

Chapter 161 - 161. Heir

'This should be the best that I can hope for with my current experience.'

Noah thought, analyzing the "Breath" in his sea of consciousness.

'Let's try to forge with this.'

Another bone of Sun tiger appeared in his hand.

Noah carefully manipulated a small part of the "Breath" in his mental sphere and slowly inserted it in the bone.

It immediately started cracking, the piece of the magical beast was opposing that foreign substance.

However, Noah controlled the "Breath" to force the item to stay still, using his mental energy and "Breath" in the dantian to envelop the bone.

A black membrane appeared around the item in his hand.

That was one of the incubating methods described in the forging procedures.

With the membrane around it, the bone could not break toward the outside and was forced to mix with Noah's "Breath".

Its color changed, from a pale white with shades of red, it became darker, turning gray with purple tones.

Noah then controlled it to change shape.

Inside the incubating membrane, its form slowly transformed.

It became thinner and denser, and its edges sharpened little by little.

However, Noah lost control of the "Breath" inside the item for an instant, causing a chain reaction that destabilized the precarious equilibrium between the two different substances.

'Fuck!'

Noah hastily dissolved the membrane and launched the bone in one corner of the basement.

Before it could reach the wall, the bone exploded, making the whole room tremble.

'Well, the power contained in the item definitely increased due to the improved purity of "Breath" that I managed to refine. Yet, I still can't force it together with other materials.'

It wasn't just a matter of different elements between his "ink" and the material that he was using, his control during the process was still lacking.

It was similar to when he had to imbue with his "Breath" the blood of the magical beast to create a blood companion, only way harder and more profound.

He was changing the structural design of a bone after all!

He had to find the right way to do it without causing an irreversible destruction of the item.

'The worst part is that every item has a different conformation so it has to be treated in a different way. My experience with the bones of the Sun tigers can't be applied to my future materials. It seems that in order to create something stable, one needs to experiment a lot on each of the materials that he wants to use.'

Different materials would lead to different products, even with the same will imprinted on the "Breath" used in the forging.

'Basically, I can only keep trying until I create something adequate.'

More than one month passed from that moment, Noah had stayed in the basement for two months already.

The sound of explosions never stopped coming from there and Ivor had become used to that by then.

'It's almost night, there should be two more explosions before he begins to cultivate.'

Ivor thought.

He had lived together with his student for quite some time already, he had completely memorized his routine.

Time passed but no more explosions rang out from the basement.

'Mh? Did he give up for today? He can't be blamed, forging takes a heavy toll on the mind.'

However, more time passed and the night arrived without any other noise coming from the underground room.

'Don't tell me that he is injured?'

Ivor became worried and hastily descended the stairs to check Noah's situation.

When he arrived in the basement though, his eyes widened in surprise.

Noah was standing and looked with a radiant smile at a dark piece of bone in his hand.

It had many cracks on its surface and it seemed so fragile that a simple movement from Noah could break it.

Nevertheless, a faint sharpness was exuded by it.

Ivor immediately jumped toward his student, fixing his eyes on the item.

He inspected it from various angles, he even carefully picked it up to control its weight.

Noah observed him standing still on his position, he didn't really know how to judge the power or the quality of what he had created so he was waiting for Ivor's judgment.

It was the first item that didn't explode, it was needless to say how excited he was to learn about its actual power.

"Not bad."

Ivor broke the silence without moving his eyes from the dark bone.

"You managed to create something on the level of the liquid stage, it seems that you have improved in refining the "Breath". It doesn't reach the apex of that stage though due to the conflicting element of its material and your lack of control during the forging."

Noah attentively listened to his explanation and nodded in his mind, everything he had said was true.

"It is also highly unstable and frail, it will break after one use if you are lucky or as soon as you power it up with "Breath" if you aren't."

'It will definitely shatter soon then.'

As always, Noah considered the worst possible option.

"Most of this result is due to your rank 2 sea of consciousness, otherwise it would be almost impossible to replicate the power of the "Breath" that you have accumulated."

Ivor handed the bone back to Noah and moved behind him.

"Try it."

Noah held the bone as if he was holding his usual sabers.

It was rectangular with smooth angles and only a slightly pointy tip, he knew that he had completely failed in shaping it correctly.

He lightly swung it using a small amount of "Breath" in the process.

The item immediately shattered and only dust remained in Noah's hand, yet, from its tip, a small wind slash was released before it was reduced into pieces.

The slash was dark, with faint red shades in its color.

It hit the wall at the end of the room and the inscriptions on it slightly flickered.

"The power of that blow was on the gaseous stage, it has lost some energy as it broke. Yet, a success is a success."

Ivor said, handing a small book to Noah.

"You are now the last cultivator practicing the Elemental forging method. As your Master, I'm officially passing down the entire legacy of our school to you. May your creations shatter the Earth and defy the Heaven!"

Chapter 162 - 162. Sword

Noah took the book and inspected it.

Inside, there was the description of all the procedures that Ivor went through to create his knife.

'Sword creation with the Elemental forging method.'

As soon as he read the title though, he turned his head to look at Ivor and smiled awkwardly.

"Don't you have something that describes how to forge sabers? I'm not that into swords."

Ivor's eyes widened and he took a long sip from his jar before snorting and rebuking his student.

"Who cares about the name that you give to something! If a piece of wood can cut a tree then it's a sword! If you stretch your fingers and use them to cut a man, then your fingers are a sword! Don't dwell on useless things and

remember that it's the core of the item that matters, its external shape can be whatever you want it to be!"

Noah still didn't completely believe in Ivor's words.

"So, you are saying that I should just forge a sword with the shape of a saber?"

"Precisely! It took me two years to figure out the perfect composition of those materials to create my knife. Of course, you can't just copy it: your element is different so you will need different items but my experiences will definitely help you avoid useless mistakes."

'If he says that, it should be true.'

Noah could trust Ivor since he understood that the only wish of the ruined cultivator was to see his method passed down.

'I have more magical beasts' bodies but none of them are of the darkness element. I've created something almost stable but, even if I had hundreds of those items, they won't be useful to me at my current level. I should raise the stakes. Also, two months have already passed from my last mission so it's time to gather materials.'

He had a vague idea of which had to be the materials for his first serious creation but he preferred to wait until his dantian had a breakthrough to attempt on that.

Also, there was a lot of testing involved in that plan, he didn't want to neglect his training because of his experiments.

"Ivor, I'm heading out, I need to gather materials."

Ivor opened his mouth to complain but was silenced by Noah throwing a thousand Credits in his direction before exiting the house.

Noah went for the board at the center of the right area of the academy and read through the various missions affixed on it.

He was looking for something specific at that time, he didn't want a common hunting mission.

'Pack of Night panthers disrupting the environment in the perimeter of Arolyac forest bordering with the Nerere country. Exterminate the pack to obtain fifty merit points, bring back the bodies to obtain one hundred merit points as a bonus.'

'Perfect!'

Noah picked up the tabled from the board and moved toward the exit of the academy.

The streets of the academy were mostly empty, all the students were busy with their specialization or outside doing mission.

However, there was still someone that used his free time to improve his social network.

One of those students was Samuel Muwlos and, at that time, he was loudly mocking Noah right in front of the passage for the outside.

"I'm telling you, that match was completely rigged! My poor friend Manuel is still recovering from his injury. You must know that he was that close from matching Lord Daniel in his rate of growth but, due to that immoral fiend, all his hard work has been wasted! If it wasn't for Lord Thaddeus, I don't know what Vance could have done to him."

A group of young students was attentively listening to him.

They were the new batches of students that had arrived during the last year and were mostly from important families, it was natural for them to engage in those kinds of recreational activities.

"I can confirm Senior Samuel's words, I was in the audience looking at their fight. That Vance has surely cheated, otherwise it would have been impossible for him to survive Manuel's last attack. Also, do you want to know the most deplorable thing that Vance has done? He took Manuel's mansion, the symbol of the strongest student of the academy, and isolated himself inside it for two whole months! If this isn't the behavior of a quack then I don't know which it is."

The young students showed disgusted expression as they continued in their stories.

"Don't worry though! I, Samuel Muwlos, will publicly challenge him once he stops hiding!"

'What the fuck are they doing there?'

Noah thought.

His hearing had vastly improved since he became a rank 2 mage, he had heard the whole conversation as he neared the exit.

'Why do they even use that area to loiter around? Are they afraid that I might hear them from my accommodation?'

His current house was directly on the opposite side of where the students were grouping, he could not help but find some connections between the two things.

'I don't really care about my reputation but I should stop them before I find a horde of angry students at my doorsteps. Breaking all their limbs would be too troublesome.'

Noah slowly walked toward Samuel's group surrounded by his usual cold aura.

It was impossible to not notice him, his presence was overwhelming unless he forcefully suppressed it.

Yet, what he needed at that moment was exactly that: showing the immense difference between him and the other students.

As the students turned to look at him, they were slightly mesmerized by his figure.

He was of medium stature but his body was slender and harmonious.

The daintiness of his features was enhanced by his white and clean skin and his eyes shone during the daylight due to the power of his mental sphere.

The girls in the group lowered their heads, too embarrassed to continue to look at his piercing gaze.

"V-Vance! Y-you came out of your lodging!"

Samuel stuttered seeing him and the new students showed confused gazes.

They could not match his pure and cold appearance with the one that they had envisioned due to Samuel's stories.

"I never thought that you would still be around, trying to taint my reputation. I believed that what happened to your friends was enough as a lesson."

Samuel remembered the poor state in which the students that tried to ambush him returned and immediately panicked.

"T-that's a misunderstanding! I will never dare t-"

His words were interrupted by Noah directly jumping on him, grabbing his head, and slamming it on the ground.

It's not that Samuel didn't have techniques or spells to avoid the attack but the surprise effect paired with the fear that he felt due to Noah's presence left him defenseless for a moment.

And that moment was exactly what Noah exploited.

The head of the noble dug the terrain and a faint trace of blood came out of it.

Noah raised Samuel's head from its hair and waited for his reaction.

"Why did you do this!? Who the fuck do you th-"

His phrase was interrupted since Noah smashed the head back in the ground.

He raised it again and waited.

"You better be care-"

Noah slammed it back in the pit and pulled it out.

"Wait! I'm sorry! I will never talk behind your back again!"

Samuel's face was covered with blood and terrain with some trace of tears in his eyes.

Noah released his hair and smiled toward him, lightly patting his shoulder.

"Was that so hard? Next time I catch you doing something like this, I will gladly test at what depth the ground becomes harder than your head."

Samuel shivered to hear those words, he knew that Noah wasn't exaggerating things.

"That won't happen again, I swear!"

Noah nodded at him and stood up, turning his gaze toward the other student that joined Samuel in his stories.

"I didn't know that juniors could make fun of their seniors."

Noah slowly walked toward the other youth, his gaze never left him as the distance between them shrunk.

The student trembled, he was petrified due to Noah's pressure focused on him.

He didn't even realize that Noah had already moved past him while softly whispering in his hear.

"Be careful of who you call a quack, one day the academy rules might not protect you."

As he said that, he left through the exit and went inside Arolyac forest.

The atmosphere in the group had greatly changed due to Noah's brief appearance.

The youth that favored Samuel fell on the ground, incapable of stopping his trembling.

Samuel stood up and left the area without even saying goodbye to his other friends, he had lost too much face that day.

The other male students had their heads lowered, they didn't dare to raise them for fear that Noah could notice them.

The girls, instead, had a dreaming expression, like they were captivated by what had happened.

Meanwhile, Noah was running at high speed toward the area in which the panthers had been seen, uncaring of the situation that he had created.

His wings unfolded and he rose in the air to pick up speed.

He wasn't doing it only because he would arrive faster at his destination but also as a form of training.

His flight technique was good but there were many aspects where he could improve, that's why he would rather use every free moment to train in it.

It took him a couple of days to reach the border with the Nerere continent.

He could have reached the area sooner but he preferred to do many different flight exercises along the way, without forgetting his usual training schedule of course.

He arrived at the border during the afternoon and calmly waited on one of the branches of the trees for the night to come.

The Night panthers came out of their hideouts only during the night, as the name suggested.

They were fast beasts with the ability to become momentarily immaterial.

It wasn't exactly the strongest beast to choose when creating another blood companion but what piqued Noah's interest were their body parts.

Due to their innate ability to enter an ethereal state, their bones and skin were highly adaptable to multiple treatments.

They were the perfect material for Noah's needs at the moment.

'Well, darkness beasts are not so common in this environment, I can always change it for a stronger one later.'

As the night arrived, the fauna changed and the nocturnal beasts came out of their lairs.

Noah waited until he found what he was looking for.

Thirty or so black panthers three meters tall slowly came out of the terrain.

'To think that they actually sleep in the ground during the day, there are sure peculiarities in this world.'

The Night panthers used the hours under the daylight to sleep but they never chose a fixed spot to create a den, they directly turned in their immaterial form and immersed in the terrain.

'Blood drain should be enough, I also want to see if I manage to learn more about the strengthening process.'

He had trained in his new spells so he was quite sure of their actual power.

His mental energy was expended and both his hands morphed into demonic claws.

His wings spread in the night and he jumped from his branch to fly over the pack.

The panthers were moving fast, looking for some prey, they were completely unaware that they were hunted themselves.

'Only two peak rank 3, they really seem weak though.'

Noah shook his head internally and dove on the pack.

His two claws stuck one panther each and immediately drained them of the blood in their bodies.

Noah felt a wave of warmth coming from his hands and accumulating on his back, right below his acupoints.

The other panthers finally noticed the intruder and pounced at him but Noah simply flew back in the air to avoid the assault.

He dove again as soon as he found an opening in their formation but, when he was about to stab his claw on the beast, it became ethereal and his arm hit nothing but air.

'I need to take them by surprise or expend their "Breath"'

Noah flew again and dove in another part of the pack.

That time though, a small black cloud formed over the heads of two of them, momentarily blocking their vision.

'Blind!'

Since the panthers could not see when the attack would arrive, Noah could easily finish them off.

The battle continued for a few minutes with Noah expending almost no "Breath" or mental energy.

At some point, when only five specimens remained, the leader of the pack roared to make them retreat.

Looking at the panthers running away, Noah nodded in understanding.

'So, it's true that it takes a lot for them to sink in the ground, it's not something immediate.'

Black flames covered him and, when he exited them, he was right in front of the escaping creatures.

Chapter 164 - 164. Experiment

In the end, the whole pack was vanquished.

Noah used the Blood drain spell to kill all the beasts except for the strongest one.

He needed its blood for the Body-inscription spell.

He then went looking for an empty cave and calmly made preparations for the creation of his new blood companion.

'I have thirty magical beasts' bodies of the darkness element, they should be more than enough for two months of testing.'

He thought as he watched the blood of the Night panther slowly accumulating on an empty bucket.

As he looked at the blood though, an idea popped in his mind.

'What if I use the "Breath" in my sea of consciousness instead of the one in my dantian to fill the blood of the panther?'

Theoretically, the "Breath" had to be used to prevent any rejection from the tattoo.

Yet, what changes there would be if he used the one that he personally refined?

Noah was curious so he decided to give it a try.

There was no need to train in the drawing of the creature since his rank 2 mental sphere had perfectly memorized the appearance of the panther, Noah simply did a couple of sketches to be sure of his capability.

'I don't have time to absorb more "Breath" or the ingredients for the spell would go to waste, I will use the liquid one that I have already stored.'

He had some "Breath" left in his sea of consciousness which was already refined so he decided to use it.

The heart of the panther had already been seized by him so, as the bucket was full, he immediately started filling the blood of the creature with his "Breath".

A couple of hours passed and the "Breath" in his mental sphere was completely expended to fill the blood in the bucket.

The process had taken even less than the last time even if the stage of the "Breath" was the same.

'This is already an improvement! It has reached the standards for the technique so fast! It's probably due to my will inside the "Breath".'

He was already satisfied with the results obtained by applying part of the processes of the Elemental forging in the creation of the companion.

He neatly washed with some water in his space-ring and then began to draw the figure of the panther on his body.

His saber cut precise lines on his skin, leaving black marks due to the refined blood of the beast.

As the drawing was completed, Noah ate the heart of the creature in two bites.

He then focused on his sea of consciousness.

The ethereal figure of a Night panther appeared over the sea.

It pounced toward the walls of the sphere but, as soon as Noah's figure opened its eyes, it felt a force blocking its every movement.

The Kesier runes didn't emit any humming, Noah was simply using the faint connection that he felt coming from the beast's figure to keep it still.

'Interesting! It seems that part of my mental energy was fused into the core of the panther since I used my personal "Breath" to create it. The taming part has become vastly easier.'

Noah's figure neared the panther and immersed it in the sea.

In a few seconds, the image of the panther appeared next Echo's one and the roots of the Demonic form spell entangled around it.

'So easy!'

Noah exclaimed in his mind as he opened his material eyes.

'This is amazing! Even though I would have had no difficulty in taming a rank 3 beast, that doesn't strictly apply for magical beasts of higher ranks! I wonder if I could make a blood companion with a rank 4 beast with my current level.'

He thought about it for a while before tossing that idea away.

'Even if I were to find the blood and the core of a rank 4 beast and use this method to create the drawing, I don't believe that I could tame it in my sea of consciousness. They reached the heroic ranks after all, their will can't be that weak. I should just wait till I'm able to kill one.'

He focused and a panther appeared in front of him.

It had the same size as the original beast but there was a faint sharpness exuded by it.

He tested its power for a while before nodding in satisfaction.

'Its ability to become ethereal is quite useful and it seems that its attack power increased by a bit. Is it due to my will inside the "Breath" used? If that's the case, I just fused together an inscription method and a spell.'

Noah pondered for a bit before finding his answer.

'The Body-inscription spell is already a simplified form of inscription. Since the Elemental forging is an inscription method, it was obvious that I could mix together those two powers. I should never use again the "Breath" of Heaven and Earth to create a blood companion and it would be better if I refine the "Breath" specifically for each companion that I want to create.'

His ability still didn't allow him much flexibility in the will that he gave to the "Breath", yet that didn't mean that it would always be like that.

'I should have given it my meaning of speed or something in line with its innate abilities. Well, it has the power of a peak rank 3 beast anyway so I can't say that I wasted it.'

The added pressure on his mental sphere wasn't much either so he considered the experiment a success.

'I should go back to my accommodation now. I need to begin the forging with the solid "Breath" and I should also focus more on my dantian, I feel that I'm reaching its limit.'

He was about to call back the panther when he remembered something.

'Right, your name should be Shadow due to your ability.'

He thought, patting the companion's head and absorbing it back on his body.

As he returned to the academy, he visited the management building to retrieve the merits points for his mission, he kept the bodies of the beasts of course.

However, when he reached his accommodation, he was met by a strange scene.

Twenty or so female students were calmly waiting in front of the entrance door.

As they noticed his presence, they turned and exclaimed happily.

"The dark prince came back!"

Chapter 165 - 165. Famous

'What the fuck is that?'

The girls had an excited smile when they looked at him.

One of them gathered her courage and stepped toward him.

"Ehm, dar-, Lord Vance, would you like to accompany me on a trip to Arolyac forest? I'm willing to give all my merit-"

She couldn't finish her phrase since Noah interrupted her with a cold answer.

"No."

Silence enveloped the area.

Noah uncaringly passed the girl and moved through the crowd to reach his habitation.

Yet, he couldn't help but hear the whispers of the girls as he walked through them.

"Kyaa, have you seen how cool he is! It's the complete opposite of Lord Daniel!"

"Yes, but Daniel was unreachable for us. Lord Vance doesn't care about noble status."

"I want him to scold me so badly but I can't even face him, I feel like fainting every time I look into his eyes."

'These girls are crazy!'

Noah thought as he unlocked the door of his house.

"Dark prince! Would you mind if I came inside and served you some tea? My family is famous for-"

Noah didn't wait for the girl to finish her speech and closed the door behind him.

His irritation grew as he heard the girls screaming again in excitement and commenting on his last rejection.

"Ah, you youths are so lucky to be able to savor these moments."

Ivor looked at him with a complacent smile and nodded proudly.

"My disciple took everything from his Master. Your charm is irresistible to such naïve girls."

"Old man, if you don't stop, I will throw you outside with them."

Ivor paled and shut his mouth while turning to leave the room.

"Wait, I want you to see something."

Noah stopped him and took out a diary from his space-ring.

It was Uriah's diary, the one describing the Body-inscription spell.

"I applied the theories behind the Elemental forging method on this spell. Can I have your opinion about it?"

Ivor's interest was immediately piqued.

Not only it was the first time that Noah explicitly asked for his help, but he was also interested in the experiments of his student.

Ivor sat on a couch and began to read the diary with interest.

Meanwhile, Noah sat in a corner of the room and focused on the energy accumulated by his Blood drain spell.

He manipulated that energy to near his dantian according to the Yin body technique.

His dantian refined the energy and redirected part of it on his bones.

When the process was over, he analyzed his body to understand his advancements.

'The "Breath" absorbed this way equals to less than an hour of actual meditation. The spell is really not fit to strengthen my body.'

He was quite disappointed by the results but he expected much, if there was really a spell that could use magical beasts to increase the rank of the body of a cultivator, the magical beasts would be already extinct.

"This is really interesting."

Ivor finished reading through the diary and handed it back to Noah.

"What do you think?"

Ivor pondered for a while before giving his honest opinion.

"It definitely resembles an inscription method but it is used as a spell with heavy requirements to be activated. Can I see the companion that you created?"

Shadow came out of Noah's body and Ivor inspected it with interest.

"What changes did you notice?"

"Faster refinement of its blood, easier to tame in the sea of consciousness, and some of my will remained in the companion."

Ivor nodded hearing Noah's words before turning to his student.

"I think that there is a lot of room for improvement. Once you become more skilled in inserting your will in the "Breath", you should be able to empower their innate abilities."

'He had my same thought.'

"Have you tried forging its center of power?"

Noah's eyes widened hearing Ivor's words.

"Should I?"

Ivor nodded, moving his gaze back on the panther.

"If you can obtain these results just by refining its blood, what would happen if you directly refine its core? You should obtain more evident results."

'That makes sense. However, I don't think I have the ability to handle the center of power of a beast yet, I should go back to forge.'

Noah stood up and retracted Shadow.

At that moment though, a loud knock sounded from the entrance door.

'Don't tell me that it's still those girls.'

Noah went to open the door and was surprised to find June looking at him with her brows furrowed.

"Can you put a leash on those girls before I end up killing them?"

Noah moved his gaze behind her and found the same crowd of girls staring at him in silence.

He then noticed that he was shirtless due to the exposure of Shadow to Ivor.

"Dammit, come inside before I do that."

He dragged June inside his accommodation and hastily closed the door.

He wasn't fast enough though and an excited scream reached his hears.

"When did you became so famous?"

June asked after sitting on one of the couches.

"How should I know, it's not that I enjoy the situation. What happened to you?"

June had never come to his accommodation before which made Noah curious.

June snorted and moved her gaze away from him.

"Apparently, since we have been sparring partners for over two years, they thought that we were in a relationship. Once they knew that, they harassed me to no end, it didn't matter how much I denied that. I even asked Master for advice but she just said that it was normal for the strongest student to have followers."

Noah sighed and massaged his temples.

He didn't really care about the crowd in front of his door but he didn't think that the people that he knew would be involved.

He sighed again before coming up with a solution.

"You can take the first floor. The scrounger usually sleeps on the ground one while I'm always in the basement. Just don't disturb me during my training."

He then turned toward the stairs that led underground.

"Wait, what do you mean by that?"

Noah shrugged his shoulders as he replied to her.

"I can't really kick them away and they don't have concerns when bothering you. So, you can just live here."

Chapter 166 - 166. Orange rune

June complained, standing from his seat.

"Do you prefer to go through their harassment every day?"

June was silenced by Noah's retort.

"Anyway, it's just temporary. As soon as I leave the academy, things should calm down."

"Wait, will you leave soon?"

Ivor appeared from one of the adjacent rooms and shouted at Noah in confusion.

June too seemed surprised by his statement and waited attentively for his answer.

Noah shrugged his shoulders.

"We can't stay here much longer, it's already our third year. Instead of remaining here for the whole year, it's better to take a profession in the Royal city and stabilize our position."

Noah was already thinking about his job in the Hunters' guild.

He was constantly in need of materials for his experiments with the forging method and the position of a hunter could provide him with a wider assortment of resources.

Also, there was a problem with his power.

He was attracting too much attention on himself, he wanted to loosen the control that the Royals had on him inside the academy.

'I'm losing sight of my situation too. The academy is a peaceful place but the real world isn't. Here I feel that my hands are always tied, I'm just accumulating problems without solving any of them.'

All the troubles he had with Daniel's followers could be solved by simply killing the students.

However, that was prohibited due to his status as a student, and all those noble youths were left alive harboring hatred toward him.

'Once I become a rank 2 cultivator, I will leave. The faculties of the academy can't offer me much more at that level anyway.'

Places like the Sulfur domain lost their effectiveness on stronger cultivators.

After all, if they really could be useful at each rank, cultivators in the divine ranks would be a common sight.

June lowered her head in thought.

Noah's words made sense, they had to secure a position in order to ensure that their journey as a cultivator won't stop due to the lack of resources.

Also, leaving the academy didn't mean that they would lose access to the inventory, their status as students would be removed but they could still contact the Royals to make transactions.

It had to be said though that her situation was more complex than Noah's one.

He had to take care only of himself while June had a family full of expectations behind her.

"I think I won't stay much in Elbas city. I'm not really good at anything except for fighting and I can't be a Royal guard or I will neglect my family. Maybe, with the help of my Master, I might ensure a friendly relationship with the Royal dynasty and appoint my family in one of the areas near the capital but that's as much as I can do."

Noah understood the meaning of her words.

She could not freely cultivate like him, every noble heir that managed to be enrolled in the academy would have to shoulder enormous expectations.

They would become the pillars on which build the future of their families, most of them would aim for the position of patriarch!

However, in Noah's eyes, those things were pointless.

He couldn't care less about his status, he wanted only to become strong.

"So, will you stop trying to surpass me? I really can't imagine you as a calm person managing the Ballor family."

Noah mocked her lightly.

June snorted and returned to her usual wild nature.

"You will see! I will raise my family's status to the large-size one and take all the resources for me! I will definitely beat you then!"

"That means that you've given up on beating me while we are still students?"

"Shut up!"

June yelled and climbed the stairs for the first floor, the sound of slamming doors clearly resounded from there.

Noah shook his head and turned to Ivor.

"We have a new roommate."

Ivor sighed and sat on the floor, slowly sipping his wine.

Noah moved toward the basement but a strange sensation emerging on his right arm made him stop.

He checked the area and noticed that a faint orange rune was slowly moving toward his torso from under his skin.

"What are you doing?"

Ivor saw his strange behavior and asked in a curious voice.

"It's nothing."

Noah didn't explain and hastily went into the basement.

When he arrived there, he carefully inspected the slowly moving rune with cold eyes.

'Is it because I kind of trust June?'

He had already considered giving Eccentric's inheritance to June.

She was honest and had a straightforward character, she seemed quite friendly with him as well.

He was also quite sure that he could manage to be always stronger than her.

Yet, he never thought that he had to decide so soon, he wasn't even eighteen after all.

'I will wait a bit more, then I'll decide. June is surely the best candidate but I would like to have more insurances regarding our future relationship.'

The rune was still on his arm.

According to his deal with Eccentric Thunder, it had to reach his dantian for their agreement to be broken which meant that he had still time to carefully analyze the situation.

He put those thoughts in the back of his mind and began to focus on the Elemental forging method.

He had the material required for his experiments, he just needed the "Breath" to perform the inscription.

Inside his dantian, a small fragment of his solid "Breath" detached itself from the amassed black crystals and moved through his body.

As it reached Noah's head, his ethereal figure inside his sea of consciousness stretched its hands outside of his mental sphere and grabbed the small shard.

The solid "Breath" successfully entered his sphere and began to struggle madly.

Nevertheless, Noah was used by then to the struggles of the "Breath".

Mental energy immediately assaulted the shard, forcing away the will of Heaven and Earth from it.

In a few minutes, the "Breath" was inoffensive, ready to be refined.

'The pressure from the solid "Breath" is quite strong but I can bear it. The only problem is this damned headache.'

Of course, storing solid "Breath" in his mental sphere caused his headache to return.

Chapter 167 - 167. Rivals

It took Noah an entire day to reach the limit of what his mental sphere could handle.

In the end, a big black boulder of "Breath" was formed over the sea.

Noah felt that his head was about to split, the pressure from that "Breath" coupled with the two blood companions was stressing his mind to no end.

Yet, taking the "Breath" directly from his dantian vastly increased the speed at which he accumulated it.

'Now, refinement.'

Noah focused, he endured the pain and forced his mental state to remember the image of the saber flying undisputed in the sky.

When he felt that he was ready, he immersed the "Breath" in the sea.

It took a long time to refine it.

The "Breath" stayed in the sea for four entire days before coming out in a different form.

It resembled again the blade of a saber but its color had more shades of blue than the last time.

'The headache hindered my mental state, I should not force myself so much next time.'

Noah judged and prepared to start his forging.

He first ate and rested, he had to stay completely still during those days in order to achieve the best refinement possible.

As he restored his energies, the leg of a Night panther appeared in his hands.

Noah carefully ripped off the flesh from the leg until only the bone of the beast was left in his hands.

A piece from the "Breath" in his sea of consciousness detached from the saber form and slowly entered the bone.

Noah immediately created an incubating membrane to contain the process.

The bone seemed to accept the "Breath", there wasn't the same rejection as with the Sun tigers' bones.

The two substances began to merge and Noah manipulated them to transform their shapes.

The bone became darker and denser, its tip slowly morphed into a sharp pointy head.

Then, a crack appeared on the body of the item which caused a chain reaction through the whole bone.

'Failure.'

Noah threw the item in his hands toward a corner of the basement where it exploded.

The might of the explosion though was way stronger than when he used the liquid "Breath" in the forging and the inscriptions flickered to no end to contain the tremors of the room.

"What the fuck is happening?"

June appeared on top of the stairs leading to the underground room and was surprised by Noah's appearance.

He had disheveled hair, bloodshot eyes, and a deep frown.

"Are you ok?"

June asked with a concerned voice.

"Yeah, I just exaggerated a bit. Why did you come here?"

Noah answered, he was so focused on the forging that he had almost forgotten that June was living with him.

"Well, the explosion? Also, I wanted to ask if you were willing to resume our sparring, I feel that my technique is getting rusty."

'That's not a bad idea, solitary training has its limits after all.'

"Sure, just give me a couple of weeks, I'm in the middle of something and I'd prefer to remain alone for that time."

June nodded and returned to the upper floor.

'I should reduce the time spent in the forging too, I'm neglecting my training.'

Noah checked the rune on his arm, during these days it had surpassed his elbow and was moving toward his shoulder.

'It's getting faster, I should spend more time with her to be certain that she won't be an enemy in the future.'

As he thought of that, he stopped his experiments and rested.

He resumed a normal pace of training, attempting to create only one inscribed item every day.

That way, he could slowly reduce the pressure on his mental sphere without interrupting the growth of his other centers of power.

There were no explicit improvements in his forgings, even though he felt that he was becoming better after each attempt, a new problem always appeared which made his creations explode.

'Even without the elemental rejection, I still can't manage to create something stable. And what is the deal with my dantian? I should have reached the limit of the first rank by now but there always seems to be more space.'

He had slowed his cultivation to focus on the inscription method but that didn't mean that he had slacked off.

He felt that he was close to reaching the peak of the first rank but that time seemed to never arrive.

'Well, I'm not in a rush to leave anyway.'

He decided that it was time for his fight with June.

Noah went to the first floor and found June calmly cultivating in one of the rooms.

Her silver hair was everywhere over her face and she seemed to have sweated a lot since her clothes were wet and stuck on her skin.

Her toned form was clearly exposed by the state of her outfit.

'She must have just finished her training, I'll just go to sleep.'

Noah turned to leave but then he sensed something with his mental energy.

His hand shot out and firmly held a spear that aimed for his head.

"How can you never be surprised?"

June stood with a disappointed expression on the other extremity of the weapon, she had attacked him as soon as he had turned.

"How can you think of nothing but fighting me? You are clearly exhausted and yet you attempted to sneak on me."

Noah shook his head but his grip stood firm on the spear, blocking it in its position.

"A hunter attacks when his prey is at its weakest."

"Am I a beast in your eyes?"

June then released a small laugh and retracted her weapon, Noah didn't let his guard down though.

"You are right, I'm quite tired, I think I'm done for today."

She sat on the floor and supported her back on the wall of the room.

Noah stared at her for a while lost in his thoughts.

"What?"

June didn't like his constant gaze and became irritated.

"Say, what kind of relationship do we have? Are we friends?"

Noah broke his silence and asked that question.

June snorted and replied loudly.

"What friends! We are rivals!"

Chapter 168 - 168. Ballor family

"A rival should at least beat me in something."

"Shut up! Did you come here to mock me?"

Noah laughed a little, he had to admit that he had fun conversing with her.

However, in the next moment, his eyes became cold.

"Let's say that you manage to beat me, what will you do? Kill me?"

The atmosphere changed immediately in the room, June understood that Noah was being serious.

"Why do you ask?"

"I have my own reasons."

Silence fell between them.

It took a while for June to finally speak.

"No, I will probably look for someone stronger. I don't have any reasons to kill you."

"What if you had them?"

Silence again but that time it took less for Noah to receive an answer.

"I don't know, ok? What could you ever do to make me want to kill you? Why are you even so serious about this?"

She was visibly irritated by Noah's questions so he decided to relax.

His gaze returned to an indifferent one and he sighed loudly.

'What could I even expect as an answer? I was a bit too pushy.'

He scratched his head looking at June and then sighed again.

"I'm sorry, that was too sudden."

He then went to the lower floor to find Ivor and took one of his jars from his stash.

As he returned to June's room, he lightly knocked on the door and showed the wine to her.

"Do you want a drink? Ivor's wine should be quite good."

She nodded slightly and Noah entered in the room and sat on the floor right in front of her.

Then, he took two simple glasses from his space-ring and poured the contents of the jar in them.

The aroma of the wine spread in the air, it was clearly a strong wine.

June didn't waste time in ceremonies and began drinking from her glass, Noah wasn't slow in imitating her.

They stayed in silence for a while, slowly appreciating the taste of Ivor's beverage.

It was strong but it had an immediate numbing effect on their mental sphere, even Noah's headache diminished greatly.

"Why did you ask those things? Do you expect me to hunt you down in the future?"

June broke the silence without raising her gaze from the glass.

"It's good to be prepared for every situation, I have trust issues."

Noah gave a vague answer.

"Do you ever tell the truth?"

Her words caused a small smirk to appear on his face.

"Do you want another lie?"

June shook her head and stared at the student in front of her.

They had fought so much against each other but she could never understand anything of his true nature, his image seemed to be constantly enveloped by fog.

Such a genius appearing out of nowhere and taking the spot of the strongest student.

His aptitude was of the darkness element, something that could create a wave of shock through the whole academy, yet no one seemed to know about it.

He had no noble ties either, all his resources and results came from his hard work.

"Are you running away?"

She couldn't help but ask.

It was the guess that made more sense in her mind.

Noah didn't answer, he limited himself to drink from his glass.

"Are you a criminal looking for freedom?"

Noah shook his head.

"What freedom could you possibly have with our power. You know of the Royal inheritance, it's safe to assume that the Royals will try to tighten their leash on us."

"So, is it about that? Do you just want more power?"

Noah raised his head too and returned the stare.

"Aren't you the same? I know that your childhood mustn't have been easy but that alone isn't enough to give birth to your addiction to battles."

June lowered her eyes as she reviewed the memories from his life in her family mansion.

"You saw me trapped in the illusion, right. Well, it was hard but not in the way that you think of."

She took a long sip before continuing in her story.

"As you know, the Ballor family is a small-size noble one, a declining one to be precise. My grandfather once told me that our ancestors traded all their wealth to obtain access to an inheritance ground. Their luck though wasn't good: the inheritance only had spells and techniques related to the thunder element and none of them had that aptitude."

"The contents of the inheritance were good but they were useless in their hands. However, they could not sell that legacy since their losses would surpass their gains, those that could buy it were medium-size noble families or above so my family could not set the selling price."

"In the end, they decided to wait, wait for an heir of the thunder element to appear. Little did they know that the waiting had to last one hundred years. They were really unlucky."

"Once my element was confirmed, I became the last hope of my family and they resorted to all kinds of harsh training to improve my strength as much as they could. I stopped being lashed every night only after I managed to become a mage."

"You know, my father used to be gentle when I was little. After the discovery of my element, he began to throw me in the middle of magical beasts' packs to increase the speed of my growth."

"In the beginning, I thought it was a punishment for something that I did but then I understood. I don't blame them though, they had to wait so much, their expectations had to be met."

'No wonder she is like that.'

Noah thought, filling June's glass that had been emptied during her story.

"What would have you done if you were in my place?"

June honestly asked looking at him.

"Take what they gave me, leave, and then never return. My life can't be about fulfilling other people's dreams."

Hearing those words, June laughed.

"Yes! I wanted that too for a while. But then I was accepted in the academy and found out so many strong people coming from many powerful families, in comparison I'm just a lone weakling. So I decided to use my family to become even stronger, I will be the heir that they waited so much for and they will be the means to realize my dreams!"

Chapter 169 - 169. Beak

'She has a point.'

One of the biggest hindrances in the cultivation journey was the lack of resources.

With a noble family as a backing and a friendly relationship with the Royals, she would have access to both techniques and useful items.

In comparison, Noah had to cover every expense with his own wealth.

Just by thinking about the number of materials that he needed to experiment with the Elemental forging method, one could imagine the wealth required to train an inscription master.

However, if he had the backing of a family, he could simply focus on the experiments without the need to accumulate materials.

'Well, I can't do anything about that. I also have to constantly hold back for fear of being discovered.'

They continued to drink more, exchanging some jokes from time to time before calling it a day.

Noah returned to the basement deep in thought.

Eccentric's rune was moving closer to his dantian so he had to make a decision soon.

'She saw how those that loved her changed their behavior all of sudden so she began to rely only on her strength. She is not evil nor ungrateful, she might actually give me a share of the inheritance in order to feel less indebted with me.'

Noah was analyzing June's personality to be sure of their future relationship.

His most pressing question was: 'will she turn on me once I give her that power?'

The only answer he could find was: probably not.

Yet, that "probably" was what held him back from giving it to her immediately.

'I don't have a better candidate though, the only other youth of the thunder element that I know is Manuel and I don't think that we can become friends.'

In the end, he tossed those thoughts on the back of his mind and went to rest.

He didn't really mind giving the inheritance to June but he still had some time to know her better.

Days passed slowly in the academy.

Noah limited himself to one attempt in the forging each day and vastly reduced the quantity of "Breath" absorbed in his mental sphere when he had to refill it.

That allowed him to continue in his usual training without incurring in a splitting headache.

The third Kesier rune, his two blood companions, and the "Breath" propelled the growth of his mental sphere at an unbelievable speed, Noah could feel that the internal pressure was diminishing continuously.

The Yin body continued to nourish his body, slowly pushing it toward the peak of the third rank.

The Dark vortex cultivation technique enlarged his dantian to its limits, Noah felt that it wouldn't take much for him to reach the peak of the first rank.

His free time was spent with June.

They would fight twice a week and converse on the other days.

They would talk about their dreams, their future projects, what they liked and disliked, their relationship became vastly deeper compared to when they were only sparring partners.

Noah began to appreciate his time spent with her.

They had a similar nature in the first place and, since she was quite straightforward, he could relax and enjoy their talks.

They even did their bimestrial mission together, dividing their gains equally with Noah refilling his stash of darkness beast's bodies.

It was clear to her that Noah hid most of his personal information but she became used to that and stopped being bothered by it.

She understood that his situation was complicated and that he wouldn't lie if it wasn't important to him.

Noah was cold and indifferent, he wouldn't waste efforts to make up lies just for fun.

His first success arrived after the fourth month of his stay in the new accommodation.

Noah was in the basement, excitedly staring at a strange looking item in his hands.

It was originally the beak of a Moon owl, a bird-type magical beast that he and June hunted down in their last mission.

As a material, its element was darkness so it was perfect for Noah's experiments.

It was small and thin, only about twenty centimeters long, yet a clear sharpness was exuded from it.

'It seems stable!'

There were no cracks on its body and it looked quite sturdy.

That was his first stable creation!

The only problem was its form.

Due to its length, it had to be used as a throwing knife, yet its tip was curved, Noah didn't manage to bend it during the forging.

"Ivor!"

Noah called for his Master, when it came to inscriptions his judgment was far more accurate than Noah's one.

Ivor arrived after a few minutes and showed a surprised expression seeing the item in Noah's hands.

He carefully took it and inspected it for a while, he would nod repeatedly every time he changed the angle of observation.

"This is not quite usable but it's indeed an inscribed item."

In the end, he gave his judgment.

"Its power couldn't reach the higher tier of the first rank but it's not due to your "Breath", it was the original material that was lacking. Also, you clearly messed up when it was time to shape it. It's too short to be considered a small sword and too curved to be thrown successfully but you have finally managed to create something stable."

Noah nodded at his explanation, the conclusions that he had reached were the same as his.

"So, how do I improve?"

Noah asked.

"Familiarize with the process first, continue with this material until you manage to shape it as you wish. Then it will be time to find better materials and mix them together in order to find a good composition. I used four different materials in various quantities in order to create my knife and they were all from rank 4 magical beasts that fitted my needs."

'So much planning only for one item. I wonder what's the value of rank 4 beasts' bodies.'

He had sold a rank 3 beast once but he only managed to gain two Credits from it.

However, that was because its body was ruined after Noah went through the requirements of the Body-inscription spell.

"What do I do with this then?"

Noah pointed at the inscribed Owl beak.

"Just sell it. If it can't be useful to you, there is no point in keeping it."

Chapter 170 - 170. Moon needle

To create an inscribed item with the Elemental forging method, there were many hurdles to surpass.

The cultivator had to endure the absorption of the "Breath" with his sea of consciousness that comported a big risk for that center of power.

Then, he had to set his will on a specific meaning and imbue the "Breath" with that, otherwise there would be no effect attached to the finished product.

After that, it was time for the choice of the materials.

The compound had to be something that didn't conflict with the element of the cultivator and that could sustain the activity that it was meant for.

For example, you couldn't use a hard material to create a whip, it would simply conflict with the purpose of the item.

At the same time, you couldn't use something too soft either, a whip forged that way would just fail to inflict any damage when wielded.

The last hurdle was its form.

The item had to be shaped according to its future usage: you could forge a sword but, if you didn't manage to shape it with sharp edges, then it couldn't be used properly.

In Noah's case, with his last creation, the first three requirements were met: his mental sphere could store the "Breath", he managed to imprint it with a strong will, and the material used coincided with his element.

However, simply the beak of a Moon owl could not sustain many impacts and its form made it unusable as a throwing weapon.

'I can't sell it directly or the world will be informed that I'm training to be an inscription master. I'll just store it for now and maybe sell it in another place.'

He had no shortage of money, keeping that item wasn't a burden.

"I will focus more on shaping it right. Only one of these items can't last much in battle but, if I make many of them, they might be useful."

Ivor nodded.

"Yes, once the form is in its place, your creation will only lack the proper components. Don't worry though, it takes a lot of time to find the right mixture for your specific needs, your progress so far is already above average."

More days passed.

Noah became focused on the form of the item and he slowly improved in the process.

First, he managed to make the beaks even thinner in order to increase their durability.

Then, he forced them to bend.

When two weeks had passed, he stared at three thick needles laid in front of him.

'It's already the third day in which I can't improve the quality of this item. It's probably the limit of the compound.'

Noah took one of the needles and injected "Breath" in it before throwing it on the wall.

The inscriptions lit up and flickered but they still couldn't completely block the needle.

It stuck in the wall for less than a tenth of its body before being stopped by the sturdiness of the basement.

Noah was surprised.

Generally speaking, the students of the academy were all rank 1 cultivators.

It made sense for the inscriptions of that room to be tuned to block that level of power.

One of his sabers appeared in his hand and he slashed the air.

A wind slash ran across the room and smashed on the wall next to where the needle was, making the inscriptions flicker again.

Noah stood up and neared the area of the impact.

His attack left only a light mark on the wall but there was no damage at all.

However, the needle managed to create a small hole in it, which meant that its piercing ability had surpassed Noah's normal attack.

'To think that this small item could contain such power. It's not even at the peak of the first rank but it's able to pierce the defenses of the basement. The Elemental forging is amazing!'

Noah took out the item from the wall and inspected it carefully.

Small cracks had appeared on its body, it seemed like it could be used only another time.

'So, it's a two-use inscribed item, the material can't sustain the power injected in it. I don't know if it will be useful to me but its value should be higher than my previous creations.'

He still had about five unused beaks, if he didn't count the needle that he had just used, he could forge a set of seven needles to sell.

'Seven needles mean fourteen attacks with the power of the solid stage. I don't know if a cultivator with a weak dantian can use their full power but there shouldn't be much difference. Oh right, I should ask Ivor's opinion.'

He hastily went for the ground floor and asked Ivor to follow him in the basement.

He then showed the needle that he had tested.

Ivor became captivated by its sight and began to inspect it with interest.

"Can you use it?"

Ivor raised his head to make that request.

Noah nodded and took the item from his hands to throw it on the wall.

It happened the same thing as before, the needle lightly pierced the surface of the wall.

However, since it was its second usage, its cracks expanded, ultimately causing its breaking in many pieces.

Ivor didn't mind that and went to inspect the little hole that had been created.

"You made it reach the high tier! Good job!"

He was happy that his disciple had managed to create something worthy of being called an inscribed weapon.

Noah shrugged his shoulders.

He was proud of his creation but, since it didn't increase his battle prowess, he didn't care much about it.

It was just the result of his experiments after all, not something that had to be added to his arsenal.

"Do you understand that you are officially an inscription master now? You might be at the beginning but you have successfully completed your first stable inscription!"

"..."

Noah was silenced, he really didn't consider that detail.

"Since it didn't increase your power you didn't put much thought on it, am I right?"

Ivor rebuked him while shaking his head.

"Give it a name at least!"

Noah thought for a while before finding a simple name.

"Moon needle."