

Chapter 151 - 151. Spells

Noah walked toward the inventory of the academy.

'Win-win he says... He just wants to use me to get the Royal inheritance, I don't know if I'll have any value after that.'

He was thinking about his conversation with Thaddeus.

'It might be fine till I'm discovered but what will happen at that point? I don't believe that they will simply clear my name, nor that I will allow them to do so. My future clash with the Balvan family is set in stone.'

He would never make a deal to pacify with the Balvan family, there was no chance that he would just forget about the events in the mansion.

'What's most likely to happen is that I will be blamed for all my crimes and the Royal family will trade my life to pacify the situation. If word gets out that the Royals hire criminals, I bet that their reputation would take a heavy blow.'

He was a criminal, there was no other way to see it.

The Royal family was in charge of the county but they had to maintain a peaceful relationship with their subjects.

Noah sighed after realizing that his only option was the usual one.

'I need power.'

He reached the inventory and showed his token to the guards that let him pass almost immediately.

"What can I do for you this time?"

Professor Lynn spoke to him with a trace of interest.

Noah arrived in front of his desk and lightly bowed before making his request.

"I would like to inspect all the spells having the darkness element as a requirement."

Lynn's brow arched in suspicion.

"All of them?"

"Yes, please."

Noah's reply was fast and polite.

Lynn stared at the youth for a bit before picking the usual white crystal and focusing on it.

When he handed it to Noah, a list of about thirty spells was shown at his probing.

'So few of them.'

A big part of the list was composed of the rank 0 spells that he had already inspected the first time that he went there.

The others were mostly rank 1 or rank 2 spells and their prices were exorbitant.

Noah carefully evaluated each one of them before sighing inwardly.

'To think that I believed to be rich just a few minutes ago.'

"Professor, I want the rank 0 spell Blind, the rank 2 spell Blood drain, and the spell Warp."

Lynn's eyes widened hearing Noah's speaking.

He stuttered as he answered to him.

"B-but that's will cost you more than half a million Credits!"

Noah calmly replied to his words by handing him a space-ring.

"Five hundred ninety thousand Credits to be precise. You can check my storage device if you don't believe that I possess that sum."

Lynn accepted the ring and was amazed to see its contents, all of Noah's Credits were inside of it.

He gulped and gave the ring back to Noah as he stood up from his chair.

"Come with me, you will deposit the money and then receive your spells."

Noah followed the Professor in the deepest part of the room through the inscribed floor.

Lynn pressed on some runes on the wall and a passage opened.

"Come."

Noah didn't hesitate and continued to walk.

They walked through a dark corridor for a bit before Lynn stopped and pressed on a rune on the floor.

A large pit appeared where a sea of Credits was stored.

'These should be the finances of the whole academy!'

"Drop the required Credits here, we couldn't make that kind of transaction in the open."

Noah waved his hand and emptied most of the contents of his space-ring in the underground vault.

Lynn nodded and gestured to Noah to return to the previous room, the gap closed automatically as they stepped away from the area.

As they exited the corridor, Lynn picked the white crystal from his desk and placed it on the same cavity of the other time.

The inscriptions lit up and three scrolls materialized.

"I don't know where you obtained all that money but I advise you to train carefully in the Warp spell. You wouldn't be the first cultivator to die because of an error in its execution."

Noah stored the scroll and bowed to the Professor, then he hastily left the inventory to return to his accommodation.

He didn't even look at Ivor as he sat on his bed and took out the three scrolls.

'Blind is a simple rank 0 spell that covers a small area with black fog, it can be useful to surprise enemies with weak mental energy.'

In less than two hours he memorized the diagram and pointed toward a corner of the room.

His mental energy was slightly expended and a small black cloud of about thirty centimeters appeared in that area.

It lasted only for one second though and then dispersed in the air.

'A bit weak but I can't expect much from a supportive spell. If used wisely, it can be useful.'

He took the second scroll, storing the first one.

'Blood drain, up to rank 2, limited to darkness element cultivator. Morphs one hand in a demonic claw that drains blood to heal injuries. It can slightly strengthen the body if enough energy is absorbed but there is the need to refine that power to do so.'

The spell was meant for those that relied mostly on the body to fight, which didn't really fit Noah's fighting style.

However, he was deeply interested in the strengthening part.

'Magical beasts can freely absorb the "Breath" of other creatures and cultivators. I feel that this spell tried to imitate that ability and reached some satisfying results.'

His main goal in buying this spell was to study the mechanism behind it.

If one day he managed to create his own spells, he would surely experiment in that same field.

'Well, I also need to rely less on my Demonic form, that spell simply consumes too much mental energy.'

It took him an entire day to understand the diagram and memorize it.

At dawn, Noah was happily staring at his right hand that had successfully turned into a black fiendish claw.

'The expenditure on mental energy is not high at all! Even if I don't use the spell to heal my injuries, it will still weaken my enemies! I will try its effect on my next mission.'

He dispelled the spell and the claws evaporated, revealing his normal hand under them.

Noah turned toward the last scroll and his eyes shined due to his excitement.

Chapter 152 - 152. Monster

'Warp spell, rank based on the mental level of the user, limited to darkness element. The user teleports at a distance depending on the quantity of mental energy used.'

'This one cost half a million Credits, spells without a rank limit are surely expensive.'

The diagram of the spell was so complex that Noah didn't manage to make progress in it even after half a day of study.

'I need to take it slowly and carefully memorize everything. I was really lucky with the Demonic form since it was implanted directly in my sea of consciousness.'

Noah used the next two weeks to memorize the diagram.

He had to diminish his focus on his training to do so but, in the end, he managed to learn perfectly the contents of the scroll.

Of course, he decided to try it as soon as he did it.

Noah was on his bed, reviewing the diagram.

He had to manipulate the "Breath" to perform certain patterns and he had to do so in a specific rhythm.

When he was sure that he wouldn't commit any mistake, he stood up and stared at a spot in front of him.

Ivor was sleeping in the empty room, he was completely alone.

Noah activated the spell, his body was immediately covered in black flames.

At the same time, those same flames appeared in a spot at one meter from his position.

The two fires then extinguished in an instant, revealing Noah in the area where the second black flames had appeared.

The process had taken less than a second from start to finish.

Noah opened his eyes and supported himself on the near wall, his mind was assaulted by a powerful dizziness and he felt the urge to vomit invading his body.

It took him a few minutes to suppress the after-effects of the spell.

'What a strong rejection! I need to spend a lot of time to get used to the teleportation before trying to use it in battle. For now, I should just be happy that I cast the spell successfully.'

He sat back on his bed and reviewed his situation.

'I've done everything I could to increase my battle prowess in the short run and I even invested in my future. There are no threats looming over me nor duties that require me to stop training. What I have to do now is to cultivate in a peaceful environment.'

And that's exactly what he did.

His courses were compelling and gradually increased his knowledge of the topics that he was interested in.

Noah never skipped a lesson, not even when he went outside of the academy to complete his bimestrial missions.

He trained in the Sulfur domain for one hour every two weeks, using that facility too often would ultimately soften the mental sphere and Noah didn't want to risk it happening.

He would also absorb "Breath" in his sea of consciousness every time the internal pressure diminished, added to his constant training with the Kesier rune, his mental sphere enlarged at an incredible speed.

His body and dantian also steadily improved as Noah never slacked off in his night meditation.

His remaining time was used to become accustomed to his new spells and to implement them in his combat style, which he then tested during the missions.

Time passed quickly and, at some point, the event that he was waiting for finally happened.

Noah was on the bed of his accommodation.

One year had passed since he returned from the Royal inheritance, he was seventeen and a half years old by then.

His facial features had matured and he had become slightly taller but remained still of medium stature.

His hair had grown so much that he had to comb it in an intricate way to prevent it from touching the ground.

It was the examination period of his courses, his second year as a student of the academy was successfully ending.

However, there was no anxiety for his incoming tests on his expression, nor confidence.

He had no expression at all.

An unfolded sheet laid at his side, it had the second Kesier rune drawn on it.

He had his eyes closed, carefully inspecting his sea of consciousness.

There were Echo's figure and a big dark blue ball that constantly emitted a pressure over the sea.

Nevertheless, they didn't manage to create any ripple on the water representing Noah's mental energy.

Two runes stood at the center of the sphere, both of them were covered by black roots that formed the diagram of the Demonic form spell.

There was only stillness, nothing seemed to be able to shake the environment inside Noah's mind.

Noah opened his eyes.

A wave of coldness invaded the room, his aura was overwhelming.

'This is completely different.'

He could clearly sense everything happening in an area of twenty meters around him.

The colors of the world were shining as if they glowed on their own.

"What happened?"

Ivor was woken up by a wave of pain sent by his mental sphere.

Since his sea of consciousness was fragmented, he was extremely sensitive to any powerful presence that naturally oppressed his mind.

Noah shifted his gaze on him, his eyes had an unprecedented brilliance on them.

Ivor stumbled, as Noah focused on him another wave of pain made him lose his balance.

"Sorry, I'm still learning to control myself."

Ivor's eyes widened and he opened a jar of wine to take a long sip, he had begun to understand what had happened to his student.

"How is this possible?"

Noah concentrated and retracted his imposing presence, even with his eyes closed he could feel his surroundings clearly.

He picked the sheet on his side and smirked a little looking at the rune on it, the sight caused him no discomfort at all.

"You've really done it."

Ivor was incredulous.

Noah nodded and moved his gaze back on him, he contained his mental pressure as much as he could but some of it was still leaked by the intensity of his stare.

"I'm a rank 2 mage now."

Ivor shook his head and drank more of his wine.

"That's... How? The sea of consciousness is usually the last to advance! And even if we want to ignore that, you are not even close to being eighteen! A cultivator reaching that stage at the age of twenty-five would be considered a peerless talent! A situation like yours has never happened in the history of the cultivation world!"

Ivor still couldn't accept the event, in his eyes, Noah was a monster with limitless potential.

Noah completely ignored his comments and stood up from his bed.

"I think it's time to start with the forging."

Chapter 153 - 153. Anonymity

Noah wasn't concerned about the tests of his courses.

He was genuinely interested in the study of magical beasts so he had diligently memorized every lesson of that course, a simple written examination wasn't something that could worry him.

There was nothing to say about the real battle course, his strength was overwhelming among the students of his class and he had real experiences with battle formations, failing in that test was virtually impossible for him.

Regarding general cultivation, the test emphasized the progress of the students during their enrollment in the academy, Noah could pass that one just by revealing half of his mental energy.

"Are you ready to start?"

Ivor recovered from his amazement and became excited.

"Yes, being a rank 2 mage should allow me to forge something useful for my level. I just need to store enough "Breath" in my sea of consciousness to make it reach the same density of a cultivator in the liquid stage."

In the various books that Ivor gave him, there were hundreds of notes regarding the power of the product according to the "Breath" used to forge it.

Generally speaking, inscribed items had a rank that described their power.

They were rank 1 if they replicated the strength of a rank 1 cultivator, rank 2 if they did it for rank 2 cultivators, and so on.

They were then further divided in low, middle, and high tier, depending on which state of that rank they belonged to.

If Noah was to create an inscribed item with the liquid "Breath" of a rank 1 dantian, he would obtain a rank 1 product in the middle tier.

His sabers, the ones obtained in Eccentric Thunder's inheritance, had precisely that power.

"Why just liquid? You can surely push for a forging with solid "Breath"."

Noah snorted at Ivor's complain.

"I want to exercise in the method first. I'd rather take it slowly than risk my mental sphere because I attempted to create something that surpasses my ability."

According to the notes of the previous practitioners of the Elemental forging, a cultivator should always try to forge something less powerful than his dantian.

In Noah's case, that meant that he should stop at the liquid "Breath".

However, those notes never considered the case of a cultivator having his sea of consciousness stronger than his dantian.

'Since I am now a rank two mage, accumulating "Breath" that equals the solid stage of a rank 1 dantian should be doable, the problem lays on its actual power.'

Noah wanted to create something that increased his battle prowess, having an item on the same level of his weapons was useless.

'With the solid "Breath", I might be able to forge something useful but it will still only reflect my current level, which I don't really need. I have an idea that might actually give me a rank 2 weapon but I need more experience on the method to be sure of it.'

The products of the Elemental forging were the strongest among the various inscription methods.

If Noah really managed to create a rank 1 high tier weapon, he would have an inscribed item that neared the second rank of the dantian in power.

Nevertheless, he had already access to a similar power through his spells due to his recent breakthrough, that's why he wanted something stronger.

"You need a bigger house which should also have a reinforced room or basement. The unstable products of our method tend to explode."

Noah nodded at Ivor's words and pondered for a while with the academy token in his hand.

He was searching for facilities that met his requirements.

'There are rooms that I can rent but they are quite pricy. Money really isn't a problem but I'd rather not waste it if I can get what I need for free.'

He had more than one hundred thousand Credits left but he wanted to preserve them and accumulate a big sum in order to buy more spells or techniques.

After all, with just one visit at the inventory, he had spent almost all the profits he obtained in the Royal inheritance.

'It seems that I only have that choice left.'

Noah put away the token and approached the door in order to exit his lodging.

"Where are you going? I know that the alchemy division is quite experienced in explosions, they should have what you need."

Noah shook his head.

"There would be too many eyes on me. Maybe I can't prevent the news about my breakthrough from being disclosed but I'd rather keep my creations a secret."

"That is wise. So?"

Ivor approved his line of thought, it was always better to have some hidden card under your sleeve.

"Daniel, a guy that graduated once he became a rank 2 cultivator, joined the alchemy division which means that he had practiced in that field for a while."

Ivor didn't understand and opened his mouth to speak but Noah interrupted him.

"He had the best accommodation in the academy and, according to the information in the token, that house has a large underground basement completely reinforced with inscriptions. It should be the best environment where to practice."

"That's wonderful, right? What do you have to do to occupy that house?"

Noah sighed, lightly smiling at Ivor.

"I have to beat the current strongest student in the academy."

Ivor showed a surprised expression but then his brows furrowed and he drank from his usual jar.

"You are a rank 2 mage, aren't you the strongest student?"

"I should be, but I wanted to avoid becoming too famous. Well, I need the Credits and the reinforced room so I can only completely give up to my anonymity."

He was already known by the students as the one that broke Daniel's record but since he spent most of his time isolated in his accommodation, only those in his class remembered his facial features.

'I should first pass my tests though and I need the third Kesier rune from the inventory. Also, I need to test my new strength, I might kill the student in Daniel's lodging if I'm not able to control myself.'

He made up his mind and exited his house, his direction was toward the left side of the academy.

Chapter 154 - 154. Tests

Noah first went to the inventory.

Professor Lynn seemed to be particularly interested in his growth and showed an interested expression every time he entered that building.

His face though turned to one of disbelief as soon as he heard of Noah's request.

"You are joking, right?"

Lynn stood up from behind his desk and shouted, he was a bit angry since he thought that the student was making fun of him.

Noah sighed and took out the second Kesier rune from his space-ring.

He showed the contents of the sheet to the Professor and then he began to look at it with a calm expression.

Lynn wasn't convinced just by that and carefully stared at Noah's face waiting for any sign of struggle to appear.

However, as the hours passed, Lynn's mouth slowly opened in disbelief.

"Professor, it's been half a day already, I have other errands to attend to."

Noah had grown bored of that useless process and decided to move his gaze back on the cultivator.

"How is this possible? Are you sure you don't have Kesier blood in your veins?"

Noah just shrugged his shoulders to answer.

Lynn sat back on his chair and muttered with himself, he really couldn't accept what he was witnessing.

"Do you know that you probably are the first cultivator to ever achieve something like that? I have to inform the Royals, this is something worthy of the official records of the history of cultivators!"

Noah's eyes widened and he wore a shameless smile.

"Isn't it possible to keep this event private? You know, I'm quite shy."

Lynn stared at Noah, his expression said that he didn't believe one of the student's words.

"Even if I wanted to, I couldn't do it. Everything inside the academy belongs to the Royal dynasty so every transaction has to be recorded and copied. You can be assured that the news of someone requesting for the third Kesier rune won't go unnoticed."

'It seems that it won't be known immediately, I should have enough time to take my new accommodation and isolate myself in there to train.'

Lynn continued to stare at Noah, there was still some disbelief in his eyes.

"Ehm, Professor, I still need the rune."

Lynn came back to reality and hastily picked the white crystal on his desk.

In a few minutes, Noah went out of the building with the third rune in his space-ring.

'Now the tests.'

Noah went to look for the three Professors of his courses in their different buildings in order to ask to do his tests privately.

The excuse that he used was that he had to complete a mission in the following days in order to meet his bimestrial duty.

The three weren't particularly opposed to it and accepted to examine him.

Professor Roy, of the magical beasts' course, was an old cultivator completely addicted to the study of those creatures, he gladly accepted to speak more of them.

Noah underwent a long interrogation at which he answered perfectly, gaining the favor of the Professor.

He didn't really know why he liked to learn about magical beasts so much, maybe the events with the King of the valley had left a deep impression on him.

Yet, he felt incredibly interested in the variety of those creatures and in their habits so he simply studied them.

Bruce Nairti didn't even test him, as soon as Noah made his request, he immediately said two words.

"You pass."

That left even Noah surprised.

Bruce saw his expression and explained his reasons in a simple way.

"You are the strongest in your class and that position was never questioned even after June became Megan's student. You tell me what's the point in testing you."

June became stronger under the teachings of her Master but still couldn't match Noah's hardworking personality.

Her character though matured quite a bit, she had become less impulsive in the last year.

Megan Icek was the last Professor that he visited.

She asked him many questions about the inventions of famous cultivators but Noah only remembered the contents of their discoveries, being almost completely ignorant about the names of those mighty individuals.

He couldn't help it, he simply didn't care about their names, he was only interested in their experiments with the various techniques.

"You are really similar to my disciple, you listen only when it concerns something that you are interested in. I had to say that she could have beaten you if she managed to think more about her actions instead of always doing what she wanted. In a week, her combat style improved drastically."

Megan said, shaking her head.

"I think that she has taken you as her goal. For such a young girl to be so focused on battles, her life mustn't have been easy."

She sighed and Noah remembered a scene in the fourth layer of the Royal inheritance.

June sitting on her knees with her head lowered, the blood from her bitten lips continuously tainting the ground.

'To have such a reverence toward strength, one must have withstood harshness in his life. Well, those that don't do it are simply blind.'

In a world where the threat of magical beasts was constant, the search for power was a survival instinct of the human species.

"You pass, just do me a favor."

Noah waited for her to continue.

"My disciple still didn't realize it but she considers you as a friend so try not to hurt her with your actions. I know that your situation isn't simple but that doesn't mean that you have to involve her in your messes."

'Is she asking me to not drag her in my personal fights?'

"I will surely try to avoid that."

Noah said.

He really meant those words.

His character was apathetic but that didn't prevent him from caring about other persons.

June was definitely far away from his definition of "caring" but he appreciated her character, he wouldn't like to hurt her for no reason.

After the issue concerning the tests was over, it was time to pick a mission and becoming used to his new strength.

Noah spent a week in Arolyac forest and was extremely satisfied with the results of his breakthrough.

'Now I just have to beat that guy and take his accommodation. After that, I can start forging!'

Noah thought and his eyes shined due to his excitement as he moved toward the management building.

Chapter 155 - 155. Crowd

A big commotion occurred in the academy.

It was the period after the final examinations of the courses, normally most of the students would return to their families or engage in long missions at that time.

However, all the students chose to delay their plans due to an unexpected event.

Vance, the recluse student that showed his face only during the lessons but that also broke Daniel's record, challenged Manuel Gousho, the current holder of the title of the strongest student in the academy.

The Gousho family was a large-size noble family affiliated with the Udye one.

Daniel and Manuel had a friendly relationship but, due to their age gap, their level had always been quite far away, never allowing a proper confrontation between them.

After Daniel left, Manuel had taken his position as the leader of the new generation, obtaining respect and reverence from his peers.

Manuel was a man nearing twenty years of age.

Since he had seized the best accommodation in the academy, his power had steadily increased, nearing the breakthrough for the second rank of the dantian.

He was just a few weeks away from reaching the peak of the solid stage, after that he would use his reagent and undergo the breakthrough.

Never could he had imagined that his academy token would send him a notification in that period.

'A challenge right before my advancement? Does this junior want to become famous by stepping over me?'

Manuel thought, sitting cross-legged on an extremely comfortable mat laid on the floor of his accommodation.

'Should I ignore it? I don't think that I will lose face if I don't agree to such a request.'

He pondered, scratching his head lightly.

'It's from that student, Vance! The one that surpassed Daniel!'

Even though his relationship with Daniel was friendly, he still had a competitive nature, he just suppressed those feelings because the age gap rendered almost impossible for him to catch up.

However, a random youth appeared which was even younger than him and surpassed his seemingly unbeatable friend.

'If I refuse his challenge, the other nobles will forever think of me as a second-rate cultivator, fearful of the real geniuses.'

Challenges could be ignored but there was a monetary fee to pay to do so.

Nevertheless, Manuel was the heir of a powerful family, that sum was nothing in his eyes.

What he was worried about was the impact that such a refusal would have on his image.

He wanted to be considered akin to a Daniel by his generation, that's why he was working so hard to reach the second rank of the dantian before the age of twenty, he wanted to match Daniel's achievement.

'I suppose that a nice victory can improve my mood and increase my focus on cultivation. I also have to teach him that not all the nobles are as weak as he thinks.'

Noah's behavior with Daniel's followers was widely known, that was another factor that ultimately led him to be ignored by most of the students.

'Large-size noble families are untouchable in the eyes of common cultivators, it seems that the new generations have forgotten about that. It's on me to restore the natural order.'

As he thought of that, he accepted the challenge through his token and stood up from the mat.

On the day of the battle, scheduled four days after Manuel's positive answer, a big crowd stood excited on the stages of the largest arena in the academy.

It was a circular building on the left side of the river, with an empty space fifty meters wide encircled by hundreds of overhead seats.

'It resembles the Colosseum of my previous world, just way smaller.'

Noah thought, lazily standing at the center of the arena surrounded by the crowd of students.

'There are some inscriptions on the ground and even on the walls below the stages, it seems that I won't have to worry about breaking it.'

He was waiting for his opponent to appear, turning a deaf ear to the screams of the crowd above him.

'I knew that there would have been a commotion but this is far greater than I thought. Basically all the students are here and there are even a few Professors!'

The students were shouting cheers and making their bets, there were even a few of them who were loudly mocking him.

"He's mad! Senior Manuel was one of Daniel's strongest followers, it's said that they were actually close friends!"

"He probably reached the solid stage and thought that he could beat the strongest student! Hmph, he really underestimates the power of us nobles."

"Senior Manuel should teach him a memorable lesson! Break his limbs and make his teeth fall! I will gladly buy one of them for a thousand Credits!"

The most heated group that insulted him was composed by the students that Noah punished back when they tried to ambush him.

'Why don't they ever learn? Well, this Manuel shouldn't be as useless as them, there are nobles that don't waste the privileges of their status after all.'

Like he used everything he had to improve his strength, there had to be other cultivators that did the same.

When one of them was born in a large-size noble family, it would be labeled as a genius due to his fast growth.

That hadn't much to do with talent though, they simply had more resources and they used them wisely to increase their power.

For someone like Noah that had to use every chance that he could find to accumulate more resources, their lives appeared way too easy.

'If you don't fight for what you need, you will obtain a power that you can't use. I wonder how many of my spells he will make me use.'

It's not that he was underestimating him, the quantity of his "Breath" was definitely inferior to his opponent, implying that in a long battle he would lose.

However, he was a rank 2 mage!

His mind was on a completely different level and that advantage didn't stop to the increase of the pressure that he naturally emitted.

"Junior, if you thought that using me to become famous was a smart plan, you really underestimated the difference between our status."

Manuel appeared from one of the passages on the walls.

He was wearing a luxurious green battle robe that coordinated perfectly with his long brown hair.

He wielded a long sword with a golden inscribed handle of the same color of the embroidery of his dress.

'Did he bought that robe only for this match? It doesn't seem like he has ever used it.'

Noah inwardly shook his head, he couldn't really understand the mental processes of nobles.

He was only wearing tight black pants, showing his defined and pale upper body to the crowd.

"Actually, I just want your accommodation."

Chapter 156 - 156. Untouchable

The crowd was silenced by Noah's statement but was then revived by Manuel's words.

"The best house in the academy belongs to the strongest student. If you want it, you have to defeat me."

The crowd exploded in cheers, Manuel's demeanor seemed to be more appreciated than Noah's one.

One was prideful and confident while the other was cold and indifferent, there was no doubt about who would attract the favor of the students.

Noah shook his head and wielded his sabers.

"Let's just start, I have things to do."

A wave of coldness enveloped the stage as Noah focused on his opponent.

Manuel's expression changed instantly, his smiling face transformed into a stern one.

Noah's stare seemed to pierce him physically and the pressure it caused was suffocating.

'His battle intent sure is worth of praise.'

Manuel thought, mistaking the pressure of Noah's sea of consciousness for his battle might.

It wasn't to blame though, the possibility that the youth in front of him was a rank 2 mage was unthinkable.

'He is not bad, he is able to withstand my focus. Well, I stayed in the forest for one week to learn how to hold back after all.'

That wasn't the full extent of the mental pressure he was capable of, he was restraining himself.

Manuel decided to take the battle seriously and pointed his sword at Noah.

Sparks gathered on the metal of the blade and the handle lighted up to accelerate the process.

In less than a second, a thunderbolt shot out from the tip of the sword toward Noah.

Echo appeared in the air in front of him with its wings spread wide.

The thunder hit its body and pierced it, continuing on its way to hit the wall behind the blood companion.

Noah had already moved, the moment he understood that Manuel was a cultivator of the thunder element, he knew that Echo could not completely block the blow.

He had a vast experience regarding thunder spells due to his two years of weekly sparring with June, he knew that the bat's body was not enough as a form of protection.

Echo disappeared in his body as Noah ran, he wanted to get closer to Manuel in order to force a melee battle.

However, another bolt of lightning arrived in his direction and he was forced to stop his advance and hide behind Echo.

Manuel didn't stop though, he launched two more thunderbolts in his direction, making Noah retreat.

'It's his weapon!'

Noah was confused.

Generally speaking, it would be impossible to use such a powerful spell that many times in a row and without a certain delay.

Yet, Manuel did exactly that and Noah pointed the reason for that unusual ability to his weapon.

'That sword shortens the casting time of the spell and it seems to lower the mental energy required for its activation. Its definitely a rank 1 item at the peak of the tier.'

As Noah retreated, Manuel stopped using his spell and took out a bottle from his space-ring in order to restore some of his mental energy.

Pills and items were allowed in those kinds of battle, wealth was a form of power after all.

The only rule was to not attempt on the life of your opponent.

'This is getting annoying, I should try that thing.'

Echo's wings came out of his back and Noah shot in a straight line toward Manuel.

His opponent didn't hesitate and pointed his blade back at him.

Another thunderbolt shot in his direction but Noah didn't change his pace.

As he and the spell were at less than a meter from each other, a black ring appeared under his feet and he immediately shot in the air.

He flew over the spell!

Manuel, however, knew about his wings and promptly moved his blade to aim in his position mid-air.

Little did he expect that, as soon as the spell shot out from his weapon, Noah kicked the air over him and diagonally changed his direction.

Normally, when someone jumped during a battle, he was unable to dodge.

Noah had his wings but they weren't enough to change his course so drastically.

Even when he used the Shadow steps spell, the concentration required to make those kinds of cuts in the air was high and the results were not always reliable.

However, since he became a rank 2 mage, he finally managed to perfect that combat style.

Noah's cut speed scared Manuel that hastily released another spell.

Noah didn't even look at it and changed direction again, relentlessly moving closer to his opponent.

That was proper flight, not simply floating in the air!

As for how he could manage to understand the trajectory of the spells, that was also due to his rank 2 mental sphere.

Each one of Manuel's actions was under the strict control of his personal scan ability which had surpassed Echo's one in precision when it concerned a short distance.

When he was in the air, Noah was untouchable.

Manuel gave up on trying to hit him and prepared to drink another potion but Noah launched thirty wind slashes toward his position.

The slashes came from different directions as if there were more persons attacking him at the same time.

Manuel gave up on refilling his mental sphere too and unleashed the might of his rank 4 martial art to block all the attacks.

His sword moved slowly in the air in front of him, releasing small sparks.

As the black slashes arrived in his position, the sparks exploded and instantly destroyed Noah's attacks.

However, that action gave Noah enough time to arrive in his opponent's position.

'First form of the Ashura!'

He didn't hesitate and unleashed his strongest technique.

More than fifteen sabers appeared around Manuel and attacked him at the same time!

Manuel resorted again to the shield made of sparks to defend himself.

Another explosion occurred which distanced the two students from each other.

"You are indeed strong."

Manuel spoke with a slight smile on his face.

"But my reserves of "Breath" are deeper than yours, this match is mine."

Noah didn't answer and simply pointed at his right cheek.

Manuel didn't understand the meaning of that gesture until he felt a warm sensation on the left side of his face.

He swiped his cheek with his hand and found out that a small cut had appeared on it.

Chapter 157 - 157. Probing

Manuel was astonished!

'How did he manage to hit me through the barrier of lightning?!?'

His martial art focused on defense, logically speaking, it had to match Noah's attacks.

However, Noah still successfully hit him.

He didn't know that after his second time witnessing that technique, Noah could clearly see through its weak spots.

'Being a rank 2 mage is wonderful. The speed of my thoughts increased drastically and I can notice details that I was completely ignorant about!'

He felt that he could see through everything!

Some merit must be addressed to his battle experience though, seeing a weakness and exploiting it were two different things after all.

"Do you surrender or you want to see if my "Breath" will last till I hit your throat?"

Noah mocked him with his own words.

He was holding back, not using any of his new spells.

He was sure that, after that match, his name would be widely known so he wanted to hide at all cost his power and, most importantly, the nature of his element.

Echo could be considered a simple puppet, just black in color.

The Shadow steps spell was hard to distinguish from rank 0 movement spells of other elements.

His martial art was quite peculiar but, since his basic forms came from the Nails of the Kamaitachi art, he could be misjudged for a cultivator of the wind element.

Even if they had their suspects though, it was unlikely that a simple rumor would reach the ears of the Balvan family.

That's why he would rather take a fast win instead of protracting the fight.

If Manuel did a mistake because of his mockery, he was confident that he could transform it into a winning blow.

Manuel didn't take the bait but pointed his sword again at Noah.

Thunderbolts shot instantly from it but Noah simply jumped back in the air and again shortened the distance between them through his flight.

In a few minutes, Noah was in front of Manuel and the latter had to resort to his barrier of lightning to evade his assault.

They were separated again but, that time, Manuel had two deep cuts on his legs.

He was also quite pale as he launched more than twenty spells without having any time to recover.

'His mental energy shouldn't be enough to continue with this tactic. What exactly is his plan?'

Noah was suspicious.

His opponent wasn't panicking nor was he resorting to reckless attacks.

Manuel's eyes were calm and focused, not those of someone that had given up.

Manuel raised his sword again and resumed launching spells.

The events occurred in the same way as before: Noah flew in the air, dodging his attacks and slowly neared his opponent.

However, as Noah was about to attack him, Manuel planted his weapon in the terrain.

A big explosion occurred as a thunderstorm expanded from the handle of his sword to the surroundings.

Yet, Noah was expecting something like that and calmly decided to enter Echo's body to withstand its might.

Echo was destroyed multiple times due to the storm and many sparks landed on Noah's body, burning and cracking his skin.

Nevertheless, Noah's eyes never flickered and remained fixed on the center of the spell.

He lunged with his right saber and stopped it as soon as it reached Manuel's throat.

Manuel raised his head and smiled madly, continuing to fuel his spell.

'This fool would rather break the rules and kill me than admit his defeat!'

Noah had deliberately chosen to not use any of his other spells and endure the attack with his body but, in the end, he found himself in that situation.

His eyes shone with a dark light as he hastily focused the entire might of his mental sphere on Manuel.

What Manuel felt in that moment, was a cold pressure assaulting his mental sphere.

As soon as a crack appeared on his sphere, the spell stopped and he fainted on the spot.

The thunderstorm vanished, revealing Noah completely covered with injuries and Manuel lying unconscious at his feet.

The crowd was silent for a moment before exploding in a loud commotion.

Noah, however, emitted pure anger from every part of his body with his killing intent clearly focused on the youth below him.

"Enough, you won."

Thaddeus appeared next to him and spoke in a soft voice.

Noah didn't raise his head but retracted his pressure.

"It's funny that you didn't stop him when my saber was on his throat."

Noah said in a plain tone, finally facing the Professor and showing him a wide fake smile.

"If you want to probe me, you should at least send Daniel."

He continued and then he simply turned toward the exit of the arena.

Thaddeus' eyes glowed with a dark light as he stared at the departing youth covered in his own blood.

Lynn appeared next to him and pressed a hand on Manuel's head.

"It's just a small injury but he needs at least one month of complete rest."

Thaddeus nodded without moving his gaze from the direction where Noah had gone.

"So, he has really done it, rank 2 mage before eighteen, unbelievable. Do you really not know to which level of proficiency his other spells are?"

Lynn shook his head.

"No, and, as you saw, he is careful not to expose his full strength. Are you sure that it was for the best to let Manuel continue?"

Thaddeus moved at last and threw a rune over Manuel's body, making him disappear on the spot.

"I had to know the extent of his growth."

"What if he ends to hate the academy?"

"He needs us and he knows that we need him for the Royal inheritance. We shouldn't push him too much though, it will be a pity if we really lose someone that can match Daniel's talent."

Thaddeus' thoughts concerned the bigger picture of the country.

With Daniel as the champion of the new generations of the noble families, the Royals needed someone that could match him in strength and talent.

However, Noah couldn't care less about the politic scene of the continent and walked with his body covered in blood toward the source of the river.

Chapter 158 - 158. Refinement

'Fuck all those control maniacs'

Noah cursed in his mind as he walked alongside the river.

As he arrived in front of his accommodation, he strongly knocked on the door.

"Ivor! We are moving."

Ivor didn't take much to come out of the small house and was a bit surprised to find Noah in that bloody state.

"Was he that strong?"

Noah snorted and directly turned toward the source of the river.

"No, they just delayed my victory to see if I revealed more of my power."

Ivor understood immediately why they did something like that.

"Did you do it?"

Noah snorted again but didn't answer.

He focused on his body and his bones emitted a soft cold aura.

As he walked, his many wounds began to heal and new skin was created under his burned flesh.

"Did you make another breakthrough?"

Ivor noticed the speed at which his body recovered and was quite surprised.

"I entered the upper tier of the third rank of the body a while ago, just these superficial injuries are nothing."

By the time they reached the source of the river, all his cuts had stopped bleeding and his burns showed signs of recovery.

'This place is better than I assumed.'

Noah thought.

The accommodations became bigger as he neared the source and the density of the "Breath" increased by another fold.

It wasn't at the same level as the big chunk of "Breath" blessing but it was still an amazing area where to cultivate.

The last house in sight was a two-story building with a large balcony on the first floor.

Noah directly moved toward the entrance door and pointed his academy token at it.

The door released a mechanical sound and unlocked, Noah pushed it without thinking twice.

"Welcome back, young master!"

Three cheerful voices rang as soon as the door opened as three young girls wearing revealing clothes welcomed him.

However, once they saw Noah bloodied figure and Ivor shabby one, they stammered and one of them mustered her courage to speak in a trembling voice.

"W-where is Master Manuel?"

Noah was still irritated by the events in the arena and didn't waste time to explain the situation.

"This house is now mine, gather his stuff and go away. If I still see you around after two parts of incense, I will personally escort you out."

He released a bit of his aura to make his statement clearer.

The maids panicked and hurriedly picked everything that belonged to their master and ran away from the front door.

Ivor couldn't help but shake his head seeing the three beauties leaving the building.

"Why didn't you let them stay, we could have had fun!"

Noah forcefully closed the door and directed an angry gaze at Ivor.

"I barely have time to sleep and you want me to waste more time? Also, everything that I will do from now on must be completely secret, I can't have those weaklings running around my house."

Ivor complained some more.

"But they were so beautiful! Why don't you ever think about your poor Master when you make those decisions?"

"My poor Master should stop being a scrounger and start helping me. All you do is drinking wine and sleeping."

"Well, there isn't much that I can do if you don't start forging."

At these words, Noah showed an excited smile.

"Don't worry, I will start soon."

Noah inspected the whole house and felt satisfied.

There were seven rooms divided between the ground floor and the first one.

What that he appreciated the most though was the underground basement of the habitation.

It was clean and twenty square meters large, both its walls and floor had inscriptions that increased their durability.

'This is perfect.'

He sat on the mat previously owned by Manuel and calmly focused on his recovery.

In two days, he was back at his peak form.

Noah sat cross-legged on the mat.

Inside his sea of consciousness, many small dark blue spheres gathered in the hands of Noah's ethereal figure.

The balls fused with each other, slowly forming a single big sphere that emitted a faint light.

A faint pressure was emitted from it which made Noah nod internally.

'This one has reached the liquid stage.'

Its matter was denser than the previous balls that he had accumulated, he could clearly feel that the power of the one in front of him had surpassed the limits of the gaseous stage.

'Now, I just need to create more of these until I have enough "ink" to start forging.'

A week slowly passed in which Noah focused mainly on accumulating "Breath" in his sea of consciousness.

After he felt that his headache was about to return, he decided to stop.

A seemingly dark blue lake stood over the sea in his mental sphere, releasing an immense pressure.

Noah, however, simply looked at it casually.

He was a rank 2 mage, the "Breath" on the level of rank 1 cultivators wasn't enough to make him flicker.

'If I continue to absorb more, I can surely make it reach the level of the solid "Breath" but my headache will return. I should just test with this to gain some experience with the process.'

"Ivor."

He called his Master that was peacefully snoring in a corner of the basement.

Ivor opened his eyes and it took them a while to gain focus.

"What?"

Noah had patiently waited for him to wake up and answered calmly.

"I'm ready to start. I've gathered enough to attempt in a breakthrough in the solid stage."

The quantity of "Breath" in his sea of consciousness wasn't even close to the one in his dantian.

However, since it was mixed with his mental energy, it could be compressed freely to reach the same amount of density of his dantian.

Ivor stood up and held back his excitement.

"Now, you have to start a second refinement to insert your will in it. Remember, simple intentions are the easier to imprint on your energy, so try to start with something easy and that you are familiar with."

Noah thought for a while and decided in his mind.

His ethereal figure immersed itself in the dark lake and they both descended in the sea below them.

Noah reviewed in his mind all the moments in which his sabers had cleanly cut in half his opponents.

Chapter 159 - 159. Story

He had a lot of memories of his battles.

From the first time when he fought the rank 1 Four-eyes wolves to his recent fight in the arena, his combat style has always focused on two qualities: speed and sharpness.

He tried to imprint his meaning of sharpness on the dark lake, concentrating on the memories where he killed his enemies in one blow.

The refinement process took a long time.

He had to first synchronize his mental energy with his idea of sharpness and then mix more mental energy in the dark lake to align the nature of the "Breath" with the one that he had set.

Another week passed, with Ivor calmly standing right next to him, waiting for the results of his refinement.

On the night of the seventh day, Noah opened his eyes and stretched and his arm in front of him.

Over his palm, a blue liquid floated peacefully.

Every drop in the small pond resembled a small blade and a faint sense of sharpness was exuded from it.

Ivor immediately neared the liquid and carefully inspected, mumbling from time to time.

"How is it?"

Noah asked expectantly.

"It's definitely too diluted with your mental energy, you can see how its color has completely lost the shades of your element. However, for your first time, the will that you imprinted is definitely above average. You can use this energy to forge a rank 1 low tier item."

Ivor's judgment left him a bit disappointed.

"Just low tier? But I definitely used "Breath" in the liquid stage."

Ivor shook his head.

"There is too much mental energy in it, it has lost some power. Next time, you should refine it directly with mental energy that has a will in it. That way, you will only do one round of refinement, preserving more power of the initial "Breath"."

Noah understood his explanation and nodded.

'The last time, I have refined it simply because I wanted to show it to Ivor but I didn't use any particular will, I just wanted to be able to manipulate it. From now on, I should just render the "Breath" harmless and leave it in my sea of consciousness until I decide what to do with it.'

As he thought of that, an idea popped into his mind.

"Ivor, can't I just take the "Breath" from my dantian? It will shorten the time required in the accumulation process and there will be less power loss during

the refinement. I, actually don't know why there are so few notes about this in the books that you gave me."

Ivor looked at Noah with an irritated expression.

"Do you think that it's that common for a cultivator to have his mental sphere at a higher rank than his dantian?"

"..."

Noah was speechless for a moment and realized his peculiar situation.

"So, is it possible?"

Ivor sighed and nodded while he gulped some wine.

"If you can endure the pressure of the "Breath" of your dantian, then yes. Yet, I recommend you to focus on increasing the intensity of your will for now so you would have to mix less mental energy with the "Breath"."

"And how do I do that?"

Noah shrugged his shoulders as he said that.

The notes that he received mostly concerned the various processes, they stated though that the matters about the will were personal and every practitioner had to find his personal way to express it.

"Well, there aren't many general rules on that topic. Usually, strong emotions give birth to strong wills. You should try to empower the meaning that you want to imprint with something that you deeply desire."

'That is quite vague, I guess I can only keep on experimenting until I become good at it.'

"What did you think about when you created the will for your knife?"

At that question, Ivor supported himself on the wall and drank a mouthful of wine.

As he began to speak, a bitter smile appeared on his face.

"You must know that I've never been too interested in cultivation, I was just a simple noble. I fell in love with a beautiful woman and she had the same feeling for me. Yet, my status wasn't good enough and she was then married to another family. From that moment on, the "Attunement" method has been precluded from me. The moment when Heavens and Earth feel that you don't believe in their fairness, you will lose all your chances to ever hear the language of the "Breath"."

Noah's eyes lit up in understanding.

'So, it's not something inborn but it depends on your experiences and thoughts.'

"But I didn't want to give up, she was the love of my life after all. Cultivating until I was strong enough to take her back was too slow so I decided to bet everything on the Elemental forging method as it was the fastest way to increase my power."

"I refined the "Breath" thinking about my love for her and my anger toward the unfairness of the world. I tested the process for two whole years before I finally produced a stable item. I used "Breath" on the level of the solid stage of the third rank of the dantian and obtained an inscribed weapon that could express the battle prowess of the heroic ranks."

'Is he saying that it's possible to surpass the barriers between ranks?'

"I know what you are thinking. It is possible to create something powerful with weak materials but you always need something that increases the level of the item. In my case, it was my will that propelled my creation directly in the heroic ranks."

Noah lowered his head in respect.

'Such strong feelings... I wonder if I have something like that.'

"Yet, a single weapon, no matter how strong it is, can't compare to the full power of a large-size noble family. I was defeated so I chose to create something even more powerful. My current mental sphere is the result of that decision."

Ivor emptied his jar as his story ended and looked at Noah with a bitter smile.

"Our road is contradictory. We require an imponent will to create our items but we also need self-control to know our limits. Focus on the basics and never take a step further unless you are absolutely sure that you have what you require to complete the process. Use your strong emotions to forge and not to guide your actions. Now, get accustomed to the forging. Once you manage to create something stable, I will give you my legacy."

As he said that, he stood up and climbed the stairs to leave Noah alone in the basement.

Chapter 160 - 160. Ambition

The third year in the academy was generally used by the students to specialize in their future profession.

There were no lessons unless someone requested for private ones, and the academy ground was mostly empty as all the students focused on their duties.

Most of the students were almost twenty after two years of enrollment so the few exceptions like Noah could use that time to increase their cultivation level in that favorable environment.

Noah was currently inside the basement, attempting in the forging process.

Two weeks had passed since his first attempt but he still had to obtain some successful results.

'Fuck!'

Noah threw away the bone of a Sun tiger.

As the piece of magical beast flew, it crashed with the wall of the basement and exploded, making all the inscription on the room flicker.

'Another failure, I even exhausted all the "Breath" that I refined.'

The Elemental forging was quite different from other types of inscription methods.

Instead of "writing" the meaning of the quality that they wanted to reproduce, the practitioners had to use the "Breath" that they had accumulated in their sea of consciousness as one of the materials of the item that they had to forge.

The meaning was imprinted in their mixture of "Breath" and mental energy after all, that compound had to be one of the core materials of the inscribed item.

From that, it originated the appellation "forging".

However, that compound was not enough as a material, it had to be put together with other appropriate ingredients.

From that, it came the appellation "elemental", as it was strongly advised to use objects that fitted the element of the practitioner.

The bones of the Sun tigers were definitely not suitable with Noah's compound but he decided to gain experience with them anyway since finding a creature of the darkness element required him to leave the academy.

He would rather do that when two months passed from his last mission in order to optimize his time.

Noah sat on the floor, he was quite tired.

'Apart from the conflicting element, there is also the problem that my control over the process is lacking. I guess that I can only become better as I gain experience.'

He had to shape the item through his control over the compound that he created in his sea of consciousness and that required an incredible amount of concentration since he had to use it to modify the shape of the other materials too.

'I need to absorb "Breath" again.'

His daily life didn't change much in the new accommodation.

He would always cultivate body and dantian at night while he used the day to train his mental sphere and in his other various activities.

One of those was exactly the forging.

Noah spent five days to refill his mental sphere with the same amount of "Breath" that he had previously, as he became more used to the process, he had increased his absorption speed.

That time though, he didn't refine it but simply limited on rendering it harmless and without a will.

A black lake stood over the sea in his mind when he closed his eyes to concentrate on the meaning that he wanted his mental energy to convey.

'Strong emotions, strong emotions.'

He initially thought that he could use his vengeful feelings for the Balvan family to empower his will but, even if the results were better than during his first refinement, they still didn't meet Noah's standards.

'It seems that those feelings are not selfless enough to reach Ivor's level. He would have gladly sacrificed himself to obtain what he wanted while I want to

be alive and well after I kill Rhys. My wellness was one of Lily's wishes after all.'

Noah searched inside himself for stronger emotions and could only find one thing more powerful than his anger for his father.

'I wonder if my ambition will work.'

He focused and remembered the sensations that he felt the first time he gazed at the shining stars during the test for his nature.

He remembered when his most powerful attacks that he spent so much to learn were completely ineffective against a magical beast in the heroic ranks.

He remembered the King of the valley, able to block the exit for its entire pack with its breath.

He remembered Kevin, withstanding uncaringly the spells of the water mage with the might of his body.

And, in the end, he remembered the event that signed the beginning of his journey as a cultivator.

A dragon, a mighty beast that he had only seen in fantasy books, spat a lance made of flames toward him.

He remembered how marveled he was when he first saw the flames shaping themselves to form a piercing attack.

Then, an old man, without any apparent quality, calmly appeared in the air and blocked that attack with one hand.

Thomas Balvan, the first cultivator that he identified in his new life, was the picture of what he imagined as divine in his mind.

'That was when my ambition was born.'

Noah couldn't notice it but his eyes began to shine as he reviewed those memories, a faint light was emitted through his closed eyelids.

He focused on the emotions that he had felt in that moment and that had accompanied him through all his life.

Then, he imagined a saber, flying horizontally in the sky.

It had never happened nor Noah had ever seen it, it was all his imagination.

The saber ran through the air, cutting everything that dared to step on its way.

Dragons fell from the sky cut in half, mountains were severed, seas were divided.

At some point, even the matter of the same sky could not withstand the saber's sharpness.

It split, showing a black space filled with small shining dots in the distance.

The black lake in Noah's mental sphere was immersed in the sea at that moment.

After three days inside Noah's mental energy, it emerged in a different shape.

It was still black with some shades of blue in its color but it was impossible to consider it a lake anymore.

It was thin, with sharp tips on both sides.

It resembled the body of a saber without its handle.