

Chapter 21 - 21. Selfless spiders

"What do we do captain?"

Mason came back to reality and watched his surroundings.

The spiders seemed satisfied with their reaps and slowly retreated carrying around 40 corpses on their backs.

Mason's eyes became resolute as he ordered.

"We stop as many as we can. I don't know why they are stockpiling food but we cannot allow so many of them to run away like this. Luke, you will follow those that escape and find out where their nest is. Good luck!"

He waited no more and went in pursuit of the beasts, the others followed behind him.

The group focused the spiders busy with the transport since they could not counterattack and in their poor intelligence they did not set any defensive formation around them.

Noah used his speed to appear in front of them and deal a clean lunge to their heads, which was his best method to spare "Breath" against their tough exoskeleton and still finish them in one blow. Meanwhile, he used his mental energy to pay attention to the guards' fighting method.

Mason would use his big ax to deal devastating blows not caring about hitting the corpses on the spiders' backs.

He swung his weapon with great dexterity and momentum creating his personal area of destruction as he advanced in the middle of the retreating group of beasts.

Noah could not help but think that if he got struck by one of those swings he would die on the spot.

Eddy and Rob had more difficulties.

Their martial art was the Balvan sword style which was rank 1 so its effects were limited against a rank 2 beast specialized in defense.

After they realized that they were only wasting energy, they used their swords to slow as many spiders as they could waiting for some of their companions to finish them.

From time to time, a sharp sound would run between them and a spider would fall dead on the ground with an iron arrow struck deep in its head. Luke was helping them from some distance away as he followed the faster specimens returning to their nest.

Balor was doing fine. His strikes were not precise but had great momentum, with his body weight added to his hammers one, every downward strike would kill or heavily injure a spider.

The slaughter continued for 20 minutes with only a small part of the beasts group managing to escape.

More than 30 spider corpses were scattered on the ground staining the terrain with green blood. The corpses of the villagers were either reduced to a pulp or heavily mutilated from the battle.

"Haha! The bodies of the ironclad spiders are really useful to the creation of magical weapons, when the inner circle comes to clean up we will be greatly rewarded!"

Balor exclaimed happily, and Eddy and Rob followed suit smiling radiantly.

Only Mason and Noah were frowning deep in thought.

'These beasts never reacted to our presence, they were only concerned on retreating with the dead villagers, something doesn't feel right.'

He looked in the direction of Mason and saw that he was probably thinking about the same thing.

He raised his eyes from the ground and looked at Noah shaking his head, neither him, with his experience, found an answer to the strange behavior of the spiders.

"We will know more once Luke comes back, let's rest at the village for now, maybe the villagers' stories can enlighten us."

Noah nodded while the other 3 men looked confused by the captain words but chose to follow his orders anyway.

They needed food and rest after this battle, and the mission was far from finished.

Back at the village, Mason asked questions around but in the end, he found nothing useful.

He exposed what he had learned to the other four while they were eating some soup made of the leftovers inside the village.

"The attacks started around a week ago. At first, the spiders would kill the livestock of the village and carry it back to their nest. When the livestock ended, they targeted humans with the same pattern: kill and bring back. The situation escalated till the invasion of today. According to the elders of the village descriptions, this was the highest number they attacked with, so we can assume that they are increasing the number of their group."

Noah frowned.

'This makes no sense, there was selflessness in their actions, they didn't even protect themselves!'

"We killed quite a lot of them though, I think we can assume that their number in the nest should not go over 60."

Rob argued trying to lift the group morale.

The door of the house they were in opened as Luke's figure appeared. He calmly sat on the opposite side of Mason and took a drink from Eddy's soup.

"The entrance of the nest is at a few hours of travel going East. It is an underground cave naturally formed. I followed the spiders inside for a bit but then opted to retreat for fear of being surrounded."

Mason nodded and asked.

"What do you think of the situation?"

Luke took another sip from Eddy's bowl.

"It was strange, I could clearly tell that they were amassing food but there were a lot of spider's corpses inside the cave. It's like they are undergoing a forced reproduction only to eat their offspring."

Rob was disgusted thinking about this and cursed loudly.

"A beast, even if a magical one, is still a beast in the end."

Noah was even more confused now, their behavior made no sense. If they needed food to reproduce themselves why would they eat their offspring? What was worth dying for, for a magical beast?

Mason reviewed all the information he had and made the attack plan.

"We gather some resources tonight and then set an encampment in front of the entrance of the nest. Tomorrow morning, we will go inside to explore and clear the cave. If we cut their replenishment of food and diminish their numbers little by little we will be completely safe while still completing the mission. Get ready, we depart in one hour."

No one objected, so they got ready and by midnight they had set a fireplace 50 meters from the entrance of the nest.

They took turns to keep a night watch.

When it was Noah's turn, he could not suppress the faint sense of danger that the cave made him feel.

No matter how much he reviewed the information he had, he would always feel that he was missing something.

'Selfless magical beasts, continuous accumulation of food, cannibalism. What is actually happening?'

Nothing that could link all these pieces of information came to his mind.

He calmed himself and sorted his mind, he was ready for the battle coming in the morning.

Chapter 22 - 22. Betrayal

At dawn, a group of five men and a kid stared at the entrance of an underground cavern two meters wide and three meters tall. It went downward till eyes could see and was completely silent.

"The passage will go on for about a kilometer and then will divide itself in different directions. I only know in which direction the spiders went last night cause I stopped there."

Luke explained.

"I will be in the head, the rest of you follow tightly."

Mason ordered and went in, the rest of the group followed with Noah at the center of it.

The passage was made of rocks and terrain and didn't seem too stable and, as they moved on, the light of the sun could not reach their position.

The passage was growing darker which made the group advance slowly.

Mason was being very careful of where he stepped since he knew that, in the enemy's nest, even a little sound could cause a catastrophe.

The passage got larger after some time and they could stand side to side, then they arrived where the cavern split into different branches.

Luke pointed at one of them and Mason went directly inside.

They walked for about an hour before the passage split again.

The light was scarce and the air was stifling wet but the group had to wait until Luke found some traces of the beasts to decide in which direction they had to explore.

"There are no conclusive traces, well, there are signs of their passage in all 4 the directions. I advice we take the rightmost since there seems to be light coming from there."

Mason thought a little and then decided on following Luke's advice.

They moved again and after another hour of march, the cause of the faint light coming from the end of the rocky corridor showed itself.

A big basin occupied a space of some hundreds of meters square and, at the center of it, a lake was situated which glowed with faint blue light.

'Water that glows?'

Noah was surprised, he never heard of anything like this.

He looked around to see if any one of the group knew something.

Mason's eyes were wide open like his mouth hung on his jaw.

Noticing Noah's gaze he recomposed himself and talked in a soft voice.

"I might have an idea of what that is and if I'm right we could not need to work anymore for the rest of our life. Yet, to be sure I must look at it closely."

Everyone's attention was piqued by Mason's words as they started to stare at the lake with greed.

'Strange, the concentration of "Breath" seems higher than the surface.'

Noah could feel his acupoints slowing their work as the air had a higher percentage of "Breath" in it.

Before he could investigate any further, Mason moved toward the lake.

On the walls of this big space, there were countless holes of different dimensions and on the ground, there were countless bones belonging to different species.

'Ironclad spider's legs, human skulls, those should belong to a sheep.'

As they were getting closer to the edge of the lake the numbers of body's remains grew as it grew the concentration of "Breath" in the air.

When they reached the lakeshore, Mason could not hide his excitement anymore.

"Yes, I'm sure. Inside the lake, there must be a "Breath" blessing, it's a legendary mineral that can attract "Breath", the inner ring will pay any price to get it, imagine our rewards if we bring it back!"

Everyone stared at the center of the lake, trying to find this legendary stone with their eyes, they didn't notice that the sound of crawling started to resound in the basin.

Noah was the first to pay attention to the sound as his alertness and mental energy were the highest in the group.

"They are coming!"

He unsheathed his sabers without hesitation.

The men were started awake by Noah's warning and cursed loudly when they heard the sound coming from every direction.

Spiders crawled out from the holes in the walls, they were of different dimensions as some of them were still rank 1. Yet, at least 50 of them were rank 2.

"Don't panic! We might get wounded but we can handle their numbers."

Mason yelled looking at the hundred of magical beasts surrounding them.

Suddenly, the bones on the shore of the lake rose as a figure that was hidden beneath them was revealed.

It was 3 meters long and had 8 long and sharp legs. 3 pairs of eyes were on the sides of its face and 2 big pincers protruded from its mouth.

"Rank 3!"

Luke yelled but the mighty beast did not hesitate.

It shot one of its legs at Noah that blocked it but was sent flying for a couple of meters.

"RUN!"

Ordered Mason, as the group moved in the direction they came from, uncaring of the spiders in their path.

Noah jumped on his feet and followed them a bit behind.

'Fuck! My hands are still trembling from that blow and I think my sabers cracked a bit. Why the fuck I didn't reach this conclusion, it was obvious! The only reason a magical beast would be so selfless is that something more powerful than it gave the order! I'm so stupid! I have to run!

He sped through the pack of spiders like he was a shadow, crouching and jumping to avoid their legs.

The other guards had already reached the passage and were swinging their weapon to force the blockage of spiders, when Noah arrived they had already proceeded and new spiders came to block his escape.

Without wasting any time he executed the best forms he ever did in his life and killed 2 rank 2 spiders on the spot only to continue speeding toward the passage.

Inside it, more spiders were crawling out from the walls using their powerful legs to obstruct the road but Noah didn't care.

He let them scratch and cut his skin in order not to waste any time.

When he arrived at the place where the first passage was, Balor was there preparing to enter. He didn't seem in a good condition as wounds were all over his fat body and blood flowed out of them.

He looked at Noah speeding toward him and smiled.

"Don't worry young man, I'll definitely tell everyone of your brave attempt in holding back those beasts to allow our escape. And don't worry about your mother, I'll be sure to console her properly eheh."

Noah's eyes widened hearing these words but he could only look as the man in front of him raised his hammers and struck the wall on his side.

The passage walls could not hold the impact and crumbled in front of him, while Balor was speeding on the other side.

"NOOOO!"

A rough yell came out of Noah's mouth as his only way out was destroyed in front of him.

'Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!'

"Fuck you, you worthless pig, if I ever come out of here alive I'll make sure to kill you personally!"

He could not contain his curses.

Meanwhile, spiders kept coming in his direction leaving him no time to for desperation.

Chapter 23 - 23. Exhaustion

Noah turned to face the spiders coming from his back.

He jumped on them dealing 3 fast slashes.

3 rank 1 spiders fell on the ground cut in half.

His mental energy was aiding at full speed his decision making while he brainstormed about the situation.

'What can I do? That rank 3 beast must have been in hibernation in order to evolve so it can't still control his body properly, that's why I survived so easily its attack but I don't think I can face it even with this.'

Two other strikes were shot out from his figure, a rank 2 spider had its head pierced while the rank 1 was halved.

'There must be another way to the main corridor of the surface, there were other branches that we didn't enter, maybe one of these passages leads to them.'

Once finding that his theory was possible, he didn't waste any time and ran into the leftmost corridor.

Hordes of spiders kept going for him but he would just kill them with the least amount of "Breath" needed.

He was too focused, in this time of life and death his mind steeled like never before.

Even though he went through the treatment twice already, that only required to endure the pain.

This time had to find a way out, kill everything that threatened him and still conserve energy in case the rank 3 appeared.

This pressure made his sea of consciousness as a whole focused only on survival.

The passage had many branches but most of them had a blue light at the bottom of it that Noah linked to the lake, which is to say the rank 3. That's why he never took them.

Sometimes a branch that went upward appeared, Noah would take them and find himself back in some places he already passed, once he even found a corridor that led back directly to where he came from.

The cave was like an underground maze and since there seemed to be no patterns in its passages he could only test all of them from the ones that felt safer to the ones with the blue light at the bottom.

At no point during his exploration spiders stopped from appearing.

Even though most of them were newborns of rank 1 they still required a little bit of "Breath" to be dealt with because their defense was high.

Noah was helpless about the situation and even with his acupoints working at full speed in an environment with a higher concentration of "Breath" the one inside his body kept on diminishing.

He found himself again standing where Balor destroyed the passage.

'I mostly explored every ramification in the other passages. Only one left, if this one ends up as a dead end too, I'll be forced to follow the blue light.'

He went inside the road on the left of the rightmost one.

The passage was large, it could fit 3 grown up men.

Seeing the blue light getting closer Noah was almost ready to turn back but then he saw a cavity entrance to his left that went upward and in his opposite direction.

Noah was overjoyed.

'That must be the one, it's the only road till now that goes straight in that direction!'

He sped right to the entrance but found strange that no spiders appeared since he entered this corridor.

'Did I kill too many of them? Impossible, I mostly killed rank 1 spiders and only about 10 rank 2. I have a bad feeling.'

As if answering his premonition, the wall to his right collapsed and a huge figure came out.

Noah didn't even wait for the figure to be fully visible as he hurriedly turned back to escape.

Yet, the passage behind him was crumbling on itself from all the ruckus the beast created by going through it.

He slowly turned to face the figure that was standing still, blocking the only road left.

The rank 3 ironclad spider was standing on 4 of his legs with half his body raised in the air. The other 4 legs were pointing in the direction of Noah and its pincers kept opening and closing at an uneven rhythm.

It seemed to enjoy the feeling of trapping its prey as it just waited for Noah to act.

'If it's fear you are waiting for you'll be disappointed, the threat of death cannot cause it in me.'

He had already died once and the treatment would force him to see its doorsteps every time, death really had no hold on his emotions.

With his back on the crumbled wall and his front facing the massive beast, only calmness could be found in his mind.

'If I die it's fine, but that doesn't mean that I would just give up.'

He remembered his first lesson with William about impossible situations, yet, even an ant had its right to defy the will of a dragon.

Coldness exuded from his figure like an extension of his state of mind.

'But I'm not an ant and you are not a dragon! I can do this!'

His plan was to go through the spider and run for the upward passage.

He jumped toward the beast dealing the strongest strike possible with his technique.

2 iron legs blocked the blow, while the other 2 shot to Noah.

Red blood flowed as wounds appeared on his body, he managed to avoid a critical hit but the legs still scratched his skin.

He could not pass it. If he defended he would be bounced back on the wall if he deflected the other two legs would be there waiting for him.

Tens of attacks were exchanged between the kid and the monster, but the stamina of the spider was nearly infinite and it kept getting stronger as it got used to its new body.

In contrast, Noah was being covered by wounds and even if not serious ones they would still add up the blood loss as time kept passing.

Plus, "Breath" was growing scarcer in his body and his sabers were losing pieces of their body with every exchange.

'I can't keep up for much longer. Think! Think of every single possibility you have. Think of every experience you had in two lives. There must be something that I can do, I refuse to die here when I barely started my cultivation's journey!'

He kept on blocking and attacking until his face lit up.

'That might actually work.'

The plan was set in his mind as he got ready for his last assault.

He charged straight at the spider and blocked with one saber the incoming leg, he let the other one pierce his left shoulder.

Since he allowed the spider to strike a small window of opportunity opened and he threw his right saber straight at the beast face.

The flying saber could not hurt the spider but was enough to catch him by surprise.

In the few instants the spider used to deflect his saber, Noah freed himself from the leg in his shoulder and got closer to his face, his now free right hand scrambled through the insides of his suit.

When the beast turned back to face Noah he found him standing at one meter of distance holding an unfolded sheet in his hand, pointing it to the spider field of view.

The blue light coming from behind it made clear the figure of a rune written on it.

CR!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

A painful scream shot out from the spider, as its first interaction with a Kesier rune hurt its sea of consciousness and stunned him momentarily.

'Now!'

This was the chance Noah betted his left shoulder and right saber for.

He held the remaining saber with both his hands and put all his remaining "Breath" in one last lunge aimed at the beast's head.

The saber pierced with difficulty the spider head and went through it emitting a shrill sound.

After it came out on the other side of the head the blade shattered from the cracks it received in the battle and from the amount of "Breath" it had to withstand.

Noah fell on the ground feeling completely drained.

THUD

A loud sound came right on Noah's side as the spider too fell on the ground.

Its body was not moving anymore, it was dead!

Noah looked at it for a bit for fear that it would stand up but relaxed when he saw no more movements coming from it.

He hugged the sheet that saved his life and closed his eyes overwhelmed by exhaustion.

Chapter 24 - 24. Anger

Sounds of iron against rock reverberated in the passage.

Noah opened his eyes and was almost scared by the corpse on his side.

But when the pain from his body arrived he remembered the situation he was in.

'I have basically no "Breath" left. The one being absorbed by my acupoints is being used to mend my wounds, I believe I won't be able to kill even a rank 1 beast, let alone the remaining rank 2'

He tried to stand up pointing with his knees and elbows but he remained in a crouching position for a while.

The noise from the other spiders was getting closer.

'They are probably attracted from the body of the rank 3. I must get away, come on body MOVE!'

He managed to stand up holding the wall, he put the Kesier rune back in his clothes and moved slowly to pick his remaining saber.

He limped slowly toward the passage on the left only to find that the sound came from the bottom of it.

'Shit! Don't tell me that I'm going to die even after killing the rank 3!'

He was at loss of what to do, he needed time to rest but he had no food or water with him since he left his backpack in the fireplace on the surface.

'Wait! Water! Maybe I can sneak out to the lake while the spiders are busy eating their previous boss.'

He looked in the direction of the blue light and moved toward it.

He was walking at a slow pace and supporting himself on the rocks on the wall. It took him one hour to reach the basin.

The environment there was completely silent, either the spiders were still busy eating the rank 3 or their low intelligence didn't make them realize that now they could use the lakeshore to their will.

Since there were no more walls to sustain him, Noah chose to crawl till the center of the underground room.

'Luckily they have low intelligence, I believe that if it was a rank 3 four-eyed wolf the effect of the rune would have not been so decisive.'

He reached the lake and took a mouthful of water to drink.

The water relieved his body from some tiredness and even filled it with a bit of "Breath".

'Right, the Breath blessing! These waters must be filled with "Breath" I can speed my recovery!'

Spiders began to crawl out of the holes in the underground room and move toward him and at their sight, Noah only smiled faintly.

'Of course, another danger would come after I find a bit of hope.'

He threw himself in the lake and floated toward its center.

'Now that I think about it, it's the first time I'm swimming with this body. Well, even the rank 3 was staying on the shore where the concentration of "Breath" is less than the water so it's safe to say that they can't swim.'

His hypothesis was right as the spiders would just surround the lake without entering it.

A peculiar scene was unfolding.

A kid wearing a smile was floating on the surface of a lake towards its center while 60 or so spiders were waiting on the shore.

'This feels too good! My body is being nourished at an incredible speed, apart from the wound of my shoulder, the others have mostly stabilized. And the concentration of "Breath" is still raising.'

When he was at the center even his wound on the shoulder showed signs of getting better.

Noah stayed like this for a while waiting for his wounds to heal.

'Maybe if I go to the bed of the lake I can speed the process.'

Once he had the idea, he followed through it immediately.

He kept going down through the water and at around 10 meters depth he saw a blue oval stone.

It was shining on its own and was beautiful to the sight.

As Noah got closer to it the thickness of "Breath" rose exponentially and when he was in front of it he could even feel his body getting stronger.

He didn't think much as he took the stone big as a man face and went back to the surface to breathe.

The Breath blessing was extraordinary, it was constantly attracting "Breath" of such a quality that all his wounds were closing and the acupoints went back on completing the second cycle of the Seven Hells.

After half a day, Noah found himself laughing happily, a sense of completeness filled his body.

'This thing is amazing! Not only it healed my wounds, it even helped me complete the second cycle! I've never felt so strong! I wonder if I can manage to keep it?'

He thought for a bit but then shook his head.

'A treasure is one only if I have the strength to protect it. If I'm weak it's just a calamity. Better to just give it to the inner circle and take some rewards.'

His acupoints had stopped working since the cycle was complete and his wounds were healed, there was no point in being here anymore.

He tied the stone to his clothes and looked at the spiders still waiting on the shore.

'Well, let's see what my body can do now!'

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Going back to the time the guards escaped, 4 men were staring at the entrance of the cave.

Then a fifth figure came out, revealing itself as Balor.

The group was mostly fine, they only had some light injury that needed some mending.

When Balor came out, he found the other 4 men staring at him with disgust and repulsion.

Mason didn't even waste time talking, he arrived next to him and punched hard his face.

Balor fell on the ground confused.

"Ca-Captain what are you doing?"

Mason could not control his anger as he kicked the fat man on the ground.

"What am I doing? What have you done is the question! We all heard Noah cursing you, apart from being a disgusting man holding grudges with a kid do you know what mess you've put all of us in?"

Balor took the insults but still felt wronged, wasn't Noah just the bastard kid of a whore?

But Mason didn't care of his confusion and kept kicking in anger.

"When I said that the vice-captain vouched for him it wasn't the whole truth. That kid was the only disciple of the smiling blade William Challi! Do you know what he will do to us when he arrives?"

Realization dawned on Balor as he trembled in fear.

"Th-then let's just say that the rank 3 killed him while we could do nothing, like this he would not do anything to us?"

But Mason only shook his head.

"I already contacted him through a special talisman that he gave me explaining the situation. I will not risk my life to cover a piece of shit like you. Men, tie him up!"

Everyone got to work and tied Balor while they waited for the judgment of the vice-captain of the guards to fall on them.

A day and a half later, a figure appeared on the distance.

It was speeding like a bullet on the ground, and its legs were barely visible from how fast they were moving.

It abruptly stopped in the fireplace where the guards were waiting.

It was sunset and the figure got revealed by the last ray of lights of the day.

William stood there catching a breath, the tiredness for his hurrying here was surpassed only by the anger of one of his men betraying his disciple.

"Where he is! Tell me where my disciple is!"

Chapter 25 - 25. Return

William was furious.

After all the pain his disciple went through only to get a bit stronger, he got betrayed on his first mission by a worthless soldier.

Mason stood up and explained with his head lowered.

"Vice-captain, we last saw him a day and a half ago when he got hit by the rank 3 beast. The last thing we heard was him cursing Balor."

He pointed at the man tied on the ground.

William focused on the man on the ground, the mental pressure he was emanating made Balor incapable of breathing.

"Please vice-captain have mercy! That kid threatened and insulted me and I was scared for my life, I only did what I had to do to survive!"

Lies came out of Balor's mouth as William was getting closer.

He took the tied hands of the trembling soldier and held them in his hands.

Then he spoke with a cold voice.

"If my disciple threatens you, you lower your head and ask for mercy."

The grip became tighter as the flow of blood in Balor's hands stopped.

"If my disciple insults you, you smile and thank him for his pointers."

Cracking sounds came from his hands as bones were compressed on each other.

His anger was so overwhelming that he didn't hear the faint sound of steps coming from the cavern entrance.

"If my disciple is risking his life, you exchange your place for his and risk yours, and if you die in the process you do that happily."

CRACK

The bones in Balor's hands shattered but he could not make any sound. He was too terrified by William's anger that he had no air left in him to talk.

The guards watching the process trembled when they heard the sound of his hands breaking and prayed that they could survive the vice-captain venting.

"Master, what are you doing here?"

A young voice came from the cave as a figure was visible on its entrance.

He was a kid with his upper body naked, pieces of his suit were pending on his sides.

He was bathed in a green substance from head to toe making him look like he had some kind of skin disease.

A broken saber was in his left hand with only half of the blade remaining.

He was looking half smiling at William with tranquil eyes.

"Noah?"

William immediately got up and jumped on him as he checked for injuries on his body, but apart from some scars and his suit reduced into pieces, everything was fine in him.

"Yes, Master?"

Noah looked at him in confusion, he still could not link his presence with this place.

The other guards were looking at him with wide eyes and even Balor had his mouth hung open as if he didn't believe in what he was watching.

William was happy beyond measure in seeing his disciple safe but could not help to release a storm of questions.

"How did you survive? What about the rank 3? Why didn't you come back earlier? And why are you green?"

He was holding Noah by his shoulders shaking him every time a question came out.

Noah was forced to answer in order to calm his Master down.

"Well, the cave is pretty big so I just kept running around killing spiders. The wall was destroyed by the fatty so I had to find another way out. The rank 3 is dead and the green is the blood from the other spiders."

This time, everyone had their mouth open as they digested the information.

William was the first to recover and kept on questioning him.

"What you mean the rank 3 is dead?"

"Well, dead is dead, I killed him."

Another wave of shock went through the men hearing this.

This time it was Balor the one who talked.

"Bullshit! How could you kill a rank 3 magical beast and come out uninjured?"

He regretted saying that when he saw the Master-disciple duo staring at him with killing intent and he lowered his head for fear of another round of torture.

"That scum is right though, how did you do it?"

Noah took out a folded sheet from his waist and showed it to his Master.

"I showed it the Kesier rune and took the chance when he was confused to strike a fatal attack. I believe it still was in its process to adapt to the evolved body, that's why I could hurt it."

William felt a bit of irritation going through him.

He smiled at Noah and said with a calm voice.

"And why would you have the rune with you in the mission?"

Noah answered with honesty like it was the most normal thing in the world.

"Well, it was a travel of 6 days and I wanted to train in the breaks."

A light punch arrived at the top of his head.

"You are impossible! Do you really think of nothing but training? Uff, I guess it's fine since it saved your life. Still, how are you uninjured?"

Noah seemed to remember something. He took out an oval form tied with a cloth and gave it to his Master.

When William unfolded it, a blue light shot out from it.

"Breath blessing! No wonder that specimen managed to reach rank 3! Haha my disciple, this time you really did an exemplary job. Don't you worry, I will intercede with the inner ring for you and take the best reward I can bargain for."

Hearing the word "reward" Noah's eyes lit up and he licked his lips.

"I will need better sabers, Master. These ones cracked only after some hits from a rank 3 beast."

William was about to reprimand but then shook his head smiling and ruffled his untied hair.

"Most importantly, what do you want to do with him?"

He pointed a Balor on the ground that was looking at him with pleading eyes.

Noah got closer and looked at his pitiful figure.

"Please, young master have mercy. I swear I will serve you with all my expertise from now on, I will..."

A torrent of pleads came out of his mouth but Noah only kept on looking at him with cold eyes.

When Balor stopped talking Noah gave only a short answer.

"No."

The saber did a horizontal arc and Balor's head detached from his body and rolled on the ground, blood flowed tainting the terrain.

His Master got close to him and asked in a soft voice.

"Are you ok? It is the first time you kill a human after all."

Noah looked at him smiling and said in a shameless voice.

"You know, my second cycle is complete, so I thought we could do the third treatment as soon-"

Another punch hit the top of his head and forced him to shut up.

Chapter 26 - 26. Deserters

Noah woke up in a room of the guards building.

2 weeks have passed since he came back from the mission and 4 days ago he went through his third treatment.

His back still hurt a bit but his mental energy had recovered. He would train if his master didn't take the rune from him worried that he would not focus on healing.

His worries were right on point.

'Mh, my body should reach the limits of rank 1 at the end of this cycle, I wonder how much will it take. What a pity, if I had that stone I could go straight for rank 2 this month.'

The Breath blessing was delivered by William to the inner circle so it was probably gone forever from his grasp.

He focused his mental energy on aiding the healing process since he had nothing to do while eating the food left on the table nearby.

The door of the room opened as William went inside the room with a bigger smile than usual, he was carrying a leather bag and a big wooden box.

"Haha my dear disciple, good morning, I bring good news!"

He placed the box and the bag on the bed and pointed at them.

"These are the rewards I got for you and I have to say that they are awesome, you won't be disappointed."

Noah didn't waste any time and started opening the box, his Master made him curious.

In the box there were 2 sabers inside their respective sheaths, their hilts were clean shiny, they seemed brand new.

He picked one of them and unsheathed it, the body of the blade was black and sharp.

"They were specially forged for you from 2 legs of the rank 3 ironclad spider that you took down. They are not magical weapons but surely are top tier between the normal blades."

Noah was unconsciously smiling looking at the blade and swinging it around, he would get up and try it if it wasn't for his body still needing rest.

He sheathed the saber and looked at the bag.

An old book was inside and when he looked at the first page his eyes widened as he could not hide the shock he was feeling.

He looked at his Master in disbelief.

"Is this really for me?"

William smile grew even more as he nodded.

"Your Master is amazing isn't he?"

He wanted to brag a bit but Noah's eyes went on the book as soon as he saw him nodding.

William just shook his head and waited for his disciple to finish his reading.

'Nails of the Kamaitachi, rank 3. Martial art created imitating the rank 4 magical beast Kamaitachi. Highest speed and perforation between the arts of

the same rank. It allows the user to cut at an unbelievable speed and precision surpassing every protection. The user might also cut things at some distance away from the blade and, at full mastery, it can shoot wind slashes through the air. Limited to two-weapon wielders'

Noah raised his gaze from the book.

"The Kamaitachi is a weasel-like beast that runs the wind and cuts to death without the victim even noticing. It should fit you really well."

He took the folded sheet containing the rune from his clothes and gave it to Noah.

"Next week we begin to spar again, I believe you will want to test your new techniques."

Noah looked at him and bowed deeply uncaring of the pain on his back.

William ruffled his hair and got out of the room leaving him alone to concentrate on the book.

Having finally something to do, Noah's days of recovery passed rapidly.

His weekly sparring with William continued but he noticed a problem with his new martial art: his "Breath" was insufficient to express its potential.

To be precise he could only use one of its abilities twice before being drained.

"That is completely normal, you always forget how early you are in things. Normally, to use a martial art of high level you would need a dantian but you complain about being able to use only two attacks. Your biggest gain, for now, is the improvement in your forms, anything else must wait until you get a rank 2 body."

William explained.

Their sparring session had ended and Noah was exposing his doubts to him.

"So, what you think I should do, Master?"

"You could just let your body grow but you don't seem to know how to stay still."

William felt a bit of exasperation saying this.

"You can gather battle experience doing missions, I believe you should be fine against any kind of rank 2 magical beasts."

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Months passed by.

Noah alternated between his usual schedule in the mansion and his travels outside it to clear magical beast's nests.

There was a pack of four-eyed wolves with a specimen that reached rank 2 but they were wiped out in half a day.

A horned snake appeared in the vicinity of a village in the North.

Its scales were hard, his body 10 meters long and large 2, and had poisonous fangs in its mouth. It was a beast at the peak of rank 2 and Noah had to resort to his rank 3 martial art to kill it after a strenuous battle.

He was forced to rest for 3 days because of that fight.

Yet, his most troublesome opponent had been a mud demon. This type of magical beast was naturally created when too much "Breath" accumulated in one place and consolidated.

The consolidated "Breath" would act as the core of a beast that could manipulate the terrain around it. It was not a powerful beast but countered heavily Noah's techniques.

He had to cut it in small pieces repeatedly to find the core and destroy it while dodging the earth spikes that it created to attack him.

Yet, his battle proficiency rose at a fast pace having to face different situations as he could decide more quickly the best way to deal with an opponent.

Today, he was sitting on his knees waiting for the usual mission that his Master would hand to him every month.

"This time will be different, you will go with a group of people that I picked personally."

Noah was immediately intrigued.

'Since he always let me go alone the difficulty of the mission must be higher to require a group.'

He picked the sheet describing the mission from William's hands.

'Deserters of the Shosti family have raided the village of Tasart, only the corpses of men and elders have been found, they probably took away women and young girls for their enjoyment. Find the rebels and execute them.

Warning: there are cultivators inside their group.'

Chapter 27 - 27. Contest

"As you know, the Shosti family rules over us and since the rebels are in Balvan mansion's zone of influence they ordered us to take care of them."

Noah listened to the explanation but had a doubt in his mind.

"Master, can I fight a cultivator?"

His ability to fight with beasts of higher rank than him was mainly due to the fact that they were, in the end, just beasts.

A powerful body and some peculiar ability could be matched by powerful techniques and perfect execution of them.

But what would happen against someone who had a dantian and practiced techniques as powerful as his?

"Generally speaking, no. If he matches your abilities he will just overwhelm you by the sheer quantity of his "Breath". You might catch him by surprise using your rank 3 martial art but then you will be mostly drained. And if he has a rank 3 martial art too, well, just run."

Noah felt depressed listening to this.

He was hardworking and talented, mostly due to his powerful mind, but others were too. And if he had to clash with them the difference in time spent cultivating would be decisive.

"So why are you giving me this mission?"

If he really could not do anything about the situation there was no point in going toward danger, he liked to fight but he was no idiot.

"Your role would be only of support. You will take care of the non-cultivator and of those with a rank 1 martial art between them, leaving the real fight to the others of your group."

William was about to dismiss him when he thought of something.

"Ehm, you can trust them this time, I made sure of that."

He showed a complex expression while he said that, apparently the events with Balor were still lingering in his mind.

Noah smiled and reassured his Master.

"Don't worry Master!"

As he left the room his smile disappeared transforming in a cold expression.

'No way I'm gonna trust anyone except Lily and Master, I should hide my strength from the time being, the nails of the Kamaitachi must be my hidden ace in the sleeve.'

When Balor betrayed him it made him remember the cruelty of men, which he had forgotten living as a kid for so much time.

He went back to his room and practiced again in all of the forms of the rank 3 art, only then he calmed himself.

His weakness was making him feel restless.

The more he knew about this world, the more he understood how dangerous it was.

By clearing nests he got an idea of how populous were the magical beasts in this world and yet humans still were at the top of the food chain, that meant that their power was unimaginable.

'While I'm just 2 steps away from the bottom of human power, I can surpass only commoners and dumb soldiers.'

In his mind, a soldier with a rank 1 technique became a dumb soldier.

His irritation reflected itself on his night training in the rune as he almost collapsed after forcing himself to watch it for 7 hours straight!

After more than one year and a half of training non-stop, the faint shape of the rune was visible in his sea of consciousness, he was sure it would not take much before he became a rank 1 mage.

'I guess I should start creating excuses for my rapid progress in mental energy, I wonder what face will Master make if I reach the apprentice mage status before I turn 13.'

He smiled imagining at his Master's astonished face but then the wave of pain from his head arrived so he went to sleep to rest his mind.

The next morning, he found his Master in the courtyard with 3 men and a woman around him, they were waiting for him.

"Noah, they will be your companions for the mission."

"So it's him?"

It was a tall muscular man between them who talked, he had no beard and short dark hair with a greatsword almost as big as him on his back.

He stared at Noah with focus, applying pressure with his mind.

'Is he testing me?'

His mental energy was heavy and was pressuring Noah's sphere but was far from enough to make him stand back.

Noah took the chance to harden his sphere since it was the first time he felt a constant pressure from the outside of it and closed his eyes to concentrate on it.

The man mistook his behavior as his attempt to resist the pressure and felt challenged, so a stalemate was created.

Noah would focus on strengthening the walls of his mind while the guard would raise the mental pressure to win the imaginary contest he thought he was in.

After 10 minutes, blood came out of the guard nose and he was struggling to keep the pressure.

The woman, seeing the blood, gave a strong slap to the back of his head stopping his concentration and dispelling the pressure.

"Ethan, stop, the kid is using you."

The man named Ethan was about to complain when he got hit but then the words of the woman made him look carefully at Noah.

He still had his eyes closed and a slight smile was on his face.

When Noah opened his eyes he showed a disappointed expression but then he noticed that everyone was looking at him.

"I swear he almost did it, I bet that if you let him try for one more hour he will definitely do it!"

A punch arrived at the top of his head as William moved behind him placing his hands on his shoulders.

"This shameless kid is my disciple, Noah. Always pay attention when you deal with him because he will say and do anything to learn more about your powers."

Noah raised his head to look at the Master behind him and complained.

"Come on Master, it's not fair if you break my cover so soon. Don't listen to him I'm a pure and innocen-"

Another punch hit him.

Ethan was incredulous, the woman was surprised while the other two men were almost suffocating from holding back their laughter.

They never saw someone treat the vice-captain like this and from the look of it, William actually gave up on fixing his disciple behavior.

"Haha, kid you're the best. I am Sanford but you can call me Sandy."

"We won't get bored in this mission, right Sandy? Haha. My name is Mark. Young man, we will get along."

The two laughing men could not hold themselves anymore as they greeted Noah.

The woman massaged her temples while exhaling.

"Don't listen to those two idiots. I'm Susan the captain for this mission and their nanny. The other guy is called Ethan, he is stupidly competitive. Now let's get somewhere private to decide how to complete the mission."

Chapter 28 - 28. Scroll

Sandy and Mark had both brown hair and a short red beard. They were of medium stature and were, apparently, brothers from two different mothers and the same father. They were quite young, as their age didn't reach the forties.

Susan was a woman nearing her fifties, with blond hair and an imponent frame and with her right ear missing.

Ethan was the youngest of the group, around his thirties, and he was the tallest between them.

They were in a room inside the guards building sitting around a circular table with cups of hot tea on the side of each of them.

Susan was explaining the information she knew about the mission.

"We know the group is formed by a former mercenary group that was going to be absorbed by the soldiers of the Shosti family. Some of them, unhappy with the status of a stable soldier, rebelled and became robbers. You all read the report about Tasart village, I don't believe they could have cleared all their traces while kidnapping so many women. Of course, our best option is to start investigating from there."

Everyone nodded.

"What about their number and capabilities? And what do we do if they use the hostages?"

It was Noah speaking. He wanted to make sure that he was ready for anything in his first battle with cultivators, even if he didn't have to participate.

"We have some description of the strongest of them and their group should amount to twenty people in total. As for the hostages, we save them if we can, we cut through them if they are used as shields."

Noah nodded, he was happy with her answer.

'In this world, the weak are to blame while the strong are to revere, I won't endanger myself to save other people I don't care about.'

A village would be wiped out because, by chance, a pack of magical beasts found it in their way, weakness was indeed a sin in this world.

Having cleared his doubts, Noah listened carefully to the questions of the other soldiers.

They set up the priorities of the mission, the plan of attack and everyone's role.

Noah had to clear anyone trying to get closer to the other four, leaving the cultivators to fight themselves with no one interfering.

"Since everything is settled, let's set off immediately. We will see each other again in two hours."

The group got dismissed and went to prepare for their mission.

Meanwhile, on the side of a small mountain covered with trees, twenty or so men were camping near a campfire.

It was winter so the temperature was low but these men didn't seem to care too much as they were doing a line to enter the bigger tent of the camp.

Cries and pleads could be heard from the tent but the men outside it would just laugh and lick their lips eager to enter.

Two men got outside of the tent and proudly announced.

"Now, there are no more virgins inside!"

Disappointed sighs and curses were spat out by the men still in line but then were suppressed by a yell coming from higher in the mountain.

"Shut up you beasts, I'm trying to concentrate here!"

The men shut up but soon whispers sounded again on the mountain.

"I heard that the boss managed to steal a magic spell's scroll from the old captain."

"Shhh, he is still in the process of learning it, he doesn't want any distraction. He let us raid the village just to make us happy and stop complaining."

"What a pity though, he had been a mage for such a long time and the only way he got a magic spell was with the rebellion."

"You chose to rebel too remember?"

"Well, we are mercenaries, we follow gold and women!"

The deserters talked for some more time and then went back to enjoy the contents of the tent.

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4 days later, a carriage appeared in the outskirts of Tasart village, or what remained of it.

The houses were burned to the ground and not a living being could be seen inside it.

A group of 3 men, a woman, and a kid got out of the carriage, they were, of course, Noah and his group.

"Aww man, you are too boring, you did nothing but meditate and practice during the trip. Aren't you in the age when you want to talk about women?"

"Sanford, don't try to corrupt the kid, he still has time to become a waste of air like you."

"Captain you are so mean! I'm just trying to educate him to the way of manhood!"

Sandy and Susan bickered, they basically did it through all the trip.

Mark would just laugh on their side at every word they spoke to each other while Ethan tried to imitate Noah in his compulsive way of training.

'Don't tell me that you become an idiot when you start cultivating your dantian?'

These were his thoughts about cultivators after 4 days of travel with them.

'Now that I think about it, even Master isn't too normal with his constant smile.'

He was considering the possibility that cultivating could have some side effects on the psyche of the practitioner.

They neared the remains of the village and looked around it in search of clues of the deserters.

Dead bodies were still on the ground, left there since the raid.

As the report said, no females were among the corpses and signs of dragging were present everywhere.

"What is there in that direction that can hide 20 lustful men?"

Mark asked the question while pointing where the traces of dragging went.

"A mountain."

Answered Sandy.

"Cliffshear mountain."

Ethan pointed out.

Susan massaged her temples to hold back from yelling at the 3 of them.

"They must have gone there, we should hurry while they are still busy using the hostages."

Noah could not help to feel a bit of wariness toward the heartlessness of Susan after her proposal.

"Oh, something is coming."

"Yes, they must have been attracted by the smell of blood lingering on the ground."

"Uh?"

It was the first time that Noah wasn't the first to notice something approaching.

'Are they already mages?'

Looking at Sandy and Mark staring in the distance he followed their line of sight, focusing on a dark dot few hundreds of meters in the distance.

The dot became 2 dots and then 4.

Then the silhouettes of 6 thunder wolves were made clear.

"Kid, you take care of them, have fun."

Sandy patted Noah's shoulder and sat on the ground like he was waiting for a show to being displayed.

Chapter 29 - 29. Flame snake

The thunder wolves were all rank 2.

Generally speaking, wolves types of magical beasts had all the ability to coordinate their attacks together.

This particular one could send bolts of lightning from its mouth or coordinate with the pack to create a massive thunder that could destroy everything in its path.

If it was shot from 6 rank 2, its power could match the top tier of their rank.

Mark sat next to Sandy and they started betting on Noah's performance.

Even Ethan this time didn't show his usual competitive side and just sat on the ground looking annoyed, a fight with those magical beasts was not worth his interest.

Susan remained standing but just kept looking for more clues around the ruins of the village.

'These guys.'

Noah felt a bit irritated.

'Each one of them should be able to wipe those wolves in one hit yet they chose to let me do it. Basically, I'm here to clean the trash.'

The wolves kept getting closer and their tails were accumulating electricity to release into an attack.

"You know, I really hate being tested."

Said Noah to the group, while unsheathing his sabers and jumping towards the wolves.

His attention was on the tails of the wolves since it was from them that you could understand when the lightning bolt would arrive.

During the period of clearing nests, William gave him a slim bestiary to memorize. It had general information about magical beasts below rank 3, with some advice on how to dodge their most powerful attacks.

In the case of the thunder wolves, it was when their mouth opened to release the electricity accumulated in their tails.

There was no such thing as the perfect attack in this world, everything must have a weakness.

In the thunderbolt case, it was the long preparation required and its poor maneuverability;

In Noah's style, it was a limited area of effect.

A bolt shot from one of the wolves mouths in Noah's direction.

He hastily moved diagonally to avoid it and then resumed in his original direction.

The bolt passed near him and hit the ground, a one-meter large hole was formed with smoke coming out of it, the special ability of a rank 2 magical beast was not to be underestimated!

Another bolt shot out but Noah avoided it sliding below it at high speed, then he jumped to end up in the middle of the pack.

From the sight on a normal human, Noah only stopped in place for few instants between the 2 wolves on his sides before moving toward the other 4.

Even the 2 beasts got a little confused by his behavior and tilted their heads to follow the kid entering their group.

At that moment, a red line appeared on the 2 wolves' necks, followed by an eruption of bright red blood.

Two beast's heads fell on the ground, accompanied by their now headless bodies.

"Oh, that is indeed the speed of the Kamaitachi style, when William told me that he gave a rank 3 martial art to a kid I almost was sent to the prison for mocking him. I wonder how much power of the technique he can express."

Sandy commented from his position on the ground, while the other 2 men nodded in approval.

Even though Noah's attack was fast, it could not fool the eyes of cultivators on their level.

Only Ethan seemed to frown a bit, he clearly saw one of the attacks but completely missed the other one.

Meanwhile, Noah was still in the wolves' pack, this time the beasts were preparing a coordinated attack since the death of 2 of their companions made them realize the danger they were in.

But it was too late!

If they used immediately their most powerful attack while Noah was getting closer they could have had a chance, but now that he was among them their fate was written.

Noah seemed to casually stroll between the magical beasts but every time he passed one of them, their head would be severed and fall on the ground.

In less than a minute, the pack was no more, only headless corpses were around him.

'My forms are on a completely different level. If previously they were on the level of a middle-tier rank 2 magical beast or even lower, now they are definitely on the upper-tier! It's just a pity that I still can't cross the boundaries of the rank 3 because my body is still weak.'

Like usual, he would analyze the battle and his techniques to fix any mistake he found in it and to evaluate his power level.

'The events with the ironclad spider were really too fortunate, I don't think I could have killed him if he hadn't just evolved.'

Noah was still standing in thought when Susan came back to the group sitting on the ground.

"The village has nothing of worth left in it and since the kid finished clearing up the beasts we should get going. What do you think, can he block the weak deserters while we fight?"

Sandy stood up while answering:

"The non-cultivators are of no concern for him, the low-level ones should give him some problems but he can handle it. The only problem is for how much can he hold them off, after all the "Breath" in his body is limited."

Susan nodded and then said with resolution:

"Then we end our fights before he's out of it, I don't want to be killed because some weak scum disturbed me."

"Agreed captain, and when we have completed the mission we can all go to the brothel in Mossgrove city to celebrate!"

Susan sighed loudly while massaging her temples, forcing herself not to get irritated by Sandy.

Meanwhile, on Cliffshear mountain, a middle-age muscular man was sitting cross-legged on the ground frowning deeply.

Screams and pleads would resound in the air but he seemed not to care or to be used to it.

A scroll with an intricate linear design written on it was open lying on his hands.

At some point, he raised one of his hands in the air and pointed at a tree on his side.

His whole arm lit up and a snake made of flames shot out of it, it slammed on the tree, destroying it and continuing for some meters before extinguishing.

The man smiled and opened his eyes to look at the destruction created by his first magic spell.

An area of 5 meters was wrecked by his spell, with some small flames still burning the destroyed tree.

The man nodded with satisfaction and put the scroll on the lingering flames burning it without any hesitation while deep in thought.

'I finally managed to learn the flame snake magic, the rebellion was totally worth it!'

Chapter 30 - 30. Battle

The group of the Balvan family arrived at the base of Cliffshear mountain.

They jumped off the carriage and stared silently at the trees filling it.

Everyone was in a serious mood since the battle was imminent, the usual exchange of jokes and scoldings was absent, only concentration could be seen in their eyes.

Even if they could arrive sooner if they ran all the way here, they prioritized their physical condition, so they rested during the night in the remains of the village and took the carriage before dawn.

It was still some hours before midday but, even though the sun was high in the sky, the field of view in the mountain's path was limited by the numerous trees on it.

Mark was the first to break the silence.

"They will obviously have sentries around their camp if they are still here."

Everyone nodded.

"The terrain is not in our favor but we should have better scouts, once we find them we can prepare a plan of attack."

Susan said.

Sandy put his arm around Mark's neck and proudly announced.

"The best the outer ring has to offer."

Noah finally understood why they were able to spot the thunder wolves before him.

'So that's why. I wonder if they are just good scouts or if their mental energy is so high that they can take on that role easily.'

He was continuously trying to figure out the real strength of his companions but they rarely showed any clues about their powers.

With the exception of Ethan, he didn't even know what kind of weapon they used.

"You two go ahead and point the way, we will follow. "

After Susan's order, they entered the mountain forest following Mark and Sandy.

They would often go in two different ways before regrouping and point a direction on the ones following them.

Few hours passed by, with no one in the group speaking a word during their exploration.

Then, Sandy and Mark went toward them signaling to be silent.

They crouched on the ground and spoke with a soft voice.

"We found the encampment a few minutes in that direction. It should be them since there were screams of women coming from there."

"The common soldiers are tired and sleepy, I believe that they did nothing but **** those women these days. You are lucky Noah."

Since it was his job to take care of the non-cultivators this was good news for him. Apparently, no one cared about the fates of the hostages at this point.

"What about cultivators?"

Asked Susan.

"There is the one in the highest place of the encampment that must be the stronger of them, we could not find more about him for fear of being discovered."

"There are 5 of them worthy of our concern after him, the others are just weaklings for the kid."

Sandy and Mark would explain things by dividing the explanation between the 2 of them, Noah was almost certain that cultivating would cause some brain damage by now.

He thought that he had to ask his Master about this matter once he came back.

"How do we proceed?"

He asked and everyone's gaze went on Susan since she was the captain of the mission.

"I will jump straight in the middle of them and face the strongest guy. While they are busy following me, Mark, Sandy, and Ethan will ambush the cultivators trying to lower their number while Noah will storm between the weaklings. Once the situation stabilizes, we go hunt for the remaining ones. Remember your roles."

'She is actually planning to be the bait?'

Noah was doubtful but still decided to follow with the plan, after all, if Susan wanted to take the danger on her, so be it.

They moved toward the perimeter of the encampment and when everyone was ready, Susan jumped out in the open, speeding toward her target.

"Just follow us kid."

Sandy said as he and Mark took out a short knife from their clothes.

Ethan unsheathed his greatsword so Noah did the same with the sabers on his back.

The normal soldiers didn't notice Susan figure as she was too fast, it was only when she was halfway through the camp that someone gave the alarm.

"Enemy attack!"

The camp fell into chaos as the soldiers went to pick their swords left on the ground.

When Susan was nearing the top of the encampment, a man jumped out from a tent and directly swung his sword at her.

Susan raised her hand and the sword got deflected by it, the sound of metal against metal resounded in the air.

"Now!"

Yelled Mark, and the group still hiding in the perimeter of the camp shot out in the open.

Sandy and Mark went directly in Susan's direction while Ethan did an ample half-circle with his greatsword severing 3 soldiers in two, then he went in the same direction of the other 2.

Noah was the last one to appear and he took advantage of the confusion created by his companions to sneak out inside the group of deserters.

Blood spilled and heads flew as he ran through the group, the more he killed now while reaching Ethan and the others, the less he had to care about later when the surprise effect dispelled.

When he appeared on the other side of the encampment, 5 soldiers fell dead on the ground.

On this side, Susan was still deflecting different weapons with her hands while trying to reach her target, Sandy and Mark took out one of them with their excellent teamwork but then got encircled by 3 cultivators limiting their movements.

Ethan was fighting a tall man with a big ax alone.

At some point, Susan did a palm gesture with her hand that released a shockwave that stunned momentarily the 2 soldiers that were fighting with her. She hurriedly grabbed the head of one of them and squeezed tightly.

The head of the unfortunate man was reduced to a meat pulp while Susan didn't even look at him before resuming her original direction, the other man on her side was too scared to react to the woman speeding through him.

Noah turned back to face the other soldiers unleashing another wave of seemingly invisible attacks, Ethan used a destructive move to shatter the big ax and then thrust his greatsword into the tall man chest.

Sandy and Mark were nimbly dodging every attack the 3 men were unleashing on them while delivering fast strikes as a counterattack, all 3 of the deserters had their wrists and arms wounded as a result.

Noah killed another 3 of them leaving standing 2 men that blocked his attacks.

Only 7 deserters remained alive, with 3 of them injured.

At that point, a ball of flame fell from the highest point of the encampment and stopped on the ground in the middle of the battlefield, Susan's figure was barely visible between the flames.