

Chapter 171 - 171. Break

Noah spent the following days forging the other Moon needles, exhausting his stash of Moon owl's beaks.

The seven inscribed weapons were then carefully laid in a casket and stored in his space-ring.

'I will sell these once I move to Elbas city, now I should focus on my dantian.'

He had some other random materials left but he felt that it was pointless to experiment more on things that he didn't need, he would rather wait to reach the Royal city and resume his forgings when he had access to better materials.

Also, his dantian was nearing its limit, once he became a rank 2 cultivator he would have access to a stronger "Breath" and rank 1 inscribed items would lose their appeal to him.

'Yet, no matter how much "Breath" I absorb, I'm still unable to reach the limits of the first rank.'

Even if he had focused more on the forging during the last period, the increased density of "Breath" of his new accommodation should have covered that diminished time spent in training.

However, he seemed to have miscalculated the time required for his advancement so he chose to momentarily focus on it.

Noah began to cultivate even during the day with his Dark vortex technique.

Many of his future plans required for him to have a rank 2 dantian so he decided to hasten its enlargement.

According to the teachings of the general cultivation course, the differences in power between stages in the first rank were only marginal while they would be more accentuated in the higher ranks.

"Vance, you are returning to the state when you had the "Breath" blessing in front of you."

June said with a smile as she peeked from the entrance of the basement.

Noah opened his eyes and released a soft sigh before laying on the floor.

"You are right, maybe what I need is just a bit of rest to stabilize my gains."

Too much training could be detrimental, rest was needed to maximize the growth.

'Maybe my dantian is too stressed and keeps on enlarging without noticing that it has reached its limits. Now that I think about it, there were cases of cultivators that trained so much that their bodies fell apart due to the pressure applied to them.'

June saw that he had stopped his meditation and happily went down the stairs to stare at the youth on the floor.

She then crouched next to him and pulled his arm.

"C'mon, come upstairs, I found where Ivor keeps his wine."

Since they began to spend more time together, Noah and June would appreciate being accompanied by Ivor's wine.

Yet, that didn't please the old cultivator and he began to hide it in random places in the house.

"Why does he even hide it, I pay for it after all."

Noah said, rising from the floor and letting June pull him upstairs.

As their relationship improved, June slowly lost all her mental barriers and began to treat Noah in a friendly manner.

Once she lowered her defenses, she became a simple young girl that didn't care about the behavior that a noble lady should have.

She was not even nineteen and she was already living together with two men after all, it was pointless to say the number of gossips that spread through the whole academy.

"Look, look! That geezer actually made a secret drawer in the wall."

She brought Noah to one of the rooms and strongly pushed on one spot on the wall.

The wood moved and a small hole was revealed behind it.

"I don't even know how he did that without us noticing!"

June exclaimed looking at the hole.

It was one of the accommodations of the academy, its sturdiness couldn't be underestimated.

'That scrounger must have used his knife! He really cares so much about his wine.'

In the cavity, there were about five jars carefully stored.

Noah took two of them and smiled toward June.

"Let's just laze around for today."

She giggled and moved to the first floor, followed by Noah.

"Your followers are becoming more daring! They actually waited for me outside of my Master's building when I went out today."

June complained as they arrived in one of the rooms.

She sat on one of the couches and took out two glasses from her storage device.

"Why are they even bothering me, this is becoming annoying."

Noah said while sighing, sitting next to her and pouring wine in the glasses.

They had become used to conversing like that, there was no awkwardness in their actions.

"The strongest student in the academy who has no ties to any noble family. Did you really think that you would be ignored just because you act grumpy? I bet that if they knew your element, they would go crazy."

"Those girls are already crazy enough due to your presence here. Sadly, they don't realize that you are just a battle maniac."

"Hmph! These words coming from someone addicted to cultivation have no value. For your information, I am rather popular among the male students, Master even said that there are girls interested in me..."

"I bet that if Professor Megan didn't say that to you, you would still be ignorant about it. Poor students, idolizing a wild beast."

"Oh, shut up. Look at you with all the mysterious halo. If I didn't know you, I would have thought that you were shy for real."

Noah snorted but a slight smile was present on his face as he sipped the wine.

June too seemed at ease and would lightly poke Noah every time he said something about her behavior.

That was their usual conversation, simply spending time together and joking with each other.

"You know."

June's smile vanished and was replaced with a bitter expression as she sat straight on the couch with both her hands on her glass.

"I know that you have your reasons for hiding your past but it can't be too beneficial to keep everything in your mind."

Noah's expression became complex as he reminisced his past.

"Are you saying that I can trust you?"

June nodded with her gaze fixed on her glass.

Noah sighed.

"I believe you will know it at some point anyway, I'm just trying to avoid loose ends."

Chapter 172 - 172. Reagent

"You really like being mysterious."

June sighed, giving up on probing more about his past.

"When you find out about me, you can give me your opinion on what I should have done."

Noah said, receiving another poke from June.

They continued to talk and drink for the whole night, enjoying their peaceful time together.

As the first rays of the dawn entered the room, Noah interrupted his line of thought and focused back on his surroundings.

June had long fallen asleep on the couch, uncaringly stretching her legs over Noah's waist.

'Is this a habit of her? She sure doesn't care about appearances.'

Noah shook his head, carefully moving her legs away in order to stand up.

June didn't wake up, it seemed that the wine had relaxed her so much that she didn't even pay attention to the environment around her.

A bitter smile appeared on Noah's face as he stared at the girl quietly sleeping in front of him.

'If my situation was different, I wonder how our relationship would have evolved.'

He then turned, going back to the basement to rest.

He woke up in the middle of the night, it was the first time that he had taken a whole day of break from his training.

'Let's see if there are some changes.'

Noah sat in his usual cross-legged position and began to meditate in the Dark vortex technique.

"Breath" converged in his dantian through the vortex in his joint hands and black crystals slowly amassed in that organ.

However, after two hours spent cultivating, Noah felt that he could no longer absorb more "Breath".

He opened his eyes and they shone with excitement.

'Finally, the limits of the first rank of the dantian.'

There was still one month before he became eighteen but he had finally reached the breakthrough point.

'If I compare myself to the other nobles of the academy, my growth isn't that amazing.'

It had taken him four years and five months to cultivate all the way from the beginning of the gaseous stage to the peak of the solid one, which was only slightly above the average time used by noble cultivators to achieve that feat.

However, since he had obtained his dantian at the age of thirteen and a half, he wasn't even eighteen and yet he was ready to become a rank 2 cultivator!

'To think that June actually helped. Well, it was almost time anyway.'

Noah checked his condition.

He was virtually at peak form, he had only been awake for two hours after all.

'No reasons to waste time then.'

An item appeared in his hand.

It was a small bottle with a silver liquid inside it, just by holding it Noah could feel the "Breath" in his dantian tremble.

'I can finally use the Silver reagent!'

The Silver reagent was an item obtained in Eccentric Thunder's separate dimension.

It was one of the most commonly used reagents for the breakthrough in the second rank of the dantian.

Noah breathed deeply for a couple of times before drinking in one sip all the contents of the bottle.

Immediately, the temperature on his low waist rose as the "Breath" in his dantian heated up.

The scorching sensation reached the walls of his dantian causing immense pain to envelop Noah's body.

Nevertheless, his focus never wavered.

Noah enveloped his dantian with his mental energy and checked for problems in the procedure.

Advancing from the first rank of the dantian to the second one wasn't strictly a difficult process but it was a rather dangerous one.

The reagent forced the "Breath" to expel its impurities, refining it in a stronger form of energy.

Yet, a simple dantian could not contain that much power, it had to be upgraded in order to allow higher types of energy to be stored inside it.

What was used to increase its strength were exactly the impurities expelled by the solid "Breath".

They were still a form of energy after all, and they were even in their most simple form so they were easy to absorb.

However, if the cultivator didn't manage to block them and let them disperse in the world, there was the chance that his dantian could break due to the internal pressure of the stronger energy that it contained.

Noah's mental energy was strong and steady, it enveloped the dantian and didn't let any impurities reach the outside world.

They stood on the walls of the dantian, slowly nourishing its matter.

The organ then contracted, as its walls became sturdier and denser, it could not maintain the enlarged form that it had reached in the peak of the stage.

Noah controlled that no impurity left the area of the dantian through the whole process.

There were no problems and, after about four hours, his dantian had returned to the size of a quarter of a fingernail.

Inside, a minute strand of gaseous "Breath" shone with a dark light.

'That was easy, being a rank 2 mage has its advantages.'

The process was smooth since all the impurities were contained in the walls of the dantian and managed to nourish it.

The walls then seemed incredibly durable after the procedure was over.

Noah activated the Dark vortex technique.

A small part of his "Breath" was consumed and a vortex twice as wide as the previous times appeared and began to absorb the "Breath" in the environment.

The absorption speed was many times higher than when he was in the first rank, yet that didn't seem to matter for his dantian as it didn't enlarge at all!

Only when the first light of the day arrived, Noah noticed that some improvement was happening.

Noah stopped his meditation and exhaled loudly.

'About two hours of cultivation and my dantian almost didn't bulge, it will take a lot to reach the peak of the gaseous stage on this rank.'

He stood up and decided to test his new strength.

A saber appeared in his hands and he casually slashed the air.

A brilliant wind slash hit the wall of the basement, making the inscriptions flash to no end.

In the end, they seemed to give up on blocking the attack and turned off.

Noah inspected the area where his attack had crashed and noticed that a vertical cut had appeared on the wall.

It wasn't that deep, only about three centimeters, yet Noah was extremely satisfied with the results.

'Just a casual attack has actually done all this damage. I can make a thousand of these with the "Breath" that I have now! At last, I am a rank 2 cultivator.'

Chapter 173 - 173. Departure

Rank 3 body in the high tier.

Rank 2 sea of consciousness.

And, at last, rank 2 dantian in the gaseous stage.

All Noah's centers of power had greatly benefitted from his enrollment in the academy.

In the two years and a half in which he had been a student, he had grown in all the fields where he was lacking.

His knowledge about cultivation had vastly increased after receiving the instructions of his professors.

All his techniques and spells had been upgraded according to his element and battle style, he wasn't the kid that had to accept anything that had a better rank than his current methods anymore.

He had also found a way to become an inscription master, paving the way to his future improvements.

'I don't have enough money to buy techniques of higher ranks and I'm not even sure that they would sell them to me without roping me in some deal. I've exhausted everything that the academy could have given me.'

Realization dawned upon him, he knew that it was time to leave.

A token appeared in his hand.

It was green and it depicted the image of a lion-type magical beast with its head severed, it was the token of the Hunters' guild that Thaddeus had sent to him a while ago.

Then, he uncovered part of his chest area and looked at the orange rune that was slowly making its way toward his dantian.

'I need to stabilize my breakthrough before moving to the Royal city. Also, I need to take care of the matter about Eccentric Thunder...'

Noah cultivated for two more weeks in his accommodation.

His dantian only enlarged slightly, it seemed that it would take a long time before he could reach the liquid stage.

He had sent Ivor to prepare a carriage for their trip toward Elbas city, their coachman was already waiting in an area inside Arolyac forest.

"Go first, I have to take care of something."

Noah said to Ivor in a soft voice.

"I still don't understand all your hurry, what's better than a peaceful life accompanied by a beautiful girl?"

Ivor complained, shaking his head.

Noah moved his gaze on the stairs for the first floor and replied with a low voice.

"There is no peace for me."

He climbed the stairs slowly.

He had to admit that a part of him was reluctant to leave but his first focus had to always be his personal strength.

'The faculties here are no longer useful for my rank and I believe that the Royal city will offer me many different possibilities to increase my strength.'

He arrived in front of June's room.

She had picked up the clues about Noah's departure and became colder toward him in the last period.

'She must feel as if what happened in her childhood is reoccurring.'

Noah had probably become the only person she trusted after her family turned on her and hearing of his departure raised again her mental barriers.

"June, I'm leaving."

June was sitting cross-legged on the floor and she opened her eyes hearing Noah speak.

She snorted and spoke in an irritated voice.

"Then leave, what are you doing here?"

Noah sighed.

'It seems like our relationship regressed to when I first met her.'

"I need to give you something first."

"I don't need it!"

'Why is this so hard...'

Noah sighed again.

"Will you abandon the thought of surpassing me?"

She finally turned her head.

"Why would I do that? You know my plan! I will use-"

"Your family and your relationship with the Royals to gather resources in order to improve your personal power. I know, I can ensure you that it won't be enough."

Noah finished her phrase.

June stood up and shouted angrily at him.

"How can you be so sure? Tell me the truth, why did you become interested in me all of sudden? What were your intentions?"

'She has a point, I indeed approached her out of necessity.'

He sighed for the third time before staring June in her eyes.

"One day, they will find me, I need to move in order to obtain as many benefits as I can before I'm forced to run away again."

June was silenced as soon as Noah began to reveal information about himself.

Noah continued.

"Look, I needed to be sure of your character and I have to admit that among all those that wanted to exploit me, your frankness is a breath of fresh air."

June opened her mouth to speak but Noah raised one hand to stop her.

"I can't have more enemies and I have to be careful of my every move. I lie a lot to cover my tracks and I don't care much about anything except for cultivating, yet you didn't mind it and have accepted me anyway. I thank you for that, I have to say that I honestly like your company."

That was the truth.

After losing his mother and abandoning William, the only people with whom he could stop pretending were Ivor and June. However, Ivor was mainly interested in keeping the Elemental forging method alive while June had no hidden meaning behind her actions.

June blushed lightly and lowered her head, Noah's words resembled a confession of some sort which made her embarrassed.

Noah though had other intentions and stretched his right arm toward her.

"I trust you. If you feel the same, take my hand. You will understand part of my actions like this."

June raised her head and stared at the hand pointed toward her.

She hesitated for a few seconds before resolving her will and stretching her hand to reach Noah's one.

As the two hands touched each other, Noah tightened his grip and spoke in a solemn voice.

"I declare you Eccentric Thunder's heir."

The conditions of his deal were met and the orange rune moved from his torso toward his fingers before entering June's body.

A torrent of information flowed into her sea of consciousness and she released the handshake as she kneeled on the floor to support herself.

"This, this..."

She was speechless as the specifics of the inheritance ground became clear in her mind.

Attached to them, there were the memories of Noah's trial from when he entered the second stage to when he exited after making the deal.

Eccentric Thunder had secretly passed them down to warn his future heir about Noah's personality, he didn't know that those memories had the opposite effect to June.

Noah's strenuous battle that ultimately led to a failure in obtaining the inheritance due to his aptitude only increased her admiration toward the mysterious man in front of her.

"One last thing. If you ever try to use that power to harm me, I will forsake all the good moments that we had together and kill you without hesitation."

Noah gave her one last warning before smiling lightly and leaving the room.
From that moment on, he was no longer a student of the academy!

Chapter 174 - 174. Expensive

The capital of the Utra country was placed near the borders of the nation.

As the city that held the highest power in the country, it was the best line of defense in case of an attack from enemy nations.

The Royal dynasty wasn't the only noble family that occupied it, there were many small and medium-size families that were annexed in the borders of the capital.

A single family could not have the power to rule over a nation for two thousand years without accidents occurring, it needed to have a man-power that vastly surpassed the one of the other large-size noble families.

The Elbas family solved that issue by linking many smaller noble families to their rule, giving important positions to them and connecting their heirs with political marriages.

Like that, the number of their descendants was largely increased and they could rely on them to take care of important structures of the Royal city.

Thaddeus and Lisa were precisely two of those descendants with mixed blood.

One was taking care of the matters of the academy while the other was a captain of the Royal guards.

In that way, the power of the Elbas family was never divided between their subjects but only with families carrying their same name.

As for the succession to the throne, that was a complex matter.

The stronger cultivators in their ranks would often retire from the political struggles of the mortal world and focus on their training, leaving the command of the continent to their weaker descendants.

It was easy to imagine the many internal battles that happened in the Royal Mansion in order to obtain that position.

However, none of that was of any importance to Noah.

He was sitting in the carriage with Ivor, waiting to reach Elbas city.

The academy token was in his hands and he looked at it with indecision clearly present in his eyes.

'He will be in touch he said, the Royal inheritance seems to really bother him.'

As he was about to leave his token to the management building, Thaddeus had shown up and urged him to keep it.

"We have other ways to contact you but the academy token remains the best method. Keep it so that we will know when you are ready to work for us again."

That was what he had said.

'Does this token keep tracks of my movements?'

No matter how he inspected it, he couldn't find anything wrong with the item, so he decided to ask Ivor for advice.

"It might be possible to track you down through that token, it is linked to the network of the academy after all. Though, if you keep it inside your space-ring, it almost impossible for them to pinpoint your position. Space-rings are a sort of separate dimension themselves, creating an item that can ignore that hurdle would require much more than an inscription on this level."

Ivor judged, handing back the token to Noah.

'I guess I should just keep it then.'

Their trip was peaceful and, in two days, they arrived at the gates of the Royal city.

"What's our move?"

Ivor asked, staring at the tall defensive wall that encircled the city.

"We first reach the Hunters' guild. After I know more about my duties, we will look for a place where to stay."

Noah said, looking in the distance to find where the wall ended.

Nevertheless, the walls were too big, being right under them made impossible for Noah to even see a part of it.

'I wonder if the King of the valley could take down this city.'

The strongest being that he had ever seen was his meter of comparison regarding sheer power.

He imagined the huge white snake crashing on the wall and destroying it but then he refused that vision.

'It's the Royal city that I'm considering here. Balvan mansion had an inscribed defensive wall, how could Elbas city not have it too?'

Ivor and Noah neared the gate and put themselves in line with the other people that wanted to enter the city.

The inspections of the soldiers went smoothly and, in a few minutes, they were inside the city.

Noah was exempted from paying for his identification token since the one from the Hunters' guild was considered as a formal invitation but he still had to give fifty Credits to the soldiers in order to allow Ivor's entry.

"How can you not have an identification token?"

The reason why Ivor didn't have it was simple.

"I lost it."

Noah cursed in his mind but still paid the required sum and two golden tokens were delivered to them.

They were quite simple in their design, with only the names "Vance" and "Ivor" on them.

Right after the gate, there were many structures used for renting carriages led by magical beasts with loud people publicizing them.

"East gate's fastest transports right here!"

"Our business has the lowest transportation cost in the whole city, come to us!"

"For a small sum, we offer the best services and comforts!"

There were more than five businesses dealing with transportations inside the city, from that, one could see how populated the capital was.

"East gate?"

Noah asked Ivor in confusion.

"There are three gates on the city walls: East, West, and South. The northern side faces the other countries so they didn't build a gate in order to maximize the defenses of the city."

Noah nodded in understanding.

He moved toward the man that publicized the low prices.

"How much to reach the Hunters' guild for two persons?"

The man happily turned toward Noah and joined his hands in a friendly gesture.

"A trip for two people would be two hundred Credits. We can ensure that you will reach your destination in less than one day!"

'The fuck? One hundred Credits for a one-day trip?'

Noah looked toward Ivor that sensed his amazement and nodded.

'So, these are really the normal prices here. The Royal city sure is expensive.'

"Fine, but I want you to point out where I can find a map of the city."

Chapter 175 - 175. Capital

A carriage led by a rank 1 Four-horned bull moved at a high speed through the streets of Elbas city.

Inside, Noah was attentively studying a map while Ivor was snoring loudly.

After quite some time, Noah raised his head from the drawing and put it back in his space-ring.

'Twenty Credits just for this simple map, to live in the Royal city you would require a profitable profession.'

If he didn't consider the Credits that he had obtained due to the two inheritance grounds, his gains would be limited to the two Credits at which he had sold the body of the Three-eyed bat in Toottac town.

'I wonder if I really can live here without spending all my resources. As for hunting down rank 4 magical beasts, I don't think I'm quite there yet.'

Based on his recent improvements, he was confident that if he met again the starved Cloud eagle, he could make it bleed.

'Killing it though is another matter, and I don't even know what would be the situation with a rank 4 beast at its peak form.'

Unless his power advanced, he had to limit himself to hunt packs of rank 3 beasts.

'I'm overthinking, I don't even know how things will work in the guild.'

He had learnt the importance that rest had in his growth so he had decided to not cultivate on his first day in the city.

Yet, he didn't imagine that reaching the guild would have taken so much.

'It has already been half a day, don't tell me that it will really take another half to arrive there!'

The Royal city was enormous, more than one hundred kilometers wide.

For a country filled with small villages and sparse mansions, a city that big was an unusual sight.

However, the capital wasn't only the place where the strongest cultivators of the country gathered, it was also the first line of defense if an enemy invasion was to happen.

Most of the business in the city covered battle related topics, from inscribed weapons and armors to training grounds for soldiers.

There were even research facilities that, coupled with the academy, represented the apex of what the Utra nation could offer in the cultivation field.

Also, many quarters belonged to the different families tied with the Royal dynasty and to their different occupations.

Thaddeus and Lisa's family mainly provided soldiers to the ranks of the capital, with Thaddeus being an exception since he was talented in inscriptions.

These were information commonly known by the people in the Royal city and were also the best that Noah could learn from his short interaction with the attendant in the building renting carriages.

'This carriage mustn't be a normal one. I almost feel no movements from inside it.'

Noah thought, placing his attention on the transport.

'Maybe it's an inscribed item with rank 1 low tier power, no wonder they just rent them.'

Noah was feeling nothing but amazement for every aspect regarding the Royal city.

From its width to the facilities present inside it, everything seemed to belong to an entirely different world!

'That's the result of gathering most of the wealth of a nation in one big area.'

Noah concluded before deciding to imitate Ivor in his sleep.

As Noah predicted, it had to pass eleven more hours before they arrived at their destination.

It wasn't due to the bull's speed though but rather to the many stops that it had to make along the way.

Yet, a few hours after midday, Noah and Ivor jumped off their carriage, successfully arrived at their destination.

"The Hunters' guild entrance is right after turning that corner, I hope that you would advise our services to your friends!"

The coachman said with a wide smile on his face before going away.

Noah found himself in an ample road with three-story buildings at its sides.

They had gaudy colors and some of them had big banners in front of their entrances.

'Three thousand Credits to rent for one month, are they crazy?'

Noah looked at the prices listed on the banners and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Is everything in this city so pricy?"

He asked Ivor.

"This is actually an average cost. The closer you get to the Royal Mansion, the more the prices will increase."

'Average he says.'

"Do you know the usual income of a hunter?"

Ivor shook his head.

"No idea but with your forgings, you should be able to make quite a wealthy life."

He still had the seven Moon needles to sell added to his one hundred thousand Credits that remained from the rewards of the Royal inheritance, money wasn't an immediate problem for him.

They began to walk toward the direction pointed by the coachman and Noah asked more questions.

"Why is the density of "Breath" still quite high? This should be a normal area."

"Since the capital is so pricy, it must have its benefits. There are "Breath" blessings in every quarter of the city and there are even special houses that have other features. As you near the central area of the city, the things that are offered surpass even my imagination."

'For the academy to create flying devices, there should be even stranger things produced.'

"What about guilds? What can you tell me about them?"

"They generally detain control over certain businesses. The Hunters' guild satisfies the need for magical beasts both alive and dead for example."

"How do you know about that?"

"I am an inscription master. The guild for that profession has a strict connection with the Hunters' one due to its need for materials. You should pass there at some point to be acknowledged as an apprentice in that field."

'So, I also need some kind of certification. It makes sense, nobody would buy the products of a no one like me.'

They turned the corner and they found themselves in front of a big wooden door with a crest depicting a lion-type magical beast with its head severed.

Noah took out the token with that same design and the door opened by itself.

A wide room unfolded in front of his eyes, with many cultivators holding jugs full of wine.

The smell of booze filled the room and the atmosphere seemed lively and happy.

Yet, as they noticed the entrance door opening, all the cultivators turned and focused on the figure that was becoming visible.

Noah felt more than thirty wary gazes on him as he crossed the ingress.

'This really suits my tastes.'

He thought, suppressing a smile from appearing on his face.

Chapter 176 - 176. Ron Slassiw

The life as a student of the academy was peaceful but also extremely plain.

Rules can help the weak but can also restrain the strong.

A life in a cage was something that Noah had tried to avoid in both his lives.

As the cultivators in the Hunters' guild looked at him, he knew that they weren't naïve brats.

'They surely had their share of battles.'

That was his first thought when they began to inspect him.

Noah didn't hesitate and walked steadily toward the end of the room, his eyes never lingered on any of the men staring him.

As he was halfway through the chamber though, a tall burly man stood up and blocked his way.

Noah stared at the man and he did the same, they were probing each other.

'He is stronger than me.'

Noah concluded in his mind but his eyes never moved from him, enduring the pressure that the man applied to his mental sphere.

'But he is only a rank 2 mage.'

Seeing that he could not make the youth lower his head, the man retracted his pressure and crossed his arms.

"Who are you and why are you here? This is not a playground."

He spoke in a deep voice.

Noah raised the token still in his hands.

"I'm Vance, from the academy. I believe that His Majesty Thaddeus Elbas had warned the guild of my arrival."

He explained calmly.

The man stared at the token for a moment before moving his gaze back on the young man.

"Just because a Royal gave you that token, it doesn't mean that you could join the guild for free."

"And how do I do that?"

Some of the other cultivators on the tables nodded in approval, they liked Noah's direct attitude.

The man snorted before pointing toward Noah.

"You students of the academy are all spoiled nobles who know nothing about real-life struggles. We can't accept a useless kid as a hunter."

As soon as he said those words, Noah understood his intentions and acted.

His upper clothes tore and Echo threw itself toward the tall man.

Yet, he only waved his hand and destroyed the body of the bat!

Before Echo reformed though, Shadow appeared behind the man and pounced him.

The cultivator strongly raised his elbow that clashed with the panther and destroyed its body in one hit!

Noah didn't stay still and attacked without hesitation, his two blood companions gave him the time needed to wield his sabers.

Shadow steps activated and Noah passed the cultivator dealing two fast strikes on his torso.

CLANG!

As his two sabers hit the man's ribs, a metallic sound resounded in the room.

Noah was on guard on the opposite side of the room, looking at the back of the burly man.

'Rank 4 body!'

His attack didn't manage to pierce the natural defenses of the body of the cultivator.

'I wasn't being serious but I still charged using a rank 0 spell! So, a rank 4 body can be this strong.'

His eyes shined as he became excited thinking about his next advancements.

According to his calculations, it wouldn't take long for him to obtain a rank 4 body too.

The man slowly turned himself, staring at the two cuts on his clothes before looking toward Noah.

He was slightly surprised by the scene.

The young man stood calmly on guard with his sabers crossed in front of him.

A black bat and a black panther were on his sides with their empty eyes fixed on him.

Four additional arms were faintly materializing on the student's torso and an aura of coldness enveloped his figure.

He was ready to fight.

'He has seen that his attacks can't pierce my skin, yet he didn't give up. It seems that the academy produced a battle genius.'

The man thought.

"Kurt, stop messing with the kid, he is clearly up for the job."

A rough voice sounded from one of the tables at the end of the room.

"Vance, come here."

Noah turned toward the voice only to see an old man with his arm stretched waving at him.

Kurt shrugged his shoulders and returned to his seat, resuming his drinking and laughing with the others in his table.

Noah moved toward the old cultivator and made a slight bow as he reached him.

"Come, come. Have a drink with us while you tell me about yourself."

Noah sat in one of the free seats near him and calmly waited for the man to talk.

"You know, there aren't many nobles from the academy willing to join our guild. They prefer to become a Royal guard and laze around all day instead of spending their lives in beasts' lairs."

He spoke while signaling to one of the servants waiting at the sides of the room to bring a jug for Noah.

"I'm no noble."

Noah said briefly.

The other cultivators on the table were a bit surprised by his affirmation but then they nodded in approval.

Even if their status was high outside Elbas city, in the capital they were simple hunters.

They were either talented soldiers from noble families residing in the city or of noble birth without any special connection to the Royal family.

In the capital, where a big part of the population was composed of nobles and wealthy cultivators, their status was only average.

Knowing that Noah's status was similar to theirs made their attitudes more friendly toward him.

He had been a student of the academy after all!

If he wanted, there would be many families willing to hire him as a guard or attempting to rope him in with political marriages.

The fact that he had entered the academy confirmed that his talent was extremely high, at the peak of his generation!

Getting their hands of someone with such potential was a wise investment for the future power of their family.

"And how did someone without a noble status enter the academy?"

Noah shrugged his shoulders.

"Luck."

The elder scoffed and shook his head.

"Not the talkative type, I see. Don't worry though, here in the Hunters' guild we all have our secrets. Oh right, I am Ron Slassiw, I manage the new arrivals."

Chapter 177 - 177. Guild

A jug full of wine was laid in front of Noah and he took a sip from it after doing a quick inspection with his mental energy.

It had become a habit by then to use his mental energy to look at everything before his eyes did.

The wine was strong and dry, far from the quality of Ivor's one.

"I need to teach you some procedures before you can start hunting, I'd say to start with the activities of our guild."

Noah raised his attention at Ron's words.

"We can hunt freely, there is a detailed map of the areas near the capital with the descriptions of the various faunas of each zone. Also, each magical beast had a different value, as do each of their body parts. You can look at their

values on the first floor of the guild, they generally vary due to their need in the Royal city."

Noah nodded internally.

'That's pretty standard, the value of something is given by its demand in the market.'

"We also sign the area where we are going to hunt so that other hunters can decide if the competition for a certain beast is too high and switch to another target, we always try to avoid internal fights and the rules are quite strict regarding the ownership of a certain beast's body."

Ron then pointed toward the table where Kurt was drinking.

"That guy, Kurt, has been a hunter for more than ten years. He usually hunts rank 4 beasts with the cultivators that are seating with him. We trust him a lot so don't be mad at his behavior from earlier, he just wanted to be sure that you were worthy of the guild."

'Hunts rank 4 beasts in a group? So not even he can kill one alone?'

Noah thought and could not help but ask more about that.

"Are rank 4 beasts that strong?"

Ron drank from his jug before answering.

"Well, yes. They are entirely in the heroic ranks while humans need all three centers of power in the fourth rank to be considered at that level. Kurt has a rank 4 body but his other two centers of power are still in the human ranks. He has managed to kill a few rank 4 beasts alone though, it's just way safer if it's done in a group."

'So, it's doable,'

Noah lowered his head on the wine to hide the excitement that he felt.

"You can join or form a group, or even go alone, it's up to you. All this can be done on the first floor."

"The deposit is on the second floor. You can sell or buy beasts' corpses and body parts there, you have discounts based on your hunts' quota. There isn't a maximum of the discounts that you can get but you must meet a minimum quota. It's about fifteen intact rank 3 beast's corpses per month, that number varies on the type of magical beast that you deliver. Don't worry though, you will be paid for those beasts, the guild just does that to force its hunters to work and don't take advantage of our favorable prices."

'That is pretty lax. Fifteen rank 3 bodies are really easy to collect each month.'

"Can you deliver thirty of them at the same time and then be free for two months?"

He was worried that his forging sessions could be interrupted.

Ron laughed and nodded happily.

"Of course! Otherwise, everyone would just let their prey rot in their space-rings in order to deliver them in the next month. Trust me, there was that issue once the higher-ups tried the strict monthly method."

'No wonder, it takes a day just to get out of the city. By the time you reach the hunting area, kill the beasts, and come back here, at least half a month would have passed.'

Noah shook his head internally.

'I should just get the quota for a few months done in my first mission and then focus on forging.'

He didn't forget his purpose.

He needed to find a place suitable for cultivation and for his experiments.

Since he finally had a rank 2 dantian, he could begin the tests to forge a real weapon, useful for his current battle prowess.

"Oh, remember that you can also bring here alive beasts, we keep them in the underground rooms. Their value is way higher than the dead ones of course."

Noah's eyes lit up.

"Do those rooms have rank 4 beasts?"

Ron stood speechless for a moment before exploding in a sonorous laugh.

The cultivators sitting near him that overheard Noah's question did the same and laughed to no end.

'Did I say something wrong?'

Noah was confused by their reaction and waited for them to explain.

Ron forced himself to calm down and gulped a mouthful of wine before answering.

"Tell me, do you know of someone capable of dragging a rank 4 beast alive here? Do you also know of a cage capable of holding them? And, at last, if you really do know him, why would he lower himself on being a hunter?"

"..."

Noah realized how stupid his question was.

Capturing a rank 4 beast alive was extremely difficult, far more than killing one.

As for restraining it, that meant that its cage had to be an inscribed item with a rank surpassing the second one.

Why would a cultivator with such capabilities choose to be a hunter?

Someone with that strength could become the patriarch of a noble family or funding its own noble house, there was no reason to limit himself to work for a guild.

"I didn't think about it."

His excitement had clouded his mind.

If he could obtain the blood and the core of a rank 4 magical beast, he could attempt on creating a blood companion as his sea of consciousness became stronger.

His two blood companions had the strength of a peak rank 3 magical beast, they could be only used as shields against cultivators on Noah's level.

They were still useful in dealing with other magical beasts but Noah was starting to rely less on them.

'I guess that, in my Demonic form, they can cause some trouble to other cultivators. Yet, having a rank 4 beast as a blood companion would really boost my battle prowess once I reach the heroic ranks.'

Chapter 178 - 178. Albino snake

"That's about it. Go on the first floor, sign for a hunting area, and fill your monthly quota. The discounts on the second floor will be available to you after that."

Ron spoke, ending his explanation.

'I need to complete a mission first then.'

"What about accommodations? Does senior have any advice about the houses in the capital?"

Noah asked and Ron showed a bitter smile.

"The prices are high almost everywhere in the city. I advise you to learn the layout of the city so that you can avoid using the transports. Also, unless you

are rich, you shouldn't rent places for a long time. Since we spend most of our time hunting, a fixed residence is only a monetary burden. Most nobles prefer to be enrolled in the Royal army so to obtain free lodgings, us hunters live by the day."

Noah lowered his head and fell deep in thought.

'Money is not an immediate problem but it will become one once I start experimenting with rank 4 materials. That scrounger is becoming a problem.'

He didn't mind not having a fixed residence but he had to take care of Ivor.

'I still need him to clear my doubts on some aspects of the forging. I can also use him to run errands for me or to sell my creations, his certification as an inscription master should suffice and I will also avoid the trouble of going through their examination. I don't think I can hide my aptitude from them.'

His choice of joining the Hunters' guild didn't solely come from his need for materials.

There, he could continue to hide while still increasing his power.

If he was to show his creations personally, it would be impossible to hide his element, after all, all his creations were made using his own "Breath"!

'I need more time and more money.'

"Thank you for your explanation, I will start to work immediately."

Noah said as he stood up and bowed.

There was no need for him to undergo examinations or enrollments as Thaddeus had taken care of them after Noah had chosen his position.

Noah went directly for the first floor and a spacious room unfolded itself as he climbed the stairs.

'This is quite messy.'

There were more than ten men and women, all looking at various boards on the walls.

At the center of the room, a big table was placed.

Over it, a detailed map depicted a large area near the Royal city.

Noah neared the table and inspected the map carefully.

'It reaches even the places on the other side of the border.'

The drawn area was huge, it covered at least five hundred thousand square kilometers of surface, it even reached hunting zones in nearby continents!

'It should work with mental energy, right?'

Noah found the picture of Arolyac forest on the map and used his mental energy to inspect it.

As soon as his mind focused in that area, a long list of names and information appeared in his sea of consciousness.

'Whoa, that basically covers every possible beast of the forest.'

The list contained the names of every type of magical beast that could be found in the forest.

There were also descriptions of the beasts, notes about their behavior, and the value of their body parts.

Noah randomly moved his attention toward another area of the map.

The list in his mind changed and a different fauna was shown to him.

'Amazing.'

Noah was honestly surprised.

Not only the map was an inscribed item capable of storing an incredible amount of information but he really admired how much work was put into it.

'To gather all this knowledge, one lifetime is not enough.'

There were hundreds of environments described with thousands of magical beasts listed, Noah knew that behind the creation of that map there was more than a century of researches.

He raised his gaze from the map and looked at the various boards on the walls.

There were the names of the various hunting zones with cultivators either inspecting them or leaving a sign through their token.

Noah randomly inspected one of the zones with many signs with his mental energy and its information appeared in his mental sphere.

'Drainston Crag, danger zone. High number of Toxic hyenas discovered recently. Hunters in the area: Orville, Lucian Aildwi, ...'

'Ohh, even these boards are pretty detailed.'

Noah nodded in satisfaction seeing the organization of the guild, the disorder of the room didn't reflect at all the orderly arrangements of the various tools.

He then turned toward the end of the room.

The stairs for the second floor were there with the largest board of the room on their side.

That one was the only panel that no hunter was inspecting.

His curiosity was piqued and he neared it.

As his mental energy scanned it, the information was shown in his mental sphere.

'Special missions of the Royal family!'

There were several hunts ordered by the Royal dynasty with special rewards attached to them.

However, their difficulty was far higher than anything Noah had ever seen.

'Thirty rank 4 Mountain trolls have occupied Green Hill Mountain, rewards ...'

'Hordes of Golden dragons flying in the skies over Crumbled Plains, ten rank 4 specimens confirmed, rewards...'

'Rank 5 Albino snake found in Twilboia Cliff, near the domain of the Shosti family. Rewards...'

Noah stopped reading at that phrase and remembered the huge beast that resembled a small mountain when it slept.

"I wouldn't even look at that board, most of the hunters that attempt in the missions of the Royals end up dead."

Ron appeared behind Noah.

"I forgot to warn you about that. There is the hidden rule of avoiding that board, I think that you can understand why is that."

Noah nodded and looked again at the areas written there.

"If even the Royal dynasty doesn't want to involve itself in these hunts, why would we even attempt in those?"

Ron nodded at his words and patted Noah's shoulder.

"Just stick to the other panels and to the areas at their bottom. The boards at the entrance of the floor have the names of the safer hunting zones on them while toward the end of the room there are only danger zones. This one with Royal missions is put here because of the incredible danger present in those areas."

Chapter 179 - 179. Hunt

Noah came out of the Hunters' guild and found Ivor quietly waiting for him.

He didn't enter the second floor.

Since he still had to deliver his first monthly quote, he had no discounts on the materials so he decided to complete a hunt before entering there.

"So?"

Ivor asked seeing him come out.

"I've registered for a hunt, let's find an accommodation now."

He had signed for a danger zone mainly populated by Swamp lizards and, as their name suggested, their location was inside a wide swamp in Mellow forest.

It was about five hundred kilometers away from the Royal city, not too far away, and there was only another hunter signed for that same area.

Rank 3 Swamp lizards' bodies were valued thirty-five Credits if they were intact, quite a good price for a rank 3 beast, yet most of the hunters were scared by the presence of rank 4 specimens in the swamp to go there.

If an area had rank 4 magical beasts in its environment, it would be branded as a danger zone so to warn those that wanted to cross it.

However, Noah wasn't scared of their presence.

'Even if I'm not able to kill them, that doesn't mean that I have to fear them!'

Those were his thoughts when he signed for the hunting area.

The reason was simple: none of the dangerous beasts in that environment could fly.

Also, his power had greatly increased since the last time he faced a rank 4 beast, if there was the chance, he would gladly test the limits of his new strength.

"Where to?"

"Somewhere near the West gate, the rents should be more affordable there."

Since the gates were the farthest places from the center of the capital, the concentration of "Breath" was on a normal level.

Nevertheless, Noah had to simply drop Ivor there while he did his mission, there was no reason to spend more for something that he didn't use.

They requested for a carriage in one of the gathering spots and traveled for one day to reach the West gate area.

The situation was the same as the other gate, with transport businesses crowding the main street.

They found a plain-looking building, renting rooms for five hundred Credits per month.

The room was simple, twenty square meters wide with only a bed in it but it was more than enough for Ivor.

"Here, I want you to sell these while I'm away."

Noah handed the casket containing the seven Moon needles together with two thousand Credits to Ivor.

"Why don't you simply take the test and become accepted as a beginner inscription master?"

Noah shook his head.

"My element must remain hidden, if you don't want me to disappear, take care of this."

Ivor saw the stern expression of his student and nodded, taking the casket and the Credits in his hands.

"Try to gain something from that, I don't want to come back and find out that you spent everything in wine."

He reminded him before stepping out of the room and exiting the city.

'Finally alone.'

As he exited through the West gate and the vast prairie appeared in his line of sight, he felt like an enormous burden had been lifted off his shoulders.

Most of the time, Ivor was a weight and, in the area of the academy, he always felt like he was under strict observation.

Now that he was off for a long mission, he felt like he regained some of the freedom that he had obtained when he escaped from Eccentric Thunder's dimension.

'She must have decided to go there by now, I don't believe she can resist the temptation of a complete inheritance with her character.'

He smiled a little thinking about Eccentric Thunder and June.

He knew that if it wasn't for that fortuitous encounter, most of his current achievements would have been impossible.

'I can't slack off either. I wonder if I'll meet Doris once I reach the swamp.'

Doris was the other hunter signed for Mellow forest.

'I hope she won't cause trouble for me. Well, I'm not in the academy anymore.'

As he thought of that, his eyes focused on a spot in the distance and his aura intensified, some of the magical beasts nearby cried due to the fear that Noah's coldness caused them.

Then he jumped ahead, shooting at high speed in the distance.

Five hundred kilometers weren't a big distance for a cultivator with a rank 3 body but Noah still took three days to cross them.

He followed the general directions of the map on the first floor and, in the end, he reached Mellow forest.

It could have taken less but he still decided to take many breaks to continue to train.

Even if the concentration of "Breath" was nowhere near the one of the academy, he still didn't want to completely stop his improvements.

Also, the training with the third Kesier rune didn't depend on the density of "Breath", so the enlargement of his mental sphere continued at a normal pace.

'Now, the swamp should be in the northern area of the forest.'

Noah didn't waste time and wielded his sabers as he entered the wood.

The daylight illuminated the uncovered spots below the trees and the environment was wet, that area seemed subject to frequent rains.

A black figure jumped from branch to branch toward the more humid part of the forest.

Noah had resumed his habit to move using the branches of the trees and he used his mental energy to scan his surroundings.

From time to time, a sound inaudible by humans was released from his back, Echo scanned the area around him looking for magical beasts.

Yet, with the exception of a few rank 1 creatures, Noah didn't find anything valuable.

'So much for a danger zone, even a kid could survive here.'

He didn't meet any danger in his few hours of exploration and the swamp area was getting closer.

'Maybe the other beasts were eaten for the birth of rank 4 specimens.'

Noah ran for half a day before finding the first rank 3 creature.

It was a Poisonous toad, one meter tall and with yellow eyes.

However, it was deeply injured with cuts all over its body and missing a leg.

It was frantically trying to run away from the direction where Noah was going to but its pitiful state made its movements extremely slow and clumsy.

Noah jumped on it and directly severed its head before inspecting its body.

Chapter 180 - 180. Expanding

The Poisonous toads generally lived in swamps like the Swamp lizards, it was reasonable to address its injuries to a conflict with the other species of magical beasts.

'These cuts are so small, they aren't caused by rank 4 creatures.'

The toad was only one meter tall while the Swamp lizard had an average height of two and a half meters for their rank 3 version.

'Was it overwhelmed by rank 2 lizards? If that's the case, how many specimens are ahead?'

Noah stared in the direction where the toad came from with a bit of uncertainty.

'For a pack to be this big, it usually means one thing: they are expanding!'

Magical beasts were a mutation of normal creatures due to the "Breath" in the environment.

As time passed, each type of magical beast became a different species, giving birth to many peculiar creatures.

At least, that was the most accepted theory about the birth of magical beasts.

The "Breath" could turn humans into cultivators and animals into magical beasts, such mystical energy was indeed amazing.

'With the exception of mating, new magical beasts can be generated through the influence of high-level beings on the environment. A rank 4 Swamp lizard

could have turned an unimaginable number of normal lizards in magical specimens of its pack.'

Noah reviewed those pieces of information in his mind.

His knowledge in the field of magical beasts was vast, the academy had given him the best instruction in the entire country after all.

'How many creatures are there below rank 3? How many above it?'

He knew that killing a rank 3 creature using weaker beasts was a hard task which meant that the pack ahead had to contain at least a few thousand beasts.

Noah resolved himself and put the body of the toad in his space-ring before continuing in his march.

He had chosen that hunt because he was confident in his ability to escape if things became ugly, there was no reason to retreat before confirming the entity of the danger.

As he continued in his advance, more bodies of Poisonous toads appeared on the ground.

'These died because of their injuries. If they had remained in the range of the pack, they would have been eaten already.'

A large pack required a big quantity of food.

The best food for magical beasts was, of course, other magical beasts, there was no way that they would have let go of rank 3 specimens like that.

The quantity of "Breath" remaining in their bodies was too alluring for them!

Noah crossed another kilometer before reaching the borders of the swamp, there were no more corpses near it.

'This is wrong.'

According to the information about Mellow forest, the swamp area had to be at a few kilometers north from his position, yet it had appeared already.

'The environment is mutating due to their presence, there is more than a single rank 4 lizard.'

Noah concluded.

Magical beasts, like cultivators, emitted a strong aura and the higher their level was, the more they could influence their surroundings.

In Twilboia Cliff, that phenomenon hadn't happened because the rank 5 Albino snake spent most of its time sleeping and it prevented any rank 4 snake to live for long.

In Mellow forest instead, the swamp was advancing, which meant that there were strong beasts radiating their aura on the environment.

However, to Noah, that meant only one thing.

'More bodies to collect!'

As far as he was concerned, he would just fly away as soon as a dangerous situation presented itself.

Noah uncovered his torso and two pairs of wings came out of his back.

He shot in the air and flew over the muddy waters of the swamp.

Soon enough, he found the first lizards calmly swimming in the quagmire below him.

'Rank 1 and rank 2, they have no value to me.'

There were tens of lizards in his field of view, Noah thought for a bit before wielding one of his sabers.

He launched two fuming wind slashes toward the crowded areas which collided with the terrain and dispersed toxic smoke.

Two black clouds twenty meters wide were created in the swamp, devouring every living being that touched the smoke.

Since he became a rank 2 mage, his Demonic form increased in strength, just with a casual attack more than fifty magical beasts were killed.

As for his expenditure of mental energy, it was negligible.

'It's better if I avoid being ganged up by them, I don't think they can do much to me but it's better to be safe when dealing with rank 4 creatures.'

He wanted to avoid being encircled by hundreds of beasts, that's why he killed those weak creatures with no hesitation.

The lizards that survived his attack dispersed and retreated toward a deeper area of the swamp.

Noah continued to fly in that direction, launching attacks as soon as the number of beasts in one area increased.

His advance was slow but that allowed him to preserve most of his strength and be sure that there would be no attacks from his back.

He was basically securing an escape route.

'Finally.'

When he had flown for another kilometer, the first rank 3 lizards appeared.

They were lazily standing over ten or so rank 2 lizards and some of them emitted peculiar cries as they moved over them.

'They are indeed mating.'

Noah thought.

'If even their rank 3 versions are allowed to do that, that means that it's an order from their leaders. They are forcibly increasing the population of the pack to expand the swamp.'

The chain of command was quite strict in magical beasts' packs, for weaker beasts to have their chance to reproduce indicated that the stronger ones in that pack allowed it.

'Only three of them sadly. Better than nothing.'

Noah flew toward them, revealing his presence.

The beasts roared seeing an invader but they had no time to react as the more powerful in their group were stabbed by black claws that drained every drop of their blood.

Noah used the Blood drain spell to deal with the rank 3 beasts in order to preserve their bodies and then flew back into the air to clear the weaker specimens with fuming wind slashes.

In less than ten minutes, that area was emptied of Swamp lizards.