewing the various steps and setting his mind for the task.

When he thought that it was enough he left his mental sphere and laid on his bed.

'Now that I lied to her, I really can't allow myself to die.'

And then he went to sleep.

The following day he went to the appointed place where his Master was already waiting for him with a stern face.

He lightly nodded seeing the focus and determination in Noah's eyes.

"Do you have some questions before we move?"

Noah thought a little and then asked softly:

"Is the place where we are going really soundproof? No one will hear me right?"

'Shouldn't he worry about his life? Is he worried that his mother might hear him?'

"Yes, the place where we are going to is the underground prison of the outer ring. We are used to keeping and torturing prisoners there and no one has ever noticed. Even some of our men don't know where the place is so you can rest assured."

Noah nodded, erasing the last doubt from his mind.

"Then I'm ready."

William nodded and then started moving toward the bottom of the corridor.

"While we go there I want you to repeat the procedure to me, so I will be sure that you won't make mistakes."

Noah started explaining:

"The Forging of Seven Hells is a treatment consisting of destroying seven acupoints on the back of the specimen in order for the body to naturally create an absorption whirl that will accumulate the Breath of Heaven and Earth on his back. Since the absorption process is chaotic the specimen must be conscious during this process in order to direct the "Breath" in the place where the seven acupoints were destroyed and reconstruct them with a mixture of their leftovers and "Breath". The specimen must also use his mental energy to hold together the newly created acupoints until they solidify and connect completely to his body. The last step is to endure through the transformation the new acupoints will cause to the body of the specimen and then wait for his new body to be completely filled with "Breath" in order to go through this process for six more times."

William stopped at the end of the corridor and tapped on the wall in front of him in seemingly random points.

The wall then went back on itself and slid to the right showing a dark and rocky passage that went downward.

"We are almost there, now explain to me the dangers and advantages of this method."

Saying so, he started walking through the passage and Noah followed.

Chapter 15 - 15. ENDURE IT!

"The biggest disadvantage is the high mortality rate of the treatment since one mistake in the process might cause the specimen to die. Then there is the difficulty of the process since the specimen must actively control the "Breath"

while his body is being destroyed and reconstructed. There is also the problem that the destruction process can't be made by the specimen itself since the acupoints are on his back and there is the need for a skillful helper. The specimen can't, also, practice any different body-nourishing method before finishing the seven cycles of the treatment since the acupoints on his body are still fragile and can't withstand any different process of nourishment. Last is the worthiness of using such a process since the specimen can just wait for his dantian to be formed and then use an orthodox nourishing method instead of risking his life. It is said that the Mad Doctor, the creator of the method, had his dantian severely damaged but didn't give up on cultivating and that's why he came up with this method."

Noah kept explaining while he was following William down the rocky passage, his Master would only nod every time he finished a sentence.

A sound came from behind them as the source of light was cut, it was the wall closing again by itself.

Only then Noah noticed some little lights at the bottom of the passage that were wooden torches fixed on the walls of this cavern.

With his already quite strong mental energy, it was not a problem for him to keep going down even before his eyes got used to the darkness.

"The greater advantage once completing all the seven cycles is that you will obtain a rank 3 body extremely sensitive to the "Breath", so it will enhance your usage of martial arts and vastly strengthen your senses. The reason the body can be considered of rank 3 is that after seven cycles the quality of "Breath" will equal a dantian one so the level of nourishment will be the same. Furthermore, differently from any other nourishing technique, the Seven Hells method doesn't need meditation using forms or postures to refill the "Breath" in the body because the acupoints created will continuously keep on absorbing "Breath" according to the cycle the specimen is in, until the body is

full of it. At last, when the treatment is over, the body will work like a smaller dantian, so the cultivator's absorbing process will be faster and his storage space will be bigger. It is to underline that most of these advantages will diminish in effectiveness once the cultivator steps on a higher realm."

While Noah was speaking, they passed a number of metal cells, mostly empty. Only some of them had chained people inside. They were no more than skin and bones.

After some time they turned right and passed through a metal door, entering a room full of torture tools.

William pointed at a rusty metal table with metal handcuffs on both its sides.

"Take off the upper part of your clothes and lie down with your belly pointing the ground, I will tie you to the table and give you some piece of cloth to bite. Then we will begin."

As Noah was about to take off his clothes, William put a hand to his shoulder and asked hesitantly:

"From now on there is no turning back, this is your last chance to stop yourself from doing something you might regret."

Noah smiled a little seeing how concerned William was and honestly answered:

"There has never been a way back for me Master, not since this bastard, son of a whore, had the stupid dream of becoming strong."

Then he undressed and with his half-naked body he lied down on the metal table with spread arms and legs and his back pointing at the ceiling.

William felt a bit of pity.

Heaven and Earth were fair to everyone giving them talent and methods to become strong, yet humans were greedy and monopolized the methods in order to obtain even more power.

'If it's power you seek, you must serve under those that can teach you how to obtain it. I wonder what would have I done if I were in this kid's situation'

Observing this 10 and a half year old kid lying on the table used to torture prisoners, William steeled his resolve and got near to him.

First, he chained both his arms and legs to the handcuffs and then he took a piece of cloth from inside his sleeve and put it in Noah's mouth.

"I'm going to begin, I will destroy the seven acupoints in the order described by the Mad Doctor then you will be on your own. Good luck."

William put his hand on Noah's back and concentrated.

He scanned the body searching for the precise position of the acupoints and, once he found them, he gathered seven slivers of "Breath" from his dantian and inserted them on the boy's back.

"I'm gonna start."

Noah tightened his grip on the chains ready for the wave of pain.

CRACK

The first sliver of "Breath" detonated destroying one acupoint with it.

An indescribable pain ran through Noah as he let out a scream through the piece of cloth in his mouth.

"GHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

He felt his back shattering as he convulsed as to try to run away from the pain inside him.

William remained impassible since he knew that he could not lose his focus on the other six slivers of his "Breath"

"Now two more!"

He yelled.

CRACK CRACK

Two more slivers detonated destroying the corresponding acupoints.

This time Noah felt as someone was using a hammer to keep on smashing his already broken back.

Even while he was screaming and convulsing, Noah repeated the same simple sentence in his mind.

'ENDURE IT! ENDURE IT! ENDURE IT!'

His entire focus was on staying conscious, during this process his extraordinary progress with mental energy showed its fruits.

But William could not wait for him to get accustomed to the pain.

"Three more!"

CRACK CRACK CRACK

Noah stopped trying to control his body, or to say it better he could not control his body anymore.

If it wasn't for William holding him down on the table he would have probably torn his own hands and feet out from the shackles.

Traces of blood appeared on the cloth inside Noah's mouth as he kept on screaming without an end.

He entered a frenzied state where he could not understand if he was thinking of something or yelling it. Yet, the sentence in his mind was still the same.

'ENDURE IT!'

"Last one!"

CRACK

This time, the pain didn't increase but a familiar feeling dawned on him.

'Is this... death? So it's a race between the death of the body and the reconstruction of it! Bring it on!'

The whirl was being created and William kept on holding down Noah's body in order to let him focus on the reconstruction.

Through all the pain and the feeling of his body dying, Noah finally felt the presence of the "Breath" on his back. It was being accumulated at high speed and was lingering over him.

'Now!'

Ignoring all other sensations, he solely focused on the "Breath" drawing it towards the seven places where his acupoints once were.

The "Breath" entered the now empty spaces and accumulated until they were full.

After the spaces were full, Noah used the remaining "Breath" over him to close off the space around the new acupoints waiting for them to form.

Little by little, the "Breath" mixed with some bone shards started to solidify and to link themselves to his skeletal and circulatory systems.

Another wave of pain assaulted Noah as the newly acupoints forcefully fixed themselves on the already existing parts of his body, but he was ready for it.

He kept holding on with his life slowly sliding away, going toward a darkness that he knew too well.

Then the first acupoint ended its solidification process and completely fixed itself within Noah's body.

A wave of strength ran through him as the acupoint started working.

Then it was time for the second one, and then the third, till all the seven new acupoints started working properly inside Noah's body.

He held on the barriers he created to isolate the process for fear of something going wrong but feeling the darkness getting further and further away he started to relax and slowly released his concentration.

With this new life invading his body, drowsiness took control of him as he fought to stay awake but at that point, William held his head and said with a whisper:

"It's ok, you did it. You can rest now."

Noah's last mental resistance fell hearing these words and he collapsed unconscious on the spot.

Chapter 16 - 16. Advancement

When Noah woke up, he found himself in an unknown room lying on a bed.

His mind was foggy and he tried to turn his head to have a better look at the surroundings.

Immediately, a wave of pain came from both his back and head resulting in a grunt from the young man.

"You'd better not move, only two days have passed and your body still needs to recover. Your mind was exhausted too so you'd better not think of using this time forced in bed to train."

William's voice sounded from the side of the bed, he was holding a book as he casually browsed through its pages.

"Did the treatment succeed?"

Noah asked with a low voice.

"You really don't have anything else in your mind, do you? Yes, everything went well and as the nourishment of the first cycle goes on, you will break through the barriers of the rank 1 body and stabilize in its early stage."

William closed the book and took a basin full of a green liquid from a nearby table.

"Drink this, it will work as a meal and speed up your recovery process."

He held the basin on Noah's mouth and slowly poured the liquid inside paying attention not to make him suffocate.

A cold sensation invaded Noah as he forced himself to drink the soup, ignoring the pain he felt from gulping.

When he was done he felt sleepy again.

"I think I will sleep some more time, Master."

Then he closed his eyes and immediately fell asleep.

William shook his head but a smile was ever-present on his face.

'The treatment was actually worse than I thought but he handled it well. Such determination and mental energy, I feel blessed having such a disciple.'

William sat down on the chair on the side of the bed and picked again the book he was reading. He wasn't going to leave his disciple's side until he was fully recovered.

It was only three days later that Noah was finally able to stand up from the bed on his own, though with a bit of effort.

William was still on his side and could not help but feel amazed.

"In only five days of rest, you can already stand up, the advantages of the Seven Hells method sure are amazing. Even your mental energy completely

recovered yesterday, I believe that in another day you might be almost at full strength."

Noah was trying to feel the changes in his body while he was standing, he clearly felt the absorption force on his back that was constantly providing "Breath" to his body, speeding its recovery process.

"It is indeed wonderful, Master. I think that after my body is fully recovered and the "Breath" focuses on nourishing it, my strength will exponentially rise!"

William shook his head and realized that it had become a habit of his since when he started his lessons with Noah.

"For now just focus on your recovery and on getting used to your new strength, from next week onwards we are going to spar using the "Breath" every session since its replenishment won't affect your free time anymore."

Since he said that, Noah became excited and wholeheartedly focused on resting.

The following day, Noah went back to his lodging and was overwhelmed by his worried mother's questions.

After managing to hide the dangerous parts and eating more than he ever had in his life, Lily let him free to go back to his room, satisfied with the time she had spent with her son.

Noah's life went back to his previous rhythm with the only difference being his weekly training sessions with his Master becoming more heated.

They would spar all morning and Noah's usage of the "Breath" synchronized with the twin saber style grew in ability with every session, with his Master addressing his fast improvement to the Forging of Seven Hells method.

Yet, his biggest progress was still his mental energy.

By that time he could train with the Kesier rune for five hours straight, apparently his mind got stronger after holding on against the pain of the treatment.

'It seems that the experiences one goes through in life can strengthen the stability of the sphere in the sea of consciousness. The more stable one mind is the more it can endure its exposition to the rune.'

Noah realized this after another night of training in the mental energy.

Two months had passed since that day in the torture room, and he felt that his body had reached some kind of limit, yet his seven acupoints kept on absorbing "Breath" so he tossed the idea of undergoing the second treatment away.

His head hurt, like every night after he stared at the rune for many hours but that pain could not make him flinch anymore.

'After surviving that day, I'm afraid my concept of pain got a little twisted.'

He smiled lightly and then went to sleep.

Early in the morning, when the sun was yet to rise, he abruptly woke up feeling some uneasiness in his body.

He stared at himself and noticed that his pores were secreting some black substance that had a nauseous smell.

Not knowing what to do and thinking that it was an after effect of the Seven Hells method, he hastily jumped outside the window in his room and ran toward the guards building, falling from the first floor only caused him a little discomfort as he activated the "Breath" in his body to reinforce his lower body.

He ran way faster than he had ever done in his life, but he was too worried to notice it.

When he arrived at the first floor of the building he hastily called for his Master.

"Master, help! There seems to be a problem with my body."

William was a cultivator of the age of 41. He had cultivated for more than twenty years. A person like him would notice when someone ran near his room but would usually ignore it since he loved to sleep.

Today though, he was forced to wake up listening to the call for help of his disciple.

He hastily left his room and looked in the direction of the voice.

Noah was covered from head to toe of some black liquid that had a terrible smell.

From his expression, you could see how worried he was.

William, seeing him in that state, smiled at first but then got a bit angry at himself.

'Shit, I totally forgot to explain it to him. If I told him earlier I could have kept on sleeping. Well, how could I know that it would have been so soon.'

He yawned and then rubbed his still sleepy eyes.

Seeing the relaxed attitude of his Master, Noah calmed down a little and patiently waited for an explanation.

"So what's the problem?"

William said a bit irritated.

Noah was surprised.

'Isn't it obvious?'

He thought.

"Ehm, I woke up in the night with this dirt coming out of my body. Could you please explain what is happening to me, dear Master?"

William put a surprised expression and acted like he didn't notice anything until Noah mentioned it.

"Oh that. Well, your body advanced to rank 1."

Chapter 17 - 17. Magical Beasts

"Eh?"

Noah was first surprised, then happy.

Only now did he inspect his body. His 7 acupoints were absorbing "Breath" at full speed and the limit he felt last night disappeared. His body felt light but was sturdy and full of strength. He also seemed to have a better perception of the "Breath" inside his body, as it felt a little empty.

'Now that I think about it, I've never run so fast in my life and my sight seems to have improved. Logically speaking, my other senses should have had an improvement too.'

He kept staring at his dirty body with curious eyes. He had to stop cause his Master scolded him.

"What are you doing still here? Go take a bath, you stink!"

William pointed at a door at the start of the corridor while holding his nose with the other hand.

Noah happily bowed and went hurriedly through that door. Inside the room, there was a large basin that Noah supposed was used as a bathtub and some buckets full of water.

He washed himself carefully and then took a white kimono from a pile in the corner of the room. When he went out his Master was waiting for him in the

corridor. He was dressed in a tight dark green gym suit with a sword sheathed on his back.

"Since you woke me up you will have to come with me. I have to retrieve some special herbs for a mission the only problem is that a group of four-eyed wolves has recently made the place where the herb is found their lair. Those magical beasts are just rank 1 and even of the lower level so you should be able to easily take them down even if their number is around 15. I could do it by myself but it's about time you have an actual fight and you can even familiarize with your new body since you are at it. Go to your room to pick your sabers and meet me at the main gate of the defense wall."

Noah was instantly excited and almost forgot to make a bow when he was about to leave.

He happily ran back to his building to pick the two sabers hidden in his room and since he had no sheath for them he just tied them to his waist with pieces of a blanket.

'A fight to the death! This is totally different from a simple sparring with Master. And this body is amazing, I did nothing but run today yet I'm still not sweating. Even the "Breath" stored in my body is increasing, right now I should be able to attack with it at least seven times by just using the one in my arms!'

The advantages of a rank 1 body were already this evident with just some hours of nourishment.

'I wonder how much time has to pass before I can go through the second cycle.'

The sudden increase of power made Noah totally disregard the pain and dangers of the treatment, leaving inside him only an endless eagerness to become stronger.

When he arrived at the main gate of the Balvan mansion he found William waiting for him with a sleepy face, apart from his previous outfit he had a leather bag in his hand.

Looking at the shabby way Noah tied his sabers he could not help but shake his head.

"Did you forget to steal a scabbard from the guards last time?"

Mocking him a bit, he threw the leather bag at the feet of his disciple.

Noah looked inside the bag and was surprised to see two short sheaths inside it, with a leather belt that could hold them.

'He really thought of that too.'

He could not help but smile when he saw how caring his Master was of him.

He hastily replaced his gear with the one in the bag.

When he was done he bowed deeply to his Master trying to express all his gratitude to him.

William nodded at his figure right now that even though was that of a kid, resembled a bit more the one of a warrior.

No master would like a shabby disciple after all his appearance would reflect on the image of his master.

"Follow me, we are gonna run to the wolf's lair immediately and take care of them."

Noah was a bit surprised.

"Are we not taking horses?"

Horses were the main form of travel in this seemingly medieval world and a stable was situated right before the main gate in order to provide its services more rapidly.

"You are a cultivator now, even if a weak one. Your body broke through rank 1, and even if it's not as fast as a horse, it can still run pretty fast. Plus you seem to forget that we are going to fight against magical beasts, a normal horse can only run away at their sight. Come on, I will explain things more in detail as we run."

William exited the gate and started running with Noah trying to follow him hurriedly.

This was the first time in his life that Noah left the mansion and he could not help but look around with curiosity and the green fields surrounding him, at some mountain in the distance and at Evergreen forest.

William saw his behavior and did a snort internally, raising his speed to force Noah to focus on following him.

'You are gonna fight for the first time and instead of being agitated you waste your time looking around, I guess he really is a kid.'

Noah and William sped in the direction of the forest that was at 3 days of distance on a horse.

After about 15 minutes of running, when the mansion was quite at some distance away from them, William started explaining.

"The four-eyed wolf is a magical beast the size of 3 meters, it generally has a pale-yellow fur and, as its name says, it has one pair of eyes on each side of his head. Its attacks consist of scratching and biting like every other wolf, and of a mental shockwave to momentarily startle his prey. With the steadiness of your mind, standing your ground against that attack is a stroll in a park so don't be too worried about it."

Noah lowered his head a bit to cover his complicated expression.

The reason was that no matter what level of mental energy his Master thought he had, he would always have way more of it.

'I know I can trust him but there is really no way to explain the transmigration thing to him. I'll just let him think of me as hardworking and with a high proficiency in it.'

William didn't notice the change in expression on his disciple and kept on with his explanation.

"Before, I said that the four-eyed wolf is a rank 1 magical beast so I think it's time to explain the ranks of a magical beast. It is humans who give a rank to the species of beasts based on their strongest attribute. For example, the four-eyed wolf has a rank 1 body but its mental attack is below that threshold, so the rank 1 of their species is given by their body."

Noah was really interested in this part of the explanation since he could never read something more specific about the cultivation world due to the fact that all the books about it were in the inner circle library.

He was about to ask which rank the dragon that attacked 10 years ago was when William continued speaking.

"Yet, Heaven and Earth are fair and since humans have a higher intellect and can create techniques to better express their strength, magical beasts have an easier growth process. Other than absorbing "Breath" naturally they can get stronger by eating other living beings full of "Breath" like magical beasts or cultivators. This causes innate aggression in their behavior and often causes cannibalism to happen inside their groups."

Chapter 18 - 18. Slaughter

"And what happens if they get strong enough to break through the limits of a rank?"

Asked Noah.

They were now running for 30 minutes and traces of sweat appeared on Noah's face, yet his Master seemed completely fine and continued to explain.

"They evolve, or to put it simply, they hibernate themselves for a period of time and when they wake up they will have a boost in all their natural abilities. Let's say, for example, that a four-eyed wolf of rank 1 was to evolve. Its rank would be 2 cause of its body but it would also have a rank 1 mental attack which will make it extremely more dangerous than its rank 1 version."

Noah finally had a better understanding of the evolution process of magical beasts and could not help but be a bit envious.

They had just to eat and sleep to get stronger while humans had to train nonstop only to take small steps toward a higher realm.

This time, William took notice of his disciple's expression and smiled a little.

"I know what you are thinking but don't worry, you will see humans advantage when you fight those beasts."

Noah was surprised but did not fully understand his Master words.

He started to focus his mind on the imminent battle trying to anticipate the worst possible outcome.

They moved for 20 more minutes till they reached a small hill, there William stopped and took a sack of water from inside his suit.

He passed the sack to Noah and said with a serious face.

"Over this hill, there is the wolf's lair. Their number amounts to 15 so you should be careful not to get surrounded. You will go alone while I will be watching closely enough to intervene if something bad happens. Remember all our training and don't be stingy on using the "Breath" until you have a complete understanding of your strength. Catch your breath a bit and then go, don't worry, you won't be in any danger."

Noah became even more serious in hearing these words.

He took a small sip from the sack and sat cross-legged on the floor to steady his breath.

He looked inside his sea of consciousness, where the faint shape of some lines was forming at the center of the sphere and checked that he was at peak condition.

'Do not hesitate, do not make mistakes. Be wary of your surroundings. 15 wolves to go.'

He exhaled with force and then stood up, his mind was ready and his body felt no fatigue, there was no reason to waste more time.

He unsheathed his sabers and started climbing the hill paying extra attention to anything that got perceived by his senses.

When he reached the top he could see the wolf's lair at the bottom of the other side of the hill.

The wolves were 3 meters long and 2 high, had 4 big and sharp eyes and yellow fur.

10 of them were lying on the ground, seemingly sleeping, while the other 5 were on guards on the sides of the sleeping group. A slightly bigger wolf was at the center of the pack, he was probably the alpha one.

'If I charge I will be completely in the open, there is no way I can catch them by surprise but there really seems to be no other option. Maybe if I run at full speed going down the hill and using the "Breath" I can land a couple of hits on one of them. Yet will it be enough to kill it? And then what about the other 14? Fucking Master, why can't you explain things properly'

He thought for a bit more but he really could not find other ways to get an advantage on them.

'Well, if I screw up, Master will just come and save me, so I might as well go all out.'

Steeling his mind, Noah concentrated and then jumped downward toward the lair.

He boosted his speed with the "Breath" in his legs and crossed his sabers in front of him.

He was fast! A rank 1 body using the "Breath" and going downhill reached an explosive speed.

Yet, Noah seemed not to notice as his mind was completely focused on taking out a wolf before they could surround them.

In a few breaths of time, he was at the bottom of the hill with one of the wolves staring at him.

As if it recognized some form of danger, it inspired as to prepare a howl to warn the other members of its pack.

Before it could though, Noah jumped horizontally and slashed at full strength toward the head of the wolf.

The saber, empowered with the "Breath", cut the wolf horizontally from its head till half its body like it was butter.

The wolf was dead on the spot!

Even Noah was stunned for a second by the perforating ability of the twin saber style but was immediately forced out of his amazement seeing that the other 4 awake wolves were ready to give the warning signal.

"AUUUUUUUUH"

Hearing the howl, Noah hurriedly took out the saber from the wolf corpse and jumped to one of the howling ones.

He was right in front of it before it even finished howling and without wasting any time he slashed at his head.

Even though he used less "Breath" than the first time he still felt almost no resistance from the wolf skull, as his saber pierced right through his brain.

The light in the wolf's eyes disappeared since it died and this gave Noah the signal to jump on another target.

Suddenly, a shockwave hit his sea of consciousness, the remaining 3 awake wolves attacked together in order to stall for the other members of the pack to get up.

The attack was like a shrill sound inside Noah's mind, yet his sphere did not even tremble being hit by it.

'So weak!'

Noah thought as he jumped right through the pack slashing at two wolves that were almost on their legs.

Two half-circles of blood were created in the air as the two sabers slashed vertically the heads of the two wolves.

This time Noah felt some resistance as he used even less "Breath" than the last time.

'I can use even less of it and still manage to cut right through their skulls with my body strength. 11 to go!'

Blood continued to flow as Noah moved around slashing at the heads of the wolves in the pack until a shrill sound way stronger than the one before made his mental sphere lightly tremble.

The alpha wolf was staring at him with venomous eyes as it used a mental attack together with the remaining 7 wolves.

Noah felt a bit of pain coming from his head, but it was so soft confronted with what he had been through that he didn't even stop for a second in his slaughter.

He would use less and less "Breath" to deal with the wolves as he estimated the strength of his body and he moved too fast for them to encircle him.

If a wolf jumped at him he would cut it in half with a double vertical slash, if it came from his side he would rotate on himself to deal a devastating blow.

The onslaught continued till only the alpha wolf remained, it had a large wound on his neck since he managed to avoid the clear hit on his head.

'This one is a bit stronger than the others, after all, it was the only one that dodged one of my attacks even if barely. Well, I must consider that I'm getting tired, so my speed is diminishing. Next time, I must aim for the stronger ones first.'

The wolf was still looking at him with anger but there was fear now in its eyes.

Noah slowly got closer while the wolf retreated, yet the wound on his neck was too serious to heal on its own.

The wolf so tried a desperate attack, jumping with its jaw open toward Noah.

He watched the fangs of the wolf getting closed and then dodged at the last time to his right, delivering an upward slash to its neck.

The body of the alpha wolf fell on the ground and its severed head rolled for some more distance.

After killing all of the 15 wolves he finally had some confidence in his ability!

Chapter 19 - 19. Threat

Noah breathed roughly.

Now that the battle was over he was overwhelmed by the tiredness of his body.

Even if he decreased the quantity of "Breath" as he got used to killing the beasts he still had almost none left.

He constantly used the one in his legs to boost his speed and agility and still used a bit of the one in his arms to activate the perforating ability of the twin saber style.

He sat on the bloody ground to rest a bit and allow his acupoints to refill the "Breath" in his body.

"You did a good job for your first time."

William arrived from behind him, smiling and carrying some flowers in his hands.

"So now you know why I told you that you would have been fine?"

Noah nodded and answered shortly.

"I use a rank 2 martial art, with just their rank 1 bodies they stood no chances."

William nodded.

"Yes! Martial arts and magic spells are what make humans the overlords of the world. A rank 2 martial art can damage a rank 3 body. The same goes for a rank 1 magic. Of course, if you don't have the corresponding quantity and quality of "Breath" you won't be able to fully use the potential of the techniques and you will be heavily limited in their usage."

Noah reviewed the battle he just had in his mind as he was waiting for his body to recover.

'I indeed wasted a lot of "Breath" during the battle and no one of the wolves could keep up with my speed so it was a one-sided battle. But I might run out of "Breath" if an enemy keeps dodging and that's if I consider my opponent a

magical beast. Against a cultivator with the same martial art rank as mine, how would things go?’

He didn’t like the answer he found.

The limits of having limited "Breath" were evident.

William shook his head, he could vaguely understand what his disciple was thinking.

"You don’t seem to realize that no other kid of your age can slaughter a pack of rank 1 beasts without even getting hurt."

’Right, I almost forgot that I’m not even 11.’

He really did forget his age in this world for a moment.

His morale was lifted a bit.

The duo waited for 10 minutes before Noah stood up and nodded to his Master, signaling that they could go back.

When they could see the main gate of Balvan mansion, William got closer to Noah and spoke with a low voice.

"I believe that your acupoints will stop working soon since you advanced so you will be ready for the second treatment. After you enter the second cycle I will let you take on guard’s missions."

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Inside the guards building, on a table in the courtyard, 5 men and a kid sat in a circle reading a sheet in their hands.

The kid was, of course, Noah.

He was wearing a black gym suit with two sabers tied on his back inside their respective sheaths and his black hair was combed in a simple ponytail that fell on his back.

6 months passed since his fight with the four-eyed wolves and other than becoming 11 he also went through the second treatment.

He was still short since his body was still growing but his body seemed exceptionally sturdy with distinct muscles lightly bulging from his small body.

'Even though by now I've been in the second cycle for the same time I did with the first one my acupoints are still working at full speed. My body should be in the middle tier of the first rank right now.'

He thought before focusing again on the sheet in his hands.

Written on it there was the description of a mission and the reason for this group of guards gathering together.

'Lilun village, 5 days of travel by horse going south. Request for help due to continuous attacks from giant spiders, presumably a nest of ironclad spiders is inside a cave nearby. The mission consists of finding and destroying the nest.'

Noah raised his eyes from the sheet and looked at the frowning faces of his companions for this mission and waited for their group captain to explain further.

The group captain was called Mason and was a senior member of the guards of the outer ring. He was a tall man in his 50ies, with a long black beard and short red hair. His weapon of choice was a big two-handed ax.

Mason was waiting for everyone to finish their reading before nodding when he noticed the other 5 people looking at him.

"First, you must know that the ironclad spider is a rank 2 beast and apart from a really hard body it doesn't have any notable abilities. The only problem is

that they reproduce at a really fast rate so their nest will probably be filled with newborns of rank 1. We will take the classic approach for the mission: get to the village, find clues about the nest, extirpate little by little their population. Any questions?"

No one seemed to have any objection until a guard of the group stood up and pointed at Noah.

He had only one eye and a deep scar that cut the now hollow eye cavity. He was a little shorter than Mason and was bald with a short beard. Yet, even though he was pretty tall, he was also quite fat and sweaty.

"I have only one question Mason, why the fuck are we taking a kid with us?"

Some of the other guards in the group seemed interested in Mason reply as to indicate that they had the same doubt.

Noah didn't even look at the fatty as he waited for the captain answer.

"The vice-captain vouched for him, so he can come and help us. And Balor, when this mission starts you must refer to me as captain or group captain."

Mason answered calmly but at the words "help us", the fatty named Balor exploded into laughter.

"This one was good, group captain. You could have just said that part of the mission was to babysit this kid cause his mother was busy serving the inner circle. Hahaha, help us!"

While he said so he neared Noah as to put his arm around his neck.

"Don't worry little kid, we will take good care of you, and maybe you can make me meet your mother in exchang---"

Balor stopped talking, or to better say, he had to stop.

A saber pointed at his left eye and the kid he was trying to hug with his right arm disappeared.

A threat sounded from his left side.

"Try to touch me, you fat pig, and I'll make you blind."

Noah was staring at him with icy eyes, the coldness he was emanating was intensified by his now extraordinary mental energy, it caused pressure to fall on Balor mind as his legs went soft and he kneeled on the ground. Yet, the saber always followed his remaining eye like it was attracted by it.

Noah kept looking at him applying mental pressure on the guard's mind.

Then he moved the saber toward the powerless guard and retracted it only when it was about to cut him.

After that, Noah sat back on the table as if nothing happened.

Chapter 20 - 20. Siege

The guards were surprised but nodded internally at such a show of power.

They were soldiers, after all, they respected power.

The captain didn't seem to care too much as he was used to these kinds of events being among soldiers all his life.

"Since everything is settled, the meeting is over. See you tomorrow at dawn, I will take care of renting the carriage but remember to take some provisions with you. Clearing that nest might take more time than we imagine."

The group got dismissed and everyone went their way, yet Balor took a bit more to get up since his legs still had no strength.

'That fat idiot, I really hope he won't cause problems to me in this mission. At least, the other guards should trust my abilities a bit now'

Noah was still irritated by Balor's previous act.

He didn't know if it was the mocking of his mother, his daringness even though he was weak, or simply his aspect.

'On the bright side, I'm finally going to fight rank 2 beasts, I was getting bored of only sparring with Master.'

He went back to his room and packed things for travel. He ordered the servant to make some portions and checked that everything was ready.

He had only one doubt.

'Should I take the Kesier rune with me? I can't train in it since I would be exhausted after every session and I can't allow me to be weak while in a mission.'

He was about to hide the sheet under the bed when he thought of something and happily put the rune in his suit.

'If I train for only a couple of hours it should be fine right?'

If his Master was to listen to him saying something like that he would probably beat him up.

Two hours were nothing for Noah as the second treatment made his mind even firmer.

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The next day he was the first to arrive at the courtyard.

As the other members of the group arrived, they would nod at Noah and wait for everyone to gather.

The only exception was Balor who did not even try to hide his resentment and hate for Noah.

Noah didn't care enough to pay attention to him and when the last man arrived they moved together toward the main gate to pick their carriage.

When they were on the road, Mason, from inside the carriage, cleared his throat to get everyone's attention.

"In order to have better teamwork, we should introduce ourselves and our weapon of choice."

The guards of the outer ring were a group of soldiers that amounted to a bit more than 100 people so it was safe to say that they knew each other at least superficially.

'Is he doing this for me? He wants to get on William's good side?'

As Noah thought, Mason was trying to do a favor to him because of his relationship with the vice-captain.

"I'm Mason, one of the eldest in the group of the outer ring, I use a big ax."

The other guards didn't seem to hate the idea and answered shortly.

"Luke, bow and knife".

"Robert, longsword, you can call me Rob."

"Eddy, longsword."

Balor only snorted but two heavy hammers were placed to his side as a self-explanatory answer.

"Noah, sabers."

Silence fell inside the carriage which was particularly awkward.

Robert took out some dice from his backpack smiling radiantly.

"I brought these with me, someone wants to play even and odd?"

It was a simple game where you had to bet on either odd or even and the result of the rolling dice would decide the winner.

The soldiers quickly agreed to kill their boredom with only Noah and the captain remaining on their seats.

Like this the 6 days of travel passed, since a carriage was slower than a horse, setting a campfire every night and playing games during the day.

Noah would manage to sneak up some hours of training in the rune when everyone was asleep but never forced himself over the 2 hours limit since that would affect too much his condition and he wanted to be ready for any danger.

On the evening of their 6th day of travel, the shape of a village appeared in their sight.

There was smoke coming from it and the light of torches was creating a red halo in the darkness.

"Something is wrong."

Said Mason.

"Get out of the carriage, we run there and check the situation as soon as possible."

The group of 6 got out and ran at full speed toward the village.

Noah was the fastest, even though he didn't have the most powerful body of the group, he was smaller and had a lighter weapon, so he sped like a bolt leaving the other soldiers behind.

'Finally a battle!'

He really got bored in these 6 days since he could not train or spar with anyone.

The village was getting closer in his eyes as screams and vague orders were becoming more clear to Noah's ears.

When he was about to enter the perimeter of the village he unsheathed his sabers ready to fight.

Inside Lilun village, the scene was terrible.

Big spiders with dark gray bodies were freely killing the powerless commoners and carrying their corpses away.

The men of the village were trying to set up a line of defense to allow the women and the children to escape but they weren't more than a meat shield that could only stop the spiders' tide for some moments.

Blood flowed continuously on the ground as the villagers were stabbed to death by the sturdy legs of the spiders and then carried away on their back, the brown ground was transformed in dark mud by the battle.

An ironclad spider managed to pass the human wall and reached for a screaming woman holding a child in her hug, trying to block the imminent blow with her body.

SHRIIIIII!

The sound of metal sliding against metal sounded as the woman mustered her courage to look at the scene behind her.

A little kid, not older than 12, was staring at the spider corpse at his feet.

A deep cut ran for half its head and green blood flowed from it.

The spider body was 1 meter and a half long and its head made only 30 centimeters of it.

She was about to ask if it was him who saved her and her son but stopped seeing the frowning expression on the youth's face.

'I didn't use that much "Breath" but the results were way less than I anticipated. A rank 2 body sure is amazing, if I didn't go through the second treatment I'm afraid I could be able to kill only 6 or 7 of them before having to rest.'

The ironclad spiders had an incredibly tough body, as their name suggested, their defenses were top tier in the range of the rank 2 magical beasts.

The other soldiers caught up with Noah and were surprised to see that he got rid of one spider in that short amount of time.

An 11 years old kid that was able to take down a rank 2 beast wasn't exactly a daily sight!