

Chapter 191 - 191. Demons

Vonduhr was a small city situated at the beginning of a mountain path.

It was mostly inhabited by non-cultivators, the people there lived off simple professions like hunting or farming.

However, in the last month, many peculiar people were seen crossing its streets to enter the Three-jugs tavern.

What was also peculiar was that the tavern, which was one of the few recreative businesses in the city, had closed its entrance to the normal citizen.

The common people of that world knew that when something unexpected or strange happened, it was likely related to the world of cultivation.

Therefore, they began to avoid the tavern and continue with their own business, if those peculiar people were really cultivators, they would rather stay away from them.

Noah arrived in Vonduhr exactly one month after he had received the "Breath" blessing.

He was wearing tight black clothes as usual but his head was covered with a large hood and half of his face was hidden behind a tight scarf.

Only his cold eyes were uncovered and they carefully examined the streets of the city.

'Should be that way.'

Noah moved toward a small building with a banner featuring three jugs.

He had trained for the whole month, steadily improving his strength and making the best use of his new cultivation resource.

Sadly, he didn't manage to have any breakthrough of the sort, he simply had not enough time for that.

'I wonder what type of cultivators did the Royal family gathered.'

Noah arrived in front of the tavern and knocked three times before opening his mouth to speak through the scarf.

"The golden eagle eats the red mouse."

The door released a metallic sound after those words were spoken and Noah pushed it to enter the building.

He was immediately assaulted by a tense atmosphere as twenty or so cultivators turned to look at him.

They were mostly dressed like him, with their faces covered and wary gazes, yet there were a few exceptions.

"My, my, another valiant warrior. Would you like a cup of wine?"

A female voice sounded as soon as the door closed.

Noah turned to see a figure walking toward him holding a jug that exuded an intoxicating smell.

The figure belonged clearly to a female cultivator and that wasn't only obvious from her voice.

She was almost naked, with only a few strands of clothes wrapped around her bosom and buttocks.

Her face was almost completely covered by yellow bandages, revealing only her shiny green eyes.

Her sensual forms coupled with her gaze would test the self-restraint of any man.

Noah felt that the odor coming from the jug was attempting to affect his mental sphere so he immediately reacted.

A saber appeared in his hand and he swung it toward the wine.

The woman dodged the attack but a few drops of the liquid contained in the jug fell on the ground and began to consume the wood of the floor.

In a few seconds, a small fuming hole was created in the tavern.

"..."

An awkward silence was created in the room as all the cultivators stared at the hole.

"Oh my! I must have switched the liquid, I'm sorry! Take this refreshing beverage as a sign of excuse."

The woman took out another cup and tried to hand it to Noah.

"Jean, stop it. We all know of your title 'Enchanting poison', do you really think that the Royals would recruit someone that stupid to fall for your traps?"

A fat man spoke to her from the back of the room.

"Shut up, fatty! Let me have some fun. Those fucking Elbas have kept me in a cage till now!"

The man snorted at her rebuke.

"Didn't you expect that much after you killed almost everyone in your mansion?"

"Hmph! They were just blind idiots, they didn't recognize my talent so they had to die."

Jean said, sitting in a corner of the room with her legs spread wide, revealing the covered parts of her lower body.

The gazes of the male cultivators turned to stare at her with eager eyes and many gulps could be heard in the room.

'Why must I always be surrounded by idiots?'

Noah internally shook his head and turned to sit near a wall of the tavern.

"Hey, new one, what's your story?"

The fat cultivator asked Noah.

"I don't have a story."

Noah casually answered and closed his eyes, he had understood by then that the people in there were just like him: criminals.

"But you must have one, I'd even bet an interesting one for you to be here. I'm fatty Joe, I did some stuff on the western side of the country and now I'm a dog of the Royal dynasty."

Jean snorted and looked at Noah.

"Don't listen to him, he is a fatty addicted to human flesh. I advise you to never turn your back on him if you don't want to be bitten."

"Come on, don't be that mean, my cultivation technique works like that. I believe that everyone in this room has done its fair share of crimes to cultivate in this world ruled by nobles."

"He is right, Jean. We are the demons that the Royals use when they don't want to get their hands dirty."

Another man spoke, joining the conversation.

Jean snorted and spoke in an angry voice.

"Those fucking nobles think that they can set rules that only benefit them and label as a 'Demon' everyone that manages to break them. I could have been the genius of my generation in the alchemy field, instead I was relegated to be the maidservant of spoiled brats for half my life. No wonder the Elbas family ruled for such a long time, they don't care much about your origins and just accept everyone that has talent."

"Haha, that's true. But it's also true that they only use us as disposable slaves."

"Well, we don't have much choice. If we want to continue to cultivate, we need their support."

Many other people joined the conversation and Noah listened attentively to their words.

In the end, realization dawned upon him.

'They are just like me, talented people that had to break the rules to embark on the cultivation journey. I guess it's true that the Royal family has gathered enough dangerous individuals through their rule, I'm just the last one to join their hidden forces.'

Chapter 192 - 192. Representative

Heaven and Earth were fair, they gave the ability to cultivate to every living being.

Yet, the world was ruled by humans who monopolized the means to embark on the cultivation journey.

Those that had accumulated more techniques and spells produced stronger cultivators over the years which allowed them to gather even more resources.

Those cultivators were the nobles of the Utra country.

However, for each noble, there would be hundreds of common people.

A few of them would inevitably have wild ambitions and wouldn't be restrained by the rules of the world.

As soon as they had the chance, they would strive for power, uncaring of the danger that they would have to face.

Humans were ambitious and greedy, they couldn't just sit back watching the minority of them strive for power.

If the rules didn't allow the commoners to cultivate, they would just break them.

Nevertheless, only a small part of those that rebelled managed to survive.

Also, once they survived, they had to face even more restrictions due to the higher powers in the nation.

Mortals could not obtain true freedom in a land populated by gods, that's why they would become monsters.

The Royals called them demons, individuals willing to do anything to pursue strength, and did their best to put a leash on them.

Their determination made them the perfect disposable soldiers to use in their sensible issues.

More cultivators entered the tavern and some of them joined the conversation that was being held.

In their past, they all had a low status.

There were guards, maidservants, cooks, concubines, and even bastards, each one of them unwilling to accept their status as commoners and be ruled by people that were simply born lucky.

From the conversation, Noah could understand some of their backgrounds.

'Jean was a maidservant appointed to clean the inventory of her family. She learnt how to read by herself and discovered her talent in alchemy, secretly cultivating in her free time. Yet, she was discovered and was about to be punished by being appointed as a whore for the guards of her family. She then created a poison that killed almost everyone in her mansion, scorching her face in the process, and escaping.'

'Joe was the son of the cook in his mansion. He luckily came across a forgotten cultivation technique that allowed him to cultivate by ingesting

objects filled with "Breath". When his father discovered that he was stealing the best nutrients from the kitchen, he wanted to report it to the nobles of his house but Joe killed him and escaped. After that, he ate magical beasts and weak cultivators that he found on his way.'

Those were the stories of the most talkative of the group.

They had to wait for the representative from the Royal family to arrive before they could move, the sheets that Noah received simply ordered him to wait in the tavern.

"Hey, why don't you show me that face of yours? If I like you, we might have some fun."

Jean neared Noah, stretching her arm toward his scarf.

Noah grabbed her hand and stared at her with his usual cold eyes.

"Oh my, I like strong men."

"I'm not a man."

"..."

Noah's answer rendered Jean speechless and made some of the other in the room explode in a sonorous laugh.

"Leave it be Jean, I can appreciate you if you want."

"You found a tough one Enchanting poison, haha!"

"Hmph!"

Jean pulled back her hand and returned to her corner, staring fixedly at Noah.

Her green eyes emitted some kind of alluring feeling, as if they forced those around her to look at them.

'What is wrong with her, we are about to engage in a fierce battle and she wants to hook up with a hooded person. But, most importantly, why me?'

Noah sighed internally at the events in the tavern and could not help but wait with eagerness for the envoy to arrive.

As if answering his desire, a covered figure stood up and removed his clothes.

A golden armor was shown to the presents and silence invaded the room.

'How cunning, he was here all along.'

"The thirty of us are all the cultivators recruited for this mission. Listen to me, I was just informed about the strength of our enemy."

Everyone's attention was picked and they observed silently as the man covered again his armor and sat back on the floor.

"They have around sixty soldiers, about half of them are rank 1 cultivators while the others are rank 2."

Complains began to escape the mouths of the present warriors, their manpower was clearly inferior to their enemies.

"Calm down and let me finish! We have the territorial advantage and, with Miss Jean here, their rank 1 soldiers are just meat shields."

The representative turned toward Jean and pointed at her.

She stood up and made a bow before taking out a large barrel that exuded a dangerous aura.

"This is a similar version of the venom that I used back in my mansion. It doesn't have its same power since I didn't have access to precious materials but it can kill rank 1 cultivators in an instant. As for rank 2 ones, they would be at least injured."

The people in the room instinctively took a step back after hearing her words.

'If what she said is true, then there won't be any problem in dealing with the difference in numbers. Only one problem remains.'

"What about cultivators in the heroic ranks?"

Noah asked.

He wasn't afraid of other rank 2 cultivators but he would rather restrain himself from showing all his strength in case a powerful cultivator appeared.

'I don't believe that the Royal family would completely rely on us for this mission, they must have other soldiers lying in wait in case we fail.'

"My body is in the heroic ranks, does that suffice as an answer?"

The representative replied to him in a cold voice, it was clear that he felt above the others in the room.

Noah shrugged his shoulders and supported himself on the wall behind him.

If the envoy was to take care of the real dangers in the mission, then he could simply use his martial art and preserve his strength in case something unexpected happened.

Chapter 193 - 193. Face

After explaining the final arrangements, the representative from the Royal family ordered everyone to move.

Thirty hooded figures exited the tavern together and ran toward the mountain path, outside of Vonduhr.

Meanwhile, right outside the city, on the opposite side from where the group from the Royal family went.

Sixty men wearing the emblem of the Muwlos family marched at a steady pace inside the town.

Samuel was in the center of the group, he was wearing an anxious expression and his eyes darted every time he heard a loud sound.

"Young master, please calm down. The Royals would never attack inside the borders of a city. The danger will come on the mountain path."

Abel was right at his side, whispering with a soft voice to his ear.

The soldiers around them were simple guards, unaware of the political struggles that the Muwlos family was creating.

If they knew that they were against the schemes of the Royal dynasty, their determination might crumble and they might even refuse to continue in their mission.

"I know but I can't help it. It's the first time that I'm in such a dangerous situation."

Samuel whispered.

As the heir of a large-size noble family, he had never faced a deadly danger.

Jumping from his lofty position to being an enemy of the overlords of the nation was a heavy blow on his mind.

"Don't worry. With me here, there are few things that can hurt you."

However, Samuel wasn't satisfied with that same answer when the danger was about to crash on them.

"What makes you so sure that they won't send someone on your same level or stronger?"

Abel heard Samuel's complaint and organized his thoughts to give him his best answer.

Yet, when he opened his mouth to speak, what came out was a question.

"Why do you think the Royals didn't stop you from buying those techniques?"

Samuel thought for a bit before answering.

"Because I followed the rules."

"Exactly. To create the current peaceful situation between the nobles and the Royals, the Elbas family had to always stick to their own rules. You must understand that if all the noble families were to fight together against the Royals, they would ultimately win."

"What are you implying?"

"I'm saying that the moment they break their own rules, the other noble families will feel authorized to act. Two thousand years ago there was no one that could match the Elbas family but now our nation is flourishing and every noble family has increased their power by a lot. They indeed have many large-size families as allies but the situation will change if they personally interfere with matters that happened according to their rules. Tell me, would you trust an ally that doesn't respect his own agreements?"

"Of course not!"

Samuel's answer was immediate, he was beginning to understand Abel's reasoning.

"This is exactly what is happening. If they were to kill you directly, their allies will lose their trust toward the Royals and shift their support to the Cause. That's why they will probably use cultivators unrelated to them to make it look like an accident. I bet they have emptied their cells for this mission."

Abel concluded, releasing a small laugh to relax his young master.

"So, you are sure that you will be enough?"

"Obviously, my body is specialized in protracted fights. Even if someone on my level appeared, I will just hold him back to give you enough time to

escape. Also, these soldiers are the best that the family could give you, each of them has a rank 3 martial art!"

Samuel nodded and finally showed a smile.

For simple guards of a noble family, having a rank 3 martial art meant that they had performed many valuable services, which also meant that they weren't inexperienced.

"Then we should hurry up. Let's refill our stashes of food in the city and move toward the Muwlos domain."

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Noah and the others in his group reached for the mountain path and waited for further instructions.

The representative stood with his eyes closed inspecting a rune in his hand.

That rune was the inscribed item through which the spies of the Royal family sent information to him.

The other hooded figures were around him, waiting in silence.

After a few minutes, he opened his eyes and pointed toward an area.

"They will cross that area. Hurry, prepare the trap with Jean's poison."

The cultivators hastily dug the terrain where the representative indicated and Jean carefully lowered her barrel inside it.

Then, the hole was covered and they went on their respective positions in hidden parts of the mountain over that point.

A group of ten cultivators stood in a newly created cave, hidden with roots and branches.

Noah was among them, they had to attack as soon as the effects of the poison vanished, they were basically the vanguard of the mission.

"Do you want to make a quick warm-up?"

Jean's almost-naked figure was behind him, speaking with a tempting voice.

Noah still didn't know how she could exude such a peculiar aura.

"Why do you bother me? There are others that would gladly take my place."

He answered her, keeping his focus on the road below.

She tried to lean on him but was stopped by the appearance of a saber pointing at her chest, Noah had wielded it as soon as she became too close.

"See, that's why."

She said, pointing at the blade.

"Because you are the only one that refuses me."

"I'm just focused on the mission."

Jean chuckled and shook her head.

"I believe that you are saying the truth but I also believe that you simply don't care about my body."

Noah turned and looked at her figure from head to toe.

"You have a nice body, so what? Should I drool over you?"

If that was a normal situation, he would just ignore her.

However, since it was during a mission where he wasn't clear about the strength of the enemies, he would prefer to end the conversation as soon as he could.

"No, I just thought that since you don't care about my body, you might not mind my face."

Chapter 194 - 194. Poison

Noah was quite surprised.

He wasn't sure if Jean was being serious or if she was just playing with him but he understood that there was a deeper meaning to her words.

'Does she want acceptance?'

He could understand that need but he really wasn't the right person where to look for it.

Luckily for him, some movements in the mountain path claimed the attention of the cultivators in the cave.

Sixty or so soldiers marched at a slow pace on the road, warily inspecting the area around them.

They knew that if an ambush was to happen, it would have been in that area.

The atmosphere inside the cave became tense as the cultivators focused on the mission, they had to wait for the trap to set off before they could assault the soldiers.

'Here is Samuel.'

Noah spotted the noble in the middle of the group.

'The scrolls must be with him, I don't believe that his family would give them to a simple guard. Though, that man doesn't seem simple.'

His focus shifted on the middle-aged man that was next to him.

He exuded a calm aura, he was definitely an experienced warrior.

'I feel that he is strong but not extremely so, there is something off about him.'

Noah couldn't know it but that middle-aged man was Abel, the wind mage that had chased him back in Evergreen forest.

"You are about to witness a good show."

Jean whispered next to him, it was clear from the light in her eyes that she was excited.

The group from the Muwlos family moved along the road, they felt that something was off but they could not find out why.

At some point, an arrow made of fire shot in their direction from the side of the mountain.

Its power was low but its speed was great, the soldier only managed to react at the last moment and dodged it.

However, right when the arrow hit the ground, an explosion occurred.

The fire had ignited the barrel that was hidden in the previously dug hole and created a reaction with the poison inside it.

Abel was the first to understand that the spell had never aimed at them but at the terrain!

He hastily grabbed Samuel and ran away from the center of the explosion while using his mental energy to inspect the events unfolding behind him.

The explosion was not strong, it only managed to push back the soldiers without hurting them, yet the poison burned quickly and released a green cloud.

The cloud expanded, covering the soldiers in the area and suffused cries could be immediately heard from inside it.

Abel watched it with wide eyes and decided to act before all his men were enveloped by the poison.

As he focused, wind began to blow from behind him.

From inside the cave, Noah stared at the spell and could not help but feel some familiarity with it.

'Don't tell me that he is actually here.'

He became a bit excited.

If it wasn't for the fact that he had been underestimated back in Evergreen forest, that wind mage would have caught up with him, preventing him from participating in the entrance test of the academy.

However, he had managed to escape and entered the academy, raising his battle prowess by a lot.

All his centers of power had improved and his assortment of spells and techniques had increased by a lot.

'You chased me back then to improve Samuel's chances in the entrance test and now I'm ambushing you to kill him. Life can reserve surprises at times.'

His grievances with the Muwlos family were finally about to be solved.

Abel's spell dispersed the toxic cloud, revealing the poor state of the soldiers that had been hit by it.

They were covered in green bruises with the weaker of them laying on the ground covered in their own blood.

The bruises pulsated, they seemed to synchronize with the heartbeat of the cultivators and began to enlarge as more blood flowed through them.

As seconds passed, the bruises became large pulsating pimples before they reached their limit and exploded.

Cries sounded again as most of the soldiers fell on the ground, incapable of dealing with the huge loss of blood.

Also, the wounds created in that way seemed to stop the empowered healing abilities of their bodies, leaving the soldiers that managed to survive the initial blood loss to bleed continuously.

'That was really effective.'

Noah praised in his mind.

Only the weaker soldiers died, the stronger ones managed to expel the toxins in their bodies by circulating the "Breath" of their dantian on the bruises.

Yet, their complexion paled, it seemed that a vast amount of "Breath" was needed for that process.

"Haha! That was amazing. The "Breath" of rank 1 cultivators can't deal with my poison at all! However, the effects on rank 2 ones are quite disappointing."

Jean judged, carefully analyzing the effects of her poison.

"If I only had more rank 4 materials, I could have dealt with them too."

She shook her head, sighing loudly.

"Is it safe to go down there now?"

Noah asked her.

"Well, you should avoid those corpses if you can but it is safe now."

He then turned toward the others hiding with him.

"Should we go?"

The leader of the group was the representative of the Royal family who was in another area.

He would lead the second wave of attacks in order to catch the soldiers of the Muwlos family by surprise.

"You go first."

Someone in his group answered him.

The others nodded in approval and even Jean seemed to like that idea.

No one would like to be the first to engage their targets as most of the attacks would be focused on him.

'Can't say I blame them.'

Noah understood that he had to take the initiative or the mission would be endangered.

He wielded his sabers and directly launched twenty wind slashes on the soldiers below him.

His attacks tore through the branches used to cover the cave, exposing their position to the group from the Muwlos family, and crashed on them in a few seconds.

Noah aimed for the soldiers that had already been wounded by Jean's poison so to better exploit the surprise effect.

Two of them were caught off guard and had their heads severed but the others managed to either block or dodge the slashes.

"Attack!"

He purposely yelled to gather the attention on him.

He wouldn't be so stupid to charge alone on them, waiting for his group to arrive, so he just moved the focus of the soldiers on his position.

Chapter 195 - 195. Fight

What Noah did wasn't for the benefit of the mission.

He had revealed their position, killing only two injured soldiers, the surprise effect could be considered wasted.

Yet, he would rather do that than charge alone on the enemies, hoping for the group behind him to follow.

'If they think like me, they will use me to identify their abilities and then charge. I won't risk my life for them.'

He had already obtained the reward for the mission, he couldn't care less if it was to fail because he was unwilling to risk his life.

'Also, if the Royals really cared about this matter, they would have acted personally.'

Noah didn't believe that his group was the only force deployed for that task.

He knew that the Royals had spies set up after all so there was a high chance that there could be hidden troops too.

The soldiers from the Muwlos family reacted quickly and set up a battle formation around Samuel with their bodies turned toward the now exposed cave.

They wouldn't attack since their task was to protect the heir of their family so they prepared themselves for the incoming charge of the assailants.

Since they had been exposed, the other cultivators in Noah's group showed themselves to the crowd below them.

There were a few hundred meters of distance between them as ten hooded figures stared at the more than forty soldiers on guard.

Jean's poison had managed to kill most of the weaker soldiers and injure some of the stronger ones but they still had the advantage in numbers.

"Let's have fun!"

Jean happily shouted and threw herself at them, launching bottles containing poisonous substances in the group below her.

The others followed behind her and stared at the bottles crashing on the soldiers.

Those poisons were less powerful than the one she had previously used but they still managed to do some damage.

Some soldiers directly threw up when they came in contact with those substances, others lost their balance, a few more had cold sweat running down their forehead as they struggled to restrict the harmful effects on them.

'She sure is talented in attacking crowded areas.'

Noah praised in his mind.

He didn't let that chance go and joined Jean in her long-distance attacks, swinging his sabers to launch wind slashes.

However, the soldiers were ready by then, Noah's attacks had no success.

'Most of us will die.'

Noah thought.

Even if the cultivators recruited by the Royal family were all strong individuals, they were fewer of them.

'Maybe, the Royals also want to use this mission to get rid of most of us.'

Noah couldn't help but think of that possibility.

The soldiers didn't stay quietly to endure the attacks of the aggressors.

Those of them that had spells or long-range techniques began to attack the descending group.

Fireballs, water bullets, wind slashes, arrows, and more ran through the air and crashed on Noah's group.

Noah dodged the attacks and moved toward the area where the trap was set off.

Now that the real battle had begun, he chose to separate from the group to act undisturbed among the soldiers.

The others used their personal methods to deal with the incoming spells, using spells or protective items to endure the first wave of attacks.

The Shadow steps spell was activated continuously, increasing Noah's speed and allowing him to dodge at ease.

An arrow made of water crashed next to him, leaving a deep hole on the terrain.

A spear moved at high speed through the air, aiming for his waist, Noah casually jumped, surpassing it.

While he was still in the air, another water arrow flew and pointed at his chest, Noah kicked the air to propel himself back on the terrain and dodge the attack.

Even without using his wings, he was quite elusive!

The others in his group were doing their best to endure the attacks too and some of them were inevitably injured, yet they still hadn't suffered any real loss.

When the distance between the two groups was shortened to fifty meters, the representative of the Royal family came out of the other hiding spot and assaulted the rear side of the soldiers, followed by the remaining twenty cultivators hired by the Royals.

The soldiers were caught by surprise and immediately suffered casualties as the two groups attacked them from two different sides.

Noah swung his sabers madly, engaging in short battles with the already injured soldiers.

He had still to test his improvements in an actual battle.

Even though he was holding himself back, the execution of his martial art was flawless and he managed to attack and retreat wisely in order to avoid being encircled.

His constant sparring sessions with June and the instruction in battle-formation of the academy made it possible for him to always be in a safe position while inflicting a fair amount of damage.

A soldier raised his sword to hit him but Noah blocked his blow and used his other weapon to wound his waist.

A spear aimed for his shoulder but he used the Shadow step spell to jump over the soldier in front of him and reposition himself on the battlefield.

He continued to move freely on the perimeter of the soldier's group, doing his best to wound or kill as many enemies as he could, using only his basic martial art and his rank 0 spell to fight.

Meanwhile, at the center of the group, a harsh battle was about to begin.

The representative of the Royal family charged undisputed toward the center of the enemy troops.

His rank 4 body was unmatched in that environment and he swung his greatsword freely, making a way toward the heir of the Muwlos family.

Samuel panicked a bit seeing the hooded cultivator getting close but Abel promptly moved in front of him.

"I will handle him, don't worry young master."

He spoke, fixing his gaze on the incoming warrior.

The representative didn't waste time, he swung vertically his big sword toward Abel.

However, what happened next surprised him.

Abel didn't dodge the attack and let the blade cut his body.

At the same time, he took out a small knife and attacked the arm that wielded the greatsword.

Chapter 196 - 196. Undead

The greatsword cut Abel's torso diagonally, leaving a deep wound on his body, but he also managed to hit his attacker, stabbing his arm right above the wrist.

The two cultivators separated briefly and stared at each other in the middle of the battlefield.

The representative of the Royal family looked at the bloody wound on Abel's chest.

Blood flowed from it but, in a few seconds, signs of healing manifested.

In about a minute, that large cut that almost divided Abel's body in two disappeared and only a faint white mark remained.

"Impressive."

The representative judged.

The wound that he had suffered was deep but small, even if it was still bleeding it wouldn't hinder his battle capabilities.

"It seems that you have a rank 4 body too, the Royals didn't spare resources to kill a rank 1 cultivator."

Abel said, pointing his knife at him.

That weapon was an inscribed item, with its sharp edges shining in a pale light.

Also, an invisible air current enveloped it, it seemed that Abel was boosting its power with a rank 0 spell of some sort.

The representative's eyes sharpened hearing his remark and opened his mouth to speak from behind the clothes that covered his face.

"That is a rank 4 body? But its power seems only to reach the peak of the third rank."

Abel nodded and showed a smug smile.

"You are indeed right. My body-nourishment method sacrifices the physical empowerment to obtain the best regenerative abilities among rank 4 bodies. Sadly, it can only give me as much, my other qualities are similar to a rank 3 body."

"So, it's quite weak."

The representative spoke.

He didn't mind spending time speaking with him.

The others in his group were generally stronger than the soldiers of a noble family and the surprise attack had tilted the scales in their favor.

They were gradually gaining the advantage, suffering fewer losses than their enemies and pushing the battle toward the center of the group.

Instead of engaging in a dangerous battle immediately, he would rather wait for his allies to arrive.

"Yes, it's weak but that's the best that my family could give me. I'm just a soldier after all. However, it doesn't seem that yours is that strong either, I can't see the so-called advantage in joining the Elbas family from you."

Abel could not move either, his priority was to protect the noble heir right behind him so he had to stay still and believe in his men.

Even though guards of noble families were generally suppressed and could only obtain second-rate techniques, the men appointed for that escort mission were among the best cultivators in the mansion of the Muwlos family.

They all had a rank 3 martial art and some spells, they had lost the initiative due to the initial ambush but they were slowly managing to recover their positions.

The biggest advantage that they had was their ability to fight as a group while their assailants were lone fighters.

Even if they continued to be pushed back, some traces of a counterattack began to appear on the battlefield.

In conclusion, the two groups had actually a similar strength.

The representative believed that his allies could maintain the advantage initially created while Abel trusted that his men would recover their positions and win through their cooperation.

The leaders of the two groups knew that the battle would be decided once one of them defeated the other so they took their time to inspect their opponent.

Abel was right in his judgment.

The representative of the Royal family only had a common body-nourishing method.

It brought his body in the fourth rank but it gave him no special qualities whatsoever.

It didn't have a transformation like Kevin's one nor was it specialized in defense like Kurt's one, it was a simple empowerment of its basic capabilities.

Humans already had a far weaker body compared to magical beasts, when it was coupled with an average nourishing method with no special abilities, the result was quite disappointing.

It couldn't be helped though, they had three centers of power after all and not everyone could have access to stronger techniques.

Also, choosing to wait for a more powerful nourishing method would halt their improvements in the other fields.

Reaching the third rank of the dantian was impossible if you only had a rank 3 body, that's why most common soldiers chose to train in weaker but accessible techniques.

A cultivator in the heroic ranks was still a valuable resource, even large-size families didn't have too many of them.

Especially considering those without a noble lineage, there weren't many of them that could be granted access to powerful techniques.

Only the Royal family was laxer in their control over precious techniques since they had the power to handle unexpected situations.

The wound on the arm of the representative finally stopped bleeding so he decided to resume in his assault.

His greatsword was swung many times, managing to wound Abel every time.

However, the leader of the group from the Muwlos family only dodged the attacks that aimed for his vital points and counterattacked promptly every time the greatsword was busy cutting his flesh.

It was a reckless fighting style, possible only thanks to the insane regenerative abilities of his body.

After more than ten exchanges, Abel's body was covered in bloody cuts while the representative had only a few stab wounds on his arms.

It became clear to the latter that Abel was purposely relying on the ability of his body to slowly wear out his opponent.

Nevertheless, there wasn't much that the representative could do.

No matter how many times he hit him, his body would keep on regenerating and the knife would find his way on his flesh.

What was worse was that the regeneration didn't seem to slow down even after all those wounds, the representative felt that he was fighting some kind of undead creature.

'However, he seems wary of his vital organs.'

Those were his thoughts when he resumed in his assault.

The greatsword slashed the soldier's body many times obtaining no apparent results while the inscribed knife continuously found breaches in the representative's guard and stabbed his arms.

At some point though, the representative released the grip of one of his hands from the weapon and grabbed Abel's arm as soon as the knife stabbed him.

He was using the same tactic of his opponent!

Being momentarily immobilized, Abel could not dodge the incoming attack and the greatsword pierced his chest, dividing his heart in two.

Chapter 197 - 197. Ten minutes

The group from the Muwlos family immediately lost its morale seeing that scene.

Their leader had been stabbed in the chest by the greatsword of the enemy.

They knew that they would be the next to face that weapon.

Samuel was right next to Abel, as soon as the greatsword pierced him a torrent of blood fell on his face, making him panic.

The cultivators hired by the Royal family didn't waste that precious moment of confusion and delivered precise attacks on the momentarily stunned soldiers, either killing or injuring them as they moved toward Samuel.

Even the representative of the Royal family relaxed and took out his weapon from Abel's chest, turning his gaze to the noble heir in front of him.

However, right when the greatsword left his chest and his body was about to fall on the ground, Abel's hand darted and drove the knife that it was wielding directly in the representative's throat!

Abel was alive!

Everyone on the battlefield stopped moving to stare at the scene at the center of it.

Abel's figure was covered in blood and wounds, there was no strength left in his legs as they were laid casually on the terrain.

Yet, the grip on his knife was strong, it kept him straight, hanging from the pierced throat of the representative.

The representative, on the other hand, had his eyes wide open in surprise.

He looked first at the knife and then at the body hanging from it, realizing his mistake.

No matter how weak a nourishing method was, a rank 4 body was still in a completely different realm of existence from its rank 3 version.

His own body had a strength that vastly surpassed the limits of the cultivators in the human ranks.

Abel had the strength of a rank 3 body while he was in the fourth rank, which meant that his regenerative abilities had to be inhumane!

Even with his heart pierced, he was still able to move and to deliver a deadly blow to his opponent!

The light in the representative's eyes diminished as blood flowed endlessly from his throat.

The wound was too deep and the weight applied on it only worsened its condition.

All he could do was internally praise his opponent's determination as life abandoned his body.

In a few seconds, his body fell over Abel's one, the representative from the Royal family was dead!

The silence in the battlefield continued, everyone was waiting to see if there was some kind of reaction from the bodies of the two leaders.

Samuel reacted and moved away the representative's corpse from Abel.

The stares of the cultivators gathered on the body covered in blood.

"Cough, cough!"

Abel coughed, spitting mouthfuls of blood from his mouth.

Inside the silent battlefield, his whispered words could be clearly heard.

"Give me two incenses of time and I'll stand up."

Noah was at some distance away when he heard those words and he cursed internally.

"Protect Lord Abel!"

One of the soldiers shouted and the others followed his orders.

They encircled Samuel and Abel, forming a defensive perimeter around them.

There were only twenty soldiers remaining and some of them were injured while the assaulters' number amounted to twenty-five.

Between the surprise attack and the slaughter unleashed when Abel's chest was pierced, many of them had died, further lowering their numbers.

However, their leader was still alive!

If they managed to hold their ground till he could fight again then the battle would be in their hands!

Even Samuel understood that point and began to use his personal stash of potions to accelerate Abel's recovery, they were all betting their lives on the leader of the expedition.

The cultivators hired by the Royal family knew that if they wanted to win that battle, they had to act quickly.

Every one of them had their personal reasons to follow through that mission, yet some hesitation still appeared in their eyes.

If they ran away now, they were sure that they could escape.

However, they would then face the consequences of disobeying the orders of the Royal family.

That hesitation was vanquished by Jean directly throwing another poisonous bottle in the enemy group.

When an area was crowded, her methods were among the best in Noah's group.

Nevertheless, the soldiers were ready by then to that attack pattern and three of them created shields made of water to fend off the poison.

Also, a spear made of wind shot from their group toward her.

The speed of the spell was too fast and directly pierced the woman's waist, making her fall on her knees.

'Fuck!'

Noah cursed and decided to act.

He didn't really care about whether the mission succeeded or not but he wasn't sure how his relationship with the Royal family would evolve once they learnt that he held himself back.

What if they decided to remove his freedom like they had done with Jean?

What if they decided that his character was too wild to be controlled?

Also, he really didn't want the noble families to create an organization similar to the academy.

He knew that it would take a long time for him to be strong enough to storm Balvan mansion and allowing the nobles to raise their power could only hinder his vengeance.

In the end, there was also the fact that he had some grudges against the Muwlos family.

The First form of the Ashura was performed.

More than fifteen sabers materialized in the air around him and attacked the formation of the soldiers.

He revealed his rank 4 martial art!

The cultivators in his group were surprised by his sudden increase of power but, when they realized that he was single-handedly forcing four soldiers back, they joined him in his charge toward the center of the formation.

Time was crucial!

They had about ten minutes to reach Samuel and finish off Abel so they resorted to their most powerful methods to break the line of defense of their enemies.

However, even the soldiers were doing their best and used their teamwork at their advantage, synchronizing spells and techniques to take care of the most troublesome individuals.

Only Noah remained untouched.

His martial art was suited for fighting large numbers of enemies and since both his sea of consciousness and dantian reached the second rank, the power of the First form had increased greatly.

The power behind every slash was incredible and even his control of the area around him improved, even though he didn't manage to kill any soldier they were continuously pushed back!

Chapter 198 - 198. Guess

Even though each cultivator recruited by the Royal family was singularly stronger than each soldier, they were unable to break the blockage.

The soldiers were trained and had good teamwork while their opponents were disorganized.

Each of their attacks was strong but always failed to inflict a severe injury on the soldiers.

Their number started to diminish.

The soldiers would alternate between a steady defense with water shields and wind walls to water bullets, fireballs, and spears made of air.

Only Noah was somewhat able to keep pressuring the blockage.

They had initially ganged up on him four against one but, as cultivators from the Royal family died, they could shift more of their attention on him.

He was the only one using a rank 4 martial art after all, he was definitely the most dangerous of their enemies.

Due to his relentless offensive, Noah prevented them from preparing spells, yet his expression became serious after each exchange.

The clock was ticking, minutes passed as if they were seconds and Samuel's potions accelerated the rate of recovery of Abel's body.

The anxiety of the cultivators sent by the Royal family was increasing.

Noah decided to attack with more fury.

The number of ethereal sabers around him increased, from fifteen they became twenty.

The soldiers had their focus to their peak, more enemies attacked Noah to block his unceasingly assault.

However, once they moved their attention to Noah, the other cultivators in his group faced less resistance and began to inflict serious wounds on the soldiers.

Little by little, the soldiers were being pushed back.

Casualties happened from time to time.

A soldier successfully blocked the thrust from a hooded figure and his companion behind him stabbed his sword in the figure's chest.

Yet, Joe arrived on their side and strongly bit the soldier's throat, creating a big hole in his neck.

That action though left him open and a soldier managed to shoot a fireball at him, turning his entire figure into ashes.

As more deaths happened, the blockage was broken, creating small battles all around Abel's body.

'It's taking too much!'

Noah thought.

Abel's body was now visible and his complexion had greatly recovered due to Samuel's potions, he knew that it wouldn't take much for him to stand up.

'Should I use the Demonic form?'

Noah was reluctant in using it not only because it would expose his element.

The black smoke was uncontrollable, it didn't distinguish enemies from allies, he would avoid using it in that situation if possible.

The number of soldiers in front of him was reduced to three, the others went to take care of the other enemies.

Those three were specialized in defense, they used all their techniques and spells to slow Noah's momentum.

Yet, wounds continuously appeared on their bodies, they couldn't hold for much longer.

Then, a yell ran through the battlefield.

Noah momentarily moved his attention to where the sound came from and his expression became dark.

Of the cultivators in his group, he was the only one remaining.

A heavily wounded soldier stood proudly over the corpse of a hooded figure.

After he made a sign of victory toward the remaining three soldiers, he collapsed on the ground, devoid of any strength.

'Did they all die?'

Noah had focused completely on the area in front of him, he couldn't pay attention to the whole battlefield when he executed the First form of his martial art.

"It seems that you bandits had really underestimated the power of the Muwlos family."

One of the remaining soldiers said proudly.

They didn't know that their enemies had been sent by the rulers of the nation so he supposed that they were a simple bandit group.

'So, my guess was right.'

Noah ignored him and inspected the area with his mental energy.

He couldn't find anything strange or peculiar which made him sigh helplessly.

'I don't believe that the Royals have misjudged the strength of these soldiers which means that they wanted for many of us to die. Maybe they didn't predict the death of their representative, that's why we are in this situation.'

"Vance, don't think that you can run away. You will pay for your sins against my family."

Samuel spoke to him in an angered tone.

They were in the same class in the academy, he had seen his martial art being executed that's why he managed to recognize him.

"Men, seize him."

The soldiers followed the order of their young master and encircled Noah.

Noah continued to ignore them and looked at the sky.

'I bet that they are watching everything in front of a cup of wine.'

"Put down your weapons and-"

The phrase of the soldier was interrupted by a swing from Noah's saber.

The soldier expected some resistance and promptly created a water shield to block the attack.

However, the saber began to release black smoke that consumed the shield in a few instants, allowing the blade to slash on the soldier's neck.

Surprise ran through his eyes as the saber directly severed his head, his spell couldn't match the Demonic form at all!

It couldn't be helped though, the water shield was a common spell of the water element while the Demonic form was a top tier spell of the darkness one, the difference between their strength was enormous.

The remaining two soldiers retreated and deployed their defenses.

A wall made of wind appeared and a defensive martial art was unleashed.

Noah didn't waste time and executed the First form of the Ashura together with the partial Demonic form.

Ten fuming sabers relentlessly crashed on the two soldiers.

Their defenses were already strained by the rank 4 martial art, when a spell of such destructivity was added to those attacks, it became impossible for them to hold on for long.

It took only a few exchanges for the soldiers to suffer a deadly injury and being consumed by the accumulated toxic smoke.

Only Noah, Samuel, and Abel remained on the battlefield.

"W-which aptitude do you have?"

Samuel had his eyes wide open due to Noah's power.

Those soldiers were rank 2 cultivators after all!

He could accept that Noah was able to kill one of them but three at the same time was a great shock!

"Young master, step aside. He is a genius of the darkness element, I never thought that he could develop so fast."

Abel opened his eyes and supported himself to Samuel in order to stand up.

The leader of the soldiers could fight again!

Chapter 199 - 199. Rat

"Did you realize it back then?"

Noah asked Abel, once his element was exposed, he could finally stop pretending.

"I had my doubts. The darkness element has no specific traits and could be easily mistaken for a martial art. However, after seeing it again, I became sure tha-

His phrase was interrupted since Noah began to attack!

Abel's complexion had regained some color and he was able to stand up but that didn't mean that he had completely recovered.

Noah wouldn't let him return to his peak form, his words were just an initial probing, he wanted to be sure that no one in the Muwlos family had any suspects about his aptitude.

After that was confirmed, he immediately attacked.

Ten fuming sabers slashed at Abel, carrying with them the full power of Noah's cultivation level and mental energy.

However, Abel was a rank 2 cultivator in the liquid stage with a rank 4 martial art.

The power of his art couldn't be shown accurately in his fight against the representative of the Royal family because the difference between their bodies was too vast.

Yet, against a body with his same strength, he could use it fully.

His knife pierced the air and clashed with each ethereal saber, his weapon released sharp lights that successfully blocked every attack and a few of them managed to overcome Noah's assault, ultimately ending on his body.

Noah took a few steps back and inspected his arms.

There were three deep cuts on his skin and he could not help but become extremely wary of his opponent.

'His martial art is as powerful as mine. Yet, his cultivation level is higher and even his body is stronger, my only advantage is the power of my spell.'

To counterattack Noah's blows, Abel had to come in contact with the toxic smoke.

The leader of the noble group stared with wide eyes as the black smoke continuously corroded his hands and fought with his regenerative abilities.

After some time, the smoke lost power and the regeneration surpassed the rate of destruction, vanquishing the spell completely.

"Impressive."

Abel praised loudly.

"If you were a rank 3 mage, I would have no chances to suppress such destructiveness. To think that three years ago you were only able to leave scratches on me, the academy surely is a gathering of geniuses."

Noah listened to his words but his mind was focused on other thoughts.

'I can probably match his blows if I enter the complete Demonic form, yet I can't fight for a long time in that state and my expenditure of mental energy would only increase if I use Shadow and Echo with it.'

His thoughts flashed rapidly in his mind as he analyzed the situation.

'I can surely run away but then I will be forced to either completely rely on the Royal family for protection or leave the country. I don't believe that the Muwlos family will keep the information about my aptitude for themselves.'

'Or, I can fight him and see if my strongest spell can match an exhausted cultivator with a rank 4 body.'

Only a few instants had passed since Abel stopped speaking with the two warriors staring at each other for the whole silent moment.

Then, Noah's determination surged and black smoke began to envelop him.

'For how long will I have to hide like a rat?'

Since his escape, Noah had to always be careful of everyone around him.

The Royals wanted to exploit him, his family was searching for him, and each new individual that knew about his aptitude could lead to irreparable consequences.

Noah did his best, focusing only on his training and joining every mission that could increase his power.

Yet, no matter how much he improved, he could never shake away those restrictions that he had since the moment he was reborn in that world.

'I'm tired of running away every time something in the heroic ranks appears. He is wounded and I can make it bleed, which means that I can kill him! Running away would mean that all my hard work can't match a cultivator in such a pitiful state.'

He transformed into his fiendish form.

The demonic form had changed slightly since he became a rank two mage.

There were the faint shapes of horns growing from his head and there seemed to be a tail growing at the bottom of his spine.

The power of the spell was linked to his rank as a mage after all, it was obvious that it would undergo improvements as his sea of consciousness enlarged.

Abel stared with a stern expression at the transformation of his opponent and turned his head to the astonished Samuel behind him.

"Young master, back off, I can't protect you from that."

Samuel gulped and retreated for a few meters.

Twenty fuming slashes shot toward him as he did that but Abel promptly stood in their trajectory and swung his knife to block the attacks.

Abel watched with wary eyes how the black smoke almost completely enveloped him and began to consume his flesh.

'The quantity of this gas increased!'

He judged in his mind, yet his line of thought was interrupted by a black figure jumping at him.

Noah used the First form of the Asura, creating more than ten ethereal sabers that jointly attacked Abel.

His physical qualities were empowered due to his spell, his body was now on even ground with Abel's one.

Abel fought valiantly, answering to each of Noah's attacks with one of his own.

Sometimes, he would let specific attacks wound him in order to exploit an opening in the guard of his opponent.

His weapon darted over the fuming figure, piercing the black armor and continuously wounding the cultivator under it.

Abel's attacks could pierce the Demonic form!

Yet, as the battle continued, more and more smoke accumulated in that area, creating a black cloud all around the two warriors.

Abel was naked, his skin was long since gone and his flesh struggled to reform.

Nevertheless, the assault of Noah's spell was unceasing.

Abel had to fight in that position or Samuel would be exposed while Noah could only gain advantages as that part of the mountain path became his personal area of destruction.

'Just die already!'

Noah watched as Abel's body slowly lost its regenerative proprieties and pressed on in his assault.

Seeing that he could not keep up anymore, Abel decided to do one last reckless attack.

He stopped defending from Noah's blows and focused in one last lunge.

Twelve fuming sabers stabbed his body at the same time and began to corrode his interiors but he held on and released a piercing attack on Noah's chest.

Chapter 200 - 200. Drain

Abel's knife shined with blinding light and released a piercing blow aimed for Noah's chest.

'Shadow! Echo!'

Before that attack could hit him, Noah called for his two blood companions.

Two fuming beasts tore Noah's clothes and stood in the trajectory of the incoming attack.

The knife cut through their bodies almost unhindered, those blood companions came from rank 3 beasts after all, they were not a match for Abel's attack.

However, the smoke that they released managed to slightly deviate the trajectory of the knife, making it land on Noah's stomach.

The knife dug in his body, stopping only after it came out of his back.

Noah found himself with a hole at the center of his torso.

However, pain wasn't enough to stop him.

Even with such a wound, he continued to focus on his opponent.

His sabers were stabbed in Abel's body, continuously pouring black smoke in his body, yet he was still alive!

He was defenseless though since his weapon was stuck in Noah's body.

'Give me a bit of that vitality of yours!'

Noah thought and released the grip on his sabers as he activated the Blood drain spell.

His hands morphed into demonic claws from under the fuming armor which he stabbed right into his enemy's chest.

Warmth invaded his body as Abel's blood was absorbed by the spell.

Abel's uncovered flesh began to lose its rosy color as the blood left those tissues.

The spell redirected the blood toward Noah's injuries, expending it to heal the wounds that he suffered during the battle.

Abel, on the other hand, felt his already faint strength being sucked away.

He tried to take out his knife to get away from that dangerous situation but, as soon as he tried to pull with his arms, his hands detached from his limbs by themselves and vanished in the black cloud.

Not even his body could withstand the joint damage of the Demonic form and the Blood drain, his healing abilities had finally lost to Noah's spells.

Looking at how his body was slowly being consumed, he understood that his end was near.

'In the end, I failed.'

He thought, before raising his head to look at the fiendish figure that had its claws stabbed deep in his chest.

"If I didn't waste most of my energies to recover from the wound that your leader inflicted on me, I would have won."

He said proudly, using his last energies to mock the young man.

"If you hadn't been wounded, I would have already run away."

A low and rough voice answered him.

In the end, Noah watched as Abel's body was completely consumed by the black cloud and his claws could not absorb blood anymore.

Noah stood inside the cloud, panting heavily as his spells dispersed and taking out the knife from his body.

The hole in his stomach was slowly healed by part of the remains of Abel's blood.

It must be said that his blood had incredible healing properties, once it was absorbed by Noah, it filled his body with vitality.

It took only a few minutes for every wound to be completely mended while the remaining absorbed blood accumulated below the acupoints on his back.

'It's finally over.'

Noah thought.

His body was back in top condition but he didn't have much mental energy left.

The Demonic form's main weakness was that its consumption of mental energy was too high, it couldn't be used for prolonged battles.

That's why Noah mainly used the partial transformation, it was easier to control and could be sustained for longer times.

However, he had to go all out in that battle, even resorting to the Blood drain spell to increase the constant damage that he could inflict to Abel in order to overcome his regenerative abilities.

In the minutes that he used to heal his body, the black cloud slowly dispersed, showing the area of death under it.

Samuel stared at it with an eager expression which turned in a scared one when he recognized Noah's figure.

"No! How is that possible!? Why are you alive?"

Noah had the clothes on his chest completely torn, hanging on his body from their connection with the hood on his head.

His pale and toned body was shown to Samuel.

It had a large red stain on his waist created by the blood that came out due to Abel's last attack, while a faint scar was visible on the center of his torso.

Except for that, there was no apparent injury on him which increased Samuel's astonishment.

Noah inspected his surroundings to search for some remains of his previous battle.

His sabers and Abel's knife were on the ground but they were full of cracks, even the inscriptions on them had been broken.

'I need new weapons, these are now useless.'

He put the three weapons away and then picked a space-ring from the ground.

He inspected its interiors just to put it in his clothes when he saw that the scrolls were not there.

Then, he raised his head to look at Samuel at a few meters from him.

With just a thought, two black sabers appeared in his hands.

Those were the weapons that William had given him after his mission with the Ironclad spiders, Noah had kept them because he believed that they could be clues to his identity.

Also, their value was low, selling them or keeping them made no difference in his mind.

"No!"

Samuel shouted as soon as Noah took the first step toward him.

"Stay away."

He shouted again.

The one in front of him had defeated the strongest cultivator in his group, he felt nothing but fear looking at Noah's hooded figure.

"Here, take this! You want the scrolls that I've bought, right? I swear, I knew nothing about the Cause, my father forced me to do the purchase. Please, spare me, the Elbas family will understand."

Samuel pleaded, showing a space-ring to Noah.

Noah arrived in front of him and took out the ring from his hands.

After a quick inspection, he found more than one hundred scrolls and books inside it.

'So many.'

He couldn't help but be surprised, all those items were spells or techniques with the total value of ten million Credits, he couldn't wait to take a look at them.

"Will you spar-"

Samuel began to speak again but Noah directly severed his head with a casual move of his saber.

The heir of the Muwlos family was dead, the mission had succeeded.