

Chapter 221 - 221. Bare Dungeon

Noah was inside the Hunters' guild, carefully inspecting the boards describing the various hunting areas.

'I can go almost anywhere now but I should still find something that doesn't attract too much attention.'

What he was looking for was a danger zone with a low number of rank 4 magical beasts.

He wanted to fight a rank 4 creature alone in order to find out his actual strength!

'I need to choose one that I can justify easily. My name has become too known inside the guild, the fact that I'm entering a danger zone alone won't go unnoticed.'

His mental energy swept through the various boards until he found something that could meet his requirements.

'Excavating worms activity discovered in the Bare Dungeon, only one rank 4 specimen confirmed with more than a hundred rank 3 beasts in the lower areas. This might work.'

The Bare Dungeon was the prison of the previous Royal family.

After the Elbas family took the throne, that structure was abandoned and the magical beasts had slowly turned it into their lair.

However, the concentration of "Breath" there was quite low so it took more than two thousand years for a rank 4 creature to be born from the dominant type of magical beasts in there.

As for why Noah considered that area, it was due to the magical beasts that lived there.

Excavating worms had a long and sturdy body, with three circular rows of sharp teeth as their mouths.

They weren't among the strongest magical beasts, actually, their battle prowess was low due to their simple attack patterns, they could only rely on their bodies and they had no peculiar ability.

Also, the value of their bodies was particularly low.

Only their teeth were somewhat valuable but, other than for those, they basically provided no useful material.

Yet, they had one quality that could be used as an excuse by Noah: their bodies had the highest amount of blood among the magical beasts.

'Kurt and the others will just think that I want to occupy the time between the hunts with them in unpopular hunting zones to maximize my growth. Rank 3 Excavating worms are only worth fifteen Credits each, no hunter would be willing to go there with the possibility of meeting a rank 4 creature.'

Even if the worms were relatively weak, the Bare Dungeon remained a danger zone due to the rank 4 specimen in there.

If hunters wanted to go in danger zones to gather a higher number of rank 3 corpses, they would choose an area where the beasts had a higher value like Noah did with Mellow Forest.

Indeed, there were no hunters signed for that area.

'Excavating worms is it!'

Noah decided, placing his mark next to the name "Bare Dungeon".

Meanwhile, inside the alchemy division of the academy.

Daniel was controlling the temperature of the cauldron in front of him with his eyes closed.

The flame under it was created by a special technique that used the "Breath" of the cultivator as fuel in order to give more control to the alchemic process.

Daniel had always been talented in that technique due to his element but he had to work hard to reach that kind of proficiency.

In the eyes of his followers, he had always been the perfect cultivator.

His family was wealthy and among the most powerful in the country, capable of providing to him any kind of cultivation resource or technique, nurturing a cultivator of the light element required an exorbitant sum after all.

His manners were polite and sophisticated, he was loved in any noble circle, and many young heirs had already sworn their loyalty to him during his time in the academy.

His talent was also exceptional.

Not only did he have one of the rarest aptitudes, but his centers of power were also at an amazing level for his age.

He was only twenty-three but his dantian was reaching the peak of the gaseous stage of the second rank!

His sea of consciousness had recently broken through the second rank, making him one of the youngest rank 2 mages in the Ultra nation.

Also, he had a rank 4 body!

Since his future strength was ensured, the Udye family was heavily investing in him, providing him the best resources to increase his training speed.

His aptitude also made him one of the most promising alchemists of the nation, further increasing his fame.

However, his family was quite against his studies in the alchemy faculty of the academy.

The first reason was that cultivators ultimately relied on strength, spending time in a profession that was not battle-related was against the policy of most noble families, especially if the one to do it was the main heir.

The second one was that the faculty was inside the academy, which was a structure of the Royal family.

Since the Cause was using Daniel as the main reason to kindle the fire of rebellion in the country, the Udye family was against his usage of structures so linked to the Royal family.

Yet, every youth was a man of his own.

Even with all the pressure that his family was putting on him, Daniel still went to train his alchemic skills in the academy.

Daniel controlled the flame silently, lowering or increasing the temperature of the cauldron as he followed the procedure that the seniors in the faculty had taught him.

In about one hour, he stopped providing "Breath" and the flame was extinguished.

Daniel sighed and excitedly opened the cauldron, lifting the lid with one hand.

A huge amount of white smoke came out of the cauldron, yet, when it dispersed, there was nothing inside it, it seemed that the refinement had failed.

'It seems that I still can't concoct rank 2 pills in the high tier, I have a long way to go.'

Pills and potions were ranked in the same way as inscribed items, the rank of the dantian was the most detailed expression of power after all.

As he stared disappointedly at the empty cauldron though, a young attendant appeared behind him.

"Lord Daniel, a mission has been assigned to you."

One of Daniel's eyebrows arched and he turned, asking in a surprised tone.

"What's that about?"

The attendant bowed and replied to him.

"I'm sorry my Lord, I could only understand that you will be sent to the Bare Dungeon."

Chapter 222 - 222. Potion

Daniel stood with his hands behind his back in front of three elderly cultivators.

They were in a dark room, with the three elders inspecting a big cauldron that stood between them and Daniel.

"Elders, did you request for me?"

Daniel asked in his usual polite tone, his head was slightly bowed as he spoke.

"Yes. We need you to go to the Bare Dungeon and collect as many Excavating worms as you can. We will reward you and anyone you want to bring along of course."

One of the elders spoke without moving his gaze from the cauldron.

"If I may ask, can't we just give this mission to the Hunters' guild? It seems inappropriate for an alchemist to hunt magical beasts."

Daniel asked, making a bow to emphasize his respect for the three cultivators.

"Daniel, what is the main ingredient for the majority of the alchemic products?"

Another elder questioned him.

Daniel's answer came immediately.

"Magical beasts' blood! However, we should have plenty of that stashed."

"That is correct. Magical beasts' blood is the base on which most of our products are created and yes, we do have enough for of it stashed for our normal activities. Yet, we are attempting in something quite far from the ordinary."

The elder tapped the cauldron in front of him and showed an excited smile to the young man.

The inscriptions on the cauldron flickered and released some of their power, making Daniel take a few steps back to withstand the wave of energy radiated from the item.

That cauldron wasn't a common inscribed item!

"What are you going to concoct with it?"

Daniel asked in astonishment.

Such powerful items were usually used to create pills that had a rank above the third!

For a pill or a potion to be in the fourth rank, it meant that it could affect cultivators in that same rank!

Products that could accelerate the cultivation were extremely valuable, especially if they were effective in the heroic ranks.

"Hehe, interested? We managed to find the recipe for a rank 5 potion and, of course, we are eager to try it out."

Rank 5 potion!

A medicine that was effective on rank 5 cultivators!

Even cultivation techniques were rare at that level, Daniel couldn't even imagine the value of a rank 5 medicine.

"Now that you know what we are dealing with, you must understand the number of resources involved in the process. We can't just stop all the activities of the alchemy division for our experiments so we need to gather more resources. Sadly, the value of the Excavating worms is low in the market of the capital so no hunter would accept this mission unless we pay a hefty sum. Yet, in order to gather all the materials described in the recipe we have already spent a lot of Credits, we can't afford the services of that guild. The only option is to send one of us there."

One elder explained their situation.

Daniel slowly recovered from the shock and put a pensive expression.

"I don't need Credits."

He said after a while.

"Hehe, we know. We also know that your position is quite difficult due to the recent events between the Royal dynasty and the noble families. That's why your reward will be the possibility to watch us concoct the rank 5 potion."

Daniel's eyes widened and an internal struggle was born inside him.

On one side, there was his ambition in the alchemy field: having the possibility to watch experienced alchemists work will greatly increase his understanding of certain procedures.

Also, what they were going to concoct was a rank 5 item!

How many times could someone experience such a sight?

On the other one, there was his loyalty toward his family.

Daniel knew that the alchemy division of the academy was a structure of the Royal family, if the elders were to succeed in the procedure, the item would go to the Royals.

'That is still fine since I can't really stop them. Yet, if I was to personally help them gather the needed materials, what will my family think?'

Daniel thought.

'Maybe this is also a test from the Royals, they want to show me their goodwill in case I was to work for them and they also want to assess my loyalty toward the Cause.'

He was struggling to make a choice.

'Dammit, it's a rank 5 item! How many decades will pass till I will be able to watch a similar event?'

The truth was that Daniel really liked being an alchemist.

The idea of taking various ingredients, mixing them together, and creating something miraculous had always intrigued him.

That's why he disobeyed his family's orders and joined the alchemy division to learn that mystical art, he couldn't just play the good heir in front of something that he liked so much.

After a few seconds spent in doubt, he opened his mouth to ask a simple question.

"Can I bring whoever I want with me?"

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A week passed.

A man dressed in a black robe arrived at the bottom of a solitary mountain where a small passage could be seen.

'This should be the place. It's so strange, even from here the density of "Breath" is already below the average.'

That man was, of course, Noah that had just reached his destination.

'I guess the previous Royal family wanted to keep their criminals in a place where they could not cultivate. I don't understand why the Elbas family would let go of such a peculiar place though.'

Noah inspected his surroundings but he couldn't find anything unusual.

'It should be something in this mountain or even at the bottom of the dungeon, maybe it's due to some strange mineral like the "Breath" blessing.'

He judged before putting those thoughts in the back of his mind.

He had come there for one reason, he wanted to test the limits of his newly obtained body!

'I can't express my full potential if I don't know what I'm capable of! Also, with my "Breath" blessing, I don't have to fear exhaustion due to the absence of "Breath".'

Thinking that, Noah entered the cavity at the base of the mountain.

Chapter 223 - 223. Mine

Ancient was the perfect adjective to describe the state in which the dungeon was.

As soon as Noah entered the cavity at the base of the mountain, he was met with a dusty and decrepit sight.

'It doesn't seem that the magical beasts have reached the surface yet. They should be on the lower layers.'

Noah thought, inspecting the ground floor of the Bare Dungeon.

It was a large cave with only a few rusty cells still resisting the passage of time.

The wooden furniture had long dissipated in the past two thousand years, leaving only some random items made of iron or similar in the wide room.

Noah didn't find anything valuable there so he decided to continue his trip toward the lower levels.

The place was dark and all light sources had succumbed to age, yet, for mages like Noah, darkness wasn't a hindrance at all.

At the end of the room, Noah found a passage leading downward which he crossed without hesitation.

'The "Breath" is diminishing.'

He noted in his mind as he descended in the first layer.

Another big room unfolded itself in front of Noah, however, that one had many more cells than the one on the surface.

'Here should be where they kept low-level criminals. It's strange though, the walls seem stable even after so many years which means that the previous Royal family had done a really impressive job when they created this place. Why abandon it?'

He didn't think that the Elbas family would abandon such a good structure without a valid reason.

'Maybe they wanted to converge the power on the capital, they want to create an army with criminals after all. Yet, it does still seem quite a waste.'

Doubts assaulted his mind but he could only repress them.

Many important matters were handled by cultivators in the heroic ranks, common human cultivators could not even imagine the number of secrets kept by them.

Noah had learnt some of them due to his peculiar situation but they were only the tip of the iceberg, who knew how many secret matters had happened in two thousand years of rule.

There were three almost identical rooms in that layer, with each of them having a passage that went deeper in the ground.

'Since I'm looking for magical beasts, I should follow the higher density of "Breath".'

Noah had come there to test his new strength, he couldn't bother with the secrets of that place.

Also, if even the current Royal family had abandoned it, that meant that any kind of useful item had already been plundered.

Noah descended for some time.

He had passed more than four layers already but he still had to find any magical beast.

'How deep is this place exactly? There is barely any "Breath" left in the air, this is definitely not a place where magical beasts would choose to live.'

Magical beasts fed on "Breath", of course they would set their lairs in an environment with a high density of it.

'Excavating worms live underground, creating tunnels and underground lairs. Even if they are weak compared to other creatures, they still need an incredible amount of "Breath" to reach the fourth rank. I thought that with two thousand years of accumulation, that could be possible but the concentration

of "Breath" is far lower than what I expected. How exactly did they manage to survive?'

After reviewing all the information that he knew about that type of creature, Noah neared one of the walls of the room and strongly punched it.

The rock was hard but a few shards still broke under the power behind Noah's attack.

'The only nourishment that they could have was the same terrain that composes this dungeon.'

Noah thought, picking up one of the small pebbles that fell from the wall and inspecting it carefully.

The rock was brown and didn't seem to have anything special with it.

Noah then used a small part of the "Breath" in his dantian and passed it over the rock.

The "Breath" didn't damage the rock and harmlessly dispersed in the air, yet the quantity in the air didn't match the one used by Noah.

Part of the "Breath" had disappeared without leaving any trace.

'Don't tell me, this is a mine of Obsidian Credits!'

The Credits were the currency used by cultivators, they had value in their eyes because they contained "Breath".

Yet, they came in two forms.

The first one was in their rocky state when they were still absorbing "Breath" into their core.

The second one was in their crystal state, in which they transformed after enough "Breath" was absorbed and that was then used by the cultivators as a currency.

'I understand, they are letting this mineral develop in order to mine it when it reaches the crystal form. The worms ate the terrain to create the lair and developed thanks to the "Breath" in it. Though, there should be more than a single rank 4 specimen then.'

Noah looked at the rock in his hand for a few more seconds before throwing it back on the floor while shaking his head.

'Abandoned my ass! I bet that the Royals come here every few decades to clean the area and disperse the "Breath" of the magical beasts back into the environment to accelerate the creation of Credits. Well, at least now I'm reassured: as long as I'm careful, there shouldn't be hidden dangers.'

The "Breath" that he had just used and dispersed in the air reached the walls of the underground room.

At that moment, some slight tremors began to run through the dungeon as if something was crawling under it.

'Ohh? They are quite sensitive.'

Noah wasn't surprised by that reaction and prepared himself for the imminent assault.

'Three, four.... Not even ten of them, I'm still far from the lair.'

Noah counted in his mind as he analyzed the vibrations in the soil and used his mental energy to cover the entire room.

Then, the terrain broke and a four meters long and one meter thick worm came out of it.

The worm was in the third rank, it had red-brown skin and three circular rows of teeth as its mouth.

It didn't seem to have eyes but it still jumped precisely at the standing Noah.

'Finally.'

However, he didn't budge nor did he take out his sabers.

As the worm arrived at his position, Noah's hand shot and sealed itself around the worm's mouth, strongly squeezing it.

A rank 3 beast was blocked by a single hand!

Chapter 224 - 224. Strong

The rank 3 Excavating worm struggled to escape Noah's grip but to no avail.

The hand was sturdy, its fingers strong, the flesh of the beast could not withstand the pressure that they applied on it.

The worm screeched as blood began to flow from its oral cavity but there was nothing it could do, it was against a rank 4 body after all!

Noah silently watched as his hands closed into a fist, turning the beast's head in meat paste.

A rank 3 beast was killed by a single move without the use of spells or techniques!

'This...'

A cold smile appeared on Noah's face as he evaluated the power that his body held.

However, his thoughts were interrupted since two more worms came out of the terrain and jumped at him.

Noah activated the Shadow steps spell and dashed toward one of the beasts.

A small black circle appeared under his sole but it was shattered by the raw power behind Noah's movement, it didn't give any further acceleration.

A rank 0 spell could not increase his speed now that he had a rank 4 body!

Yet, Noah had never sprinted faster in his life!

He reached the worm while it was still mid-air and directly threw a punch to its mouth.

Noah's fist clashed with the rows of teeth of the beast, shattering them and piercing its body from the inside, the teeth were only able to lightly cut his skin.

Then, the other beast reached him but Noah simply gave it a strong blow with the elbow of his free arm.

The elbow smashed on the worm's head and tore everything in its path, teeth and blood flew out in every direction as the beast was sent flying toward one end of the underground room.

Noah then turned toward the beast stuck on his arm and punched it, smashing its head and killing it with that blow.

Three rank 3 magical beasts killed in four moves using only the sheer power of his body!

'This is what I worked so hard for.'

He thought, looking at the corpse on the ground.

The remaining five worms came out of the ground and warily encircled Noah.

Their intelligence was low but they still understood when an opponent was too strong for them.

Sadly, their hunger was unbearable.

They had to feed on the terrain to sustain themselves, the only other living beings that they could eat were the specimens in their same pack, a human being was an irreplaceable prey in their sights.

However, Noah wouldn't just wait for them to attack.

He directly jumped toward one of them, his speed was incredible, he arrived in front of one of the worms in an instant and delivered a strong kick in the middle of its body.

The worm screeched as his skin was pierced, yet it survived.

It had to be said though that Noah did that on purpose.

He knew that the weak point of those types of magical beasts was their head, where their mouths were, yet he wanted to test the amount of damage he could inflict if he focused a non-vital part.

The outcome made him quite satisfied: he couldn't instantly kill the beast but its body had been almost severed in half by a casual kick.

The other worms took his assault as a signal to begin their attack, they jumped at Noah from four different directions with their mouths drooling saliva that traced transparent lines in the air.

Noah stomped with his foot over the head of the beast under him and moved.

His fists shot toward two beasts while his knee crashed with another one, as for the last worm, he had better plans for it so he dodged its attack.

Four more rank 3 magical beasts had died in just a few instants.

'Finally, I have some power.'

He couldn't stop smiling seeing the dead beasts on the ground.

Those were rank 3 magical beast!

'I went from killing my first one thanks to the element of surprise created by the Kesier rune, to being able to kill them without any technique. This power is what I've desired for so long, the power of the heroic ranks.'

Noah turned toward the remaining beast.

The worm was scared stiff and tried to dig an escape route on the terrain but Noah focused his mental energy on it.

The beast could not move anymore, Noah's pressure was too heavy for it to resist.

'I've still some use for you, I should probably try that. A few drops of "Breath" should be enough to give me an idea of its power.'

The membrane around his heart tightened and a few drops of the "Breath" contained in it were inserted in his circulatory system.

Noah immediately felt a violent energy surging from within himself and watched as his blood vessels turned black, becoming visible from under his skin.

Noah seemed to have pulsing black worms all over his skin as his circulatory system was shown to the beast.

The few scratches that he had just received from his clashes with the worms' teeth healed immediately but Noah hadn't used the ability of the Yin body to mend his wounds.

Noah charged at the immobilized beast and delivered his strongest fist to its body, making the whole creature explode due to the might of the impact.

Blood flew in every part of the room, leaving only Noah and his excited smile in it.

Eight magical beasts in the third rank had been physically overwhelmed by a human, that left him particularly happy about his recent breakthrough.

'I guess they are just ants in my eyes now.'

Noah concluded in his mind as he watched his veins return to their normal state.

'Those drops of "Breath" were a bit overkill, one would have been enough. At least, it seems that the ability of my body is not that hard to control, I just need to use the energy before my blood vessels explode.'

Noah had seen a rank 4 body when he fought on Twilboia Cliff.

Yet, Kevin's transformation seemed harder to control and needed a casting time while Noah's empowerment was almost immediate and the only danger was the buildup of internal pressure in his body.

'If I had met the wind mage with my current strength, maybe I wouldn't have needed for the representative of the Royal family to inflict such a heavy injury to defeat him. I guess I'm quite strong now.'

Chapter 225 - 225. Party

Noah gathered all the corpses in his space-ring.

He had used only his body to fight them so he was in his peak form, only a few drops of "Breath" in the membrane around his heart were lost.

'The liquid "Breath" in my body should be refilled autonomously by my dantian over time, there is no need to stop just yet.'

He resumed his exploration toward the lower layers with his head full of thoughts about his recent fight.

'The Shadow steps spell is useless in battle now that my body is in the heroic ranks, it can help me only during my flight. Also, my running speed is now higher than my flying one, my blood companions are falling behind my improvements.'

Echo and Shadow were created from rank 3 magical beasts, their power was fixed, they could not overcome the limits of the human ranks no matter how much Noah's centers of power increased in power.

'Should I attempt creating a companion from a rank 4 creature? Can I even do that?'

Noah evaluated that idea but then he shook his head.

'I'm not even sure if I can kill one of them, let alone subduing it in my sea of consciousness. I should wait for my mental sphere to reach the third rank to be safe, one mistake in the taming process and I might end up like Ivor. If things really become too dangerous, Echo and Shadow should still provide some help while I'm in the Demonic form.'

When he reached the end of the passage that he was crossing, he found twenty Excavating worms waiting for him at the entrance of the layer.

'I guess I should see how much power of my martial art I can express now.'

Noah though, smiling coldly as two white sabers appeared in his hands and jumping straight in the center of the group of beasts.

Meanwhile, a luxurious carriage stopped right in front of the entrance of the Bare Dungeon.

It had a rank 2 Mountain bull tied to its reins and a series of inscriptions on all its sides.

The door of the carriage opened and four young men and a young woman calmly exited it and inspected the environment around them.

"This should be the place, it's quite hard to be mistaken with such a low density of "Breath" in the air."

One of the men spoke and then turned toward the man at the back of their group.

He was wearing a white robe adorned with golden inscriptions that seemed to have defensive proprieties.

He had short silver hair and a slight but warm smile on his face.

"Yes, Milo, this is definitely the place."

That man was Daniel who had just arrived at the Bare Dungeon with his party.

Milo lowered his head in sign of respect and hid a smile behind that gesture.

Daniel then continued to speak.

"I want to use this moment before we enter the mountain to thank you all again for joining my mission. I know that you are busy with your lives and that the task from the alchemy division was quite sudden so I want to be sure that you understand how much I appreciate your company. Thank you, friends."

Daniel's words were warm and well-spoken, it was clear that he was used to conversing with other nobles.

"We aren't worthy, my Lord. I chose to follow you the moment my eyes first saw your figure. I don't care if my family is against the Cause, once I become matriarch, I will offer you the full support of my family."

The woman spoke in a stern tone but she could not hide some traces of blushing from appearing on her face.

"I and the Udye family will never forget your vow, Phoebe."

Daniel answered her words and lightly caressed her face, making her blush even more.

"Phoebe is right, we are all with you. My Orgoo family and your Udye family has been allies for centuries, the Royals can't divide such long-lasting friendship."

If Noah was there, he would recognize the man that had just spoken.

He was Troy Orgoo, one of the youths that had passed the entrance test in Ebonrest city with him.

"Mh. Our force is not weak, three of us have a rank 4 body and we are all equipped with inscribed robes in the second rank. Even if we met with the rank 4 specimen, I have full confidence that we can escape. Who knows, we might even attempt to kill it!"

Daniel cheered everyone's morale with his words and moved toward the entrance of the dungeon, followed by the other four cultivators.

"Lord Daniel, ehm, what do you know about this place? Why is the "Breath" so scarce here?"

The man that had been silent till that moment was Manuel, the student that Noah had defeated to obtain his last accommodation in the academy.

"I requested some reports from my family. Apparently, this whole mountain will become a mine of Obsidian Credits one day so the Elbas family has emptied its contents to accelerate the creation of the mine. They come here every few decades to prevent the creation of a threatening pack of magical beasts though, so it's not completely abandoned."

Daniel explained in a plain tone but the others in his group shot dissatisfied gazes to Manuel.

They all knew what had happened in the academy.

He lost in a fight against someone without a noble background, making the nobles lose face in front of the other students and also injuring himself.

The injury slowed his cultivation speed and left a trauma on his personality, ultimately leading him to still have a rank 3 body.

It was obvious that his name was usually mocked among the circle of nobles due to that event.

"And, when was the last time that the Royals cleaned up this place?"

Manuel was unmoved by those stares and continued to ask questions.

"It should have been almost fifteen years ago, there should be a large number of rank 3 worms in there."

Chapter 226 - 226. Holes

Of Daniel's group, only three of them had a rank 4 body.

One was, of course, Daniel, while the other two were Milo and Phoebe.

However, with the exception of Daniel, all of them had their mental sphere still in the first rank, even though some of them were extremely close to the breakthrough.

It couldn't be helped, the sea of consciousness was the hardest center of power to train: not only did it require a long amount of time and a painful training, but it also needed for the mental sphere of the cultivator to be thick and sturdy.

Such requirements could not be met by such young cultivators, especially if their social status was lofty and comfortable.

Sufferings and hardships were required to harden the mental sphere, things that nobles of wealthy families rarely encountered.

They had access to a large number of pills and potions that targeted that center of power but their effects could not match real-life adversities.

Only Daniel, who lived under the constant pressure of being the focal point of the Cause, could achieve a rank 2 sea of consciousness by the age of twenty-three.

Being made of rank 1 mages though didn't mean that the party was weak.

They were still rank 2 cultivators equipped with protective items in the second rank.

They all had a rank 4 martial art and inscribed weapons that suited their combat style, underestimating them would be a mistake.

The five nobles crossed the entrance of the dungeon and immediately noticed something.

"Someone is here!"

Milo exclaimed, giving voice to the thoughts of his companions.

There were clear signs of Noah's passage on the dusty floor, it hadn't even passed half a day since his arrival after all.

"Someone from the Royal family?"

Phoebe asked but Daniel shook his head.

"Unlikely. The footprints belong to a single person and the Royal army always sends at least five men on each mission. It can only be a hunter or some lone cultivator looking for hiding."

Milo snorted when he heard those words.

"Lone cultivators... This name is too nice to describe what they really are: criminals!"

In a political system like that of the Utra nation, a lone cultivator was almost always a criminal or a fugitive.

Techniques and spells were held by the nobles after all, it was impossible to accomplish something in the cultivation journey without having any relationship with them.

"So, what do we do about this?"

Troy asked timidly, turning his gaze to Daniel.

"If he is a lone cultivator, we will question him and decide if he needs to be apprehended. If he is a hunter, we will try to buy the corpses of the worms that he has killed."

Daniel answered casually, as if what he was saying was the most obvious thing in the world.

The others in the party nodded at Daniel's upright decision.

In their situation, anyone could have easily decided to take advantage of the unlucky fellow and make some gains out of him.

They outnumbered him and that location was quite remote, no one would find clues of a battle if they were thorough in covering them.

Yet, Daniel didn't even consider that possibility, improving even more his image in front of his party.

Such behavior was the complete opposite of the cultivator that was in the lower layers, smilingly killing magical beasts.

Noah waved his sabers with impeccable dexterity, in only a few minutes, the last beast was killed, leaving more than thirty corpses laid on the ground.

'I'm getting closer but I still have to see any rank 1 or 2 worms. Are they in the center of the pack being fed to stronger beings?'

Noah thought about the possible options while he gathered the corpses.

'It should be like with the Albino snake, just for a different reason. The environment doesn't have enough "Breath" so they resort to cannibalism, the terrain can't match a living being after all.'

He moved toward a deeper area, raising his attention to the peak.

'I've killed more than fifty rank 3 beasts, if this is still far from the pack, then the report must have been quite old.'

He was certain by then that the Royal family was periodically cleaning the dungeon.

Magical beasts weren't as smart as humans but they weren't completely idiotic either: if the situation didn't force them, they would have already changed the location of their lair, especially with a rank 4 specimen leading them.

The fact that the pack still occupied that area was the confirmation that the beasts were purposely being kept there.

'All these efforts just to create a source of money, being the head of a country seems really annoying.'

Noah sighed internally thinking about how much time the Elbas family had invested in that place.

When he arrived in the lower layer though, the sight changed drastically.

It was still a detention room, with cells scattered randomly on the ground.

Yet, the walls were full of holes, signing the passage of a high number of magical beasts.

Also, the cells had biting signs on them and were vividly consumed, it seemed that something had sucked off the metal from each bar.

'Were these cells inscribed items?'

Noah guessed, nearing one of the cells to inspect it more carefully.

'Mh, they have eaten the inscriptions on them, I wonder how populous the pack is. Excavating worms are known for their high reproduction rate, I wouldn't be surprised if the Elbas family had purposely planted those beasts here for this reason.'

More magical beasts meant more "Breath" dispersed in the environment when the cleaning operations happened.

That method sacrificed the final amount of Credits obtained but accelerated their creation.

'I don't really know how much does it take for a Credit to form but two thousand years had passed already, the fact that I didn't find a single crystal means that I'm still at some distance from the core.'

Then, a sound forced him to stop his thoughts.

Each hole in the walls began to emit a crawling noise that echoed through the entire underground room.

'I can't really guess how many there will be like this, I hope they don't destroy the place.'

Noah wielded his sabers and prepared himself for the imminent assault.

At that moment, more than fifty worm's heads came out from the cavities around him.

Chapter 227 - 227. Bloodline inheritance

Fifty or so Excavating worms came out of the tunnels in the walls.

Noah waved his sabers without hesitation, sending tens of wind slashes flying in every direction.

Blood and heads fell down from the holes before the worms could even exit them completely.

In just one attack, more than fifteen worms had been killed!

Having a rank 4 body not only improved all his attacks but also removed the limit that he had on his martial art.

The Three forms of the Ashura was a rank 4 martial art, logically speaking, it had to match the might of a rank 4 magical beast!

However, Noah's centers of power were too weak, they could not allow him to express the true power of those forms.

Yet, now that he had a rank 4 body, some of that power could be unleashed.

Noah seemed to have six arms that relentlessly slashed the air, four of them though were still ethereal and could only express part of their true strength.

'My martial art is almost mastered!'

Noah thought as he jumped left and right to finish off the beasts that had encircled him.

Rank 3 creatures had never been a problem for Noah, yet that was thanks to the incredible power of his Demonic form.

With a rank 4 body though, he could kill as many as he wished without tiring himself too much.

Endurance had always been one of Noah's weaknesses since his battle prowess came from the Demonic form spell which expended a huge amount of mental energy, yet, with his body in the heroic ranks, he could show the results of his constant training.

Martial arts were weaker than spells after all, they did not have the same destructive power but they consumed far less energy.

Also, they depended on the ability of the cultivator.

Noah, that had fought for more than ten years with a saber in his hands, could finally show the difference in his ability!

Fifty rank 3 beasts weren't a threat for him, in ten minutes, they were easily killed.

'Once my mind and dantian reach the third rank, I can aim for the complete mastery of my art.'

He concluded in his mind, forcefully slashing with his weapons to remove the blood on them.

'This makes about one hundred worms in the third rank, they know my position by now.'

Noah neared one of the tunnels but he could not see its end.

After inspecting a few more tunnels and gathering the corpses, he became certain of one thing.

'Here is where the lair begins.'

It was at that moment though that something unexpected happened.

The floor of the underground room began to tremble and a loud crawling noise resounded in the area.

'Is this an ambush?'

Noah was surprised but still calm.

He came in the dungeon to test his strength against a rank 4 magical beast, defeating waves of rank 3 creatures wasn't a big issue.

However, no worm arrived.

The floor continued to tremble until deep cracks appeared on the terrain before it finally broke completely.

The ground crumbled, showing tens of worms that were eating the terrain below, creating tunnels that disrupted the stability of the entire structure.

'The fuck is that?'

Noah's concerns weren't aimed at the broken floor nor at the astute trap of the magical beasts but rather at the environment that became visible below him.

Hundreds of tunnels went in every direction in the terrain, it resembled the structure of a hive with many bigger tunnels that divided every section.

Also, in its deeper part, a pale halo shone, illuminating the intricate underground structure in which the beasts transformed the lower layers of the Bare Dungeon.

Echo's wings tore Noah's clothes and began to flap at his will and small black circles appeared under his soles from time to time, keeping him in the air while he inspected the situation.

'This isn't the usual layout of a worm's lair. The magical beasts have precisely dug passages over the years and created this. Did they inspire themselves to the previous structure of the dungeon? But that would require a higher intelligence than what they are capable of, unless...'

Noah remained at the same altitude over the huge numbers of tunnels and caves at a hundred meters below him.

All he could see were some random worm appearing and continuing in its excavation, it seemed that the beasts had given up on him when they saw that he could fly.

'Bloodline inheritance!'

That assumption echoed in his mind, creating waves of shock that assaulted Noah.

'This is incredible! It makes sense though, this is the perfect environment for the birth of a rank 4 creature with that quality.'

A bit of greed was exuded from Noah's eyes as he stared at the illuminated bottom of the lair.

'I have to kill it, I can't let go of this chance.'

A beast with a bloodline inheritance was a magical beast that had developed its sea of consciousness.

The sea of consciousness was, after all, the representation of the thoughts of a living being.

Beasts acted on instinct, they had not proper thoughts, leading them to have a vague imitation of the humans' mental sphere that could not be trained, they were even unaware of having it.

However, nature always found a way.

They were beings that relied on their bodies for everything, their blood contained their will even if it was so weak that it could be disregarded.

Yet, in the proper situation, that will could be empowered and passed down to their descendants or to those that ate them.

Little by little, that blood would accumulate and create a proper center of power, giving to a specimen a higher intelligence.

'Two thousand years of periodic extermination, forced to eat their own kind to survive, hating the humans that always left some of them alive. That hate has grown and accumulated over the years, carried by the blood of each beast in the pack until a rank 4 creature was born with a sea of consciousness that contained the hate of tens of thousands beasts. That hate is the inheritance passed down by the previous generations of these creatures, which ultimately gave birth to an intelligent magical beast, a miracle.'

Noah's expression broke into a smile.

'A miracle that I can eat.'

Chapter 228 - 228. Hate

The Excavating worms had been moved from their previous lair and planted in that barren environment.

Then, their numbers had been periodically reduced to prevent them from escaping from the dungeon, forcing them to resort to cannibalism or to eat terrain.

The blood of the beasts from two thousand years ago might have been lost, diluted during that huge amount of time, but the will that it carried remained.

It was enough for one beast to start to hate, tainting its body with a firm but weak emotion, for a chain reaction to be generated.

That beast died but its blood was shared among the beast that ate it, awakening a similar will on them.

The same happened to those beasts that continued to spread that contaminated blood.

Then, the cleaning operation would arrive, reducing their numbers and concentrating once again that emotion in fewer specimens, while being slightly increased in might.

Like that, years passed and that cycle repeated itself.

An entire pack that shared the same emotion continued to thrive and be destroyed, increasing the power held by its will.

Until, one day, the miracle happened.

A peculiar rank 4 creature was born, carrying an unusual concentration of contaminated blood.

That blood had the accumulated hatred of tens of thousands beasts, it became so powerful that the normal body of the magical beast could not contain it, leading to the awakening and developing of its sea of consciousness.

Because of that, it was called bloodline inheritance.

'At least, I know for a fact that the Royals aren't aware of this.'

Noah thought, standing mid-air with his eyes fixed on the deepest part of the lair.

As for why he was convinced of that, it was because the sea of consciousness of a magical beast that obtained a bloodline inheritance was considered among the best nutrients for the mental sphere of a cultivator.

A beast's mental sphere was still inferior to a human's one, which allowed a cultivator to freely absorb it!

'Is this considered good or bad luck?'

Noah couldn't help but have second thoughts.

On one hand, a beast with a bloodline inheritance was an extremely rare event, impossible to predict.

A pack of magical beasts had to be contained for thousands of years, hoping that one of their specimens would give birth to a strong will and pass it down.

Also, there were no available methods to test if such will was created, which ultimately led the cultivators to abandon every experiment on that field.

It was completely random after all, it was impossible to create an environment that had a high chance of success in giving birth to such a beast.

If one added the amount of time needed too, it was easy to consider any experiment in that field not worth the effort.

On the other hand, such a beast was smart.

It could learn from the environment, it could plan ambushes, it could define the layout of its lair to better suit its needs.

Also, it could use its pack to perform complex formations, overall it was a powerful foe.

'This mission has suddenly become far more dangerous than I expected.'

Noah was conflicted.

'If I let go of this chance, I will surely lose the bloodline inheritance, I don't believe that the Royals will miss it once they see the layout of the lair.'

The sea of consciousness of the creature would give a huge boost to his mental sphere and also increase his understanding of the magical beasts.

'Yet, I wasn't sure that I could kill it before I discovered its quality, now my chances have reduced even more.'

Minutes passed, with Noah calmly considering his possibilities.

'Fuck it, the Excavating worm has one of the lowest battle capabilities among the magical beasts and my spells are suited to fight large numbers of enemies. I have tons of potions and a "Breath" blessing, I'm more than prepared for this fight. Even if I can't defeat it and the pack tries to cut my escape route, I can just use the Demonic sword to create a way for me.'

Once he decided, he slowly descended toward the nearest cave, rousing the worms in the tunnels that gathered in front of him.

'Let's see if your will is stronger than mine.'

Meanwhile, in the upper layers of the dungeon.

Daniel and his group were warily inspecting their surroundings.

The tremors that made one of the lower floors crumble had surprised them and it had momentarily stopped their descent.

"Milo, what do you think?"

Daniel broke the silence.

Milo raised his gaze and shook his head.

"Something was destroyed in the lower layers but I can't deduce anything else. The "Breath" in the terrain hinders even the investigative technique of the scouts of the Elbas family. What should we do?"

Daniel looked at the ground below him for a while before nodding to the others with him.

"It's either the lone cultivator fighting or the beasts creating a mess. Either way, we should proceed downward to find the Excavating worms."

The other four nodded and waited for him to point to a direction.

Daniel had a large and detailed map in his hands, it was the complete blueprint of the Bare Dungeon.

After a quick inspection, he pointed toward one of the passages.

"This passage leads to the lower layers faster, even if on that one the concentration of "Breath" is higher. With our strength, fighting a few hundred rank 3 magical beasts is not a problem so we should descend quickly."

The cultivators didn't have any objection and went directly for the passage pointed by their leader.

Milo was in the front, he had specific techniques to investigate the environment, he could even surpass the perception of a rank 2 mage when he used them.

The group moved fast, they easily crossed a few empty rooms, getting closer and closer to the lair.

Then, they were met with the same scene that Noah had encountered.

It was a room with more than a hundred holes in the walls, with a constant crawling noise coming from them.

Chapter 229 - 229. Separation

"They are coming!"

Milo shouted and prepared for the assault of the magical beasts.

The others in his group did the same and set themselves up in a circular formation that covered every angle.

Daniel wielded a silver sword, Milo had two daggers, Phoebe held a spear with both her hands, and Troy and Manuel were ready with their swords pointed toward the walls.

"They should be only rank 3 beasts, no need to waste mental energy on them."

Daniel loudly ordered and the others nodded in approval, their strength was way superior to that of those weak creatures.

Three of them had a rank 4 body after all, using spells would be overkill.

The worms slowly came out of the tunnels and inspected the situation.

In the eyes of those simple beasts, the five humans in a circle in front of them were simply too scary.

They exuded a strong battle intent and they were working together, they would rather go after the solitary human in the deeper parts of their lair.

However, their leader had given specific orders so they jumped at them after a short moment of hesitation.

The result of that fight was quite predictable.

Sixty or so magical beasts in the third rank tried to encircle the cultivators but were vanquished in a few minutes due to the immense difference in power.

Daniel gracefully waved his sword which emitted sharp shining lights that cut the creatures as soon as they came in contact with them.

Milo inflicted precise wounds on every worm that came too close to the formation, killing each of them in one blow.

Phoebe used wide attacks, fully expressing the power of her long weapon, and preventing most of the creatures from coming close to them.

Troy and Manuel were slightly less impactful but still killed a few worms.

It wasn't that they were weak but rather that their three companions were much stronger than them.

When everything was over, Daniel moved to collect the corpses with a satisfied gaze.

His space-rings were already equipped with items that gathered the blood of the worms so the collection part was fast and smooth.

'I should collect three to four hundred of these to be sure. These ambushes are quite useful.'

He thought before being brought back to reality by a strong earthquake.

The room began to tremble just like it had happened to Noah.

"Milo?"

Daniel shot an inquisitive look to Milo but he could only shrug his shoulders in answer, he was confused about that situation too.

Then, cracks began to fill the floor of the room and big pieces of the terrain fell in the empty space downward, creating dark pits in the ground.

In the end, the ground broke and revealed the hive-like structure of the lower layers.

The five nobles didn't have any method to fly or to slow their descent.

When they lost their footholds, they fell straight into the nest, separating themselves during the fall when they managed to reach for a cave.

Meanwhile, Noah was running at high speed, killing as many worms as he could.

His tactic was simple: kill all the weaker beasts and have a one versus one against the rank 4 creature.

'Intelligence is useless if you don't have the necessary strength to use it!'

Those were his thoughts.

The fact that the rank 4 Excavating worm had a Bloodline inheritance and had awakened its sea of consciousness didn't directly increase its battle prowess.

Intelligence required means to be scary, it was almost useless if it didn't have ways to be applied.

That's why, Noah decided to vanquish its army before facing it, without the possibility of setting encirclements and formations, the threat of its intelligence would be greatly reduced.

However, the exploration of the lair revealed itself quite challenging.

Most of the tunnels were vertical and required the usage of his wings to effectively explore them.

Also, the worms could freely dig their way away from the battle, escaping Noah's chase and reorganizing in another area.

'This is annoying, I've only managed to kill around thirty worms since I entered the lair, they always escape when I kill too many of them. The way in which they escape is suspicious too, it seems that they are trying to lure me somewhere.'

Noah was chasing every trace of life that he found as he had planned, yet, when dealing with a beast with a Bloodline inheritance, he could not act in the same way he did with normal magical beasts.

He had to be wary of the plots and traps of his opponent, he couldn't just jump at every worm he saw.

'If I end up in a closed space with hundreds of magical beasts in the third rank and the leader, I might be in trouble.'

Then, a tremor ran through the underground area which made Noah stop his advance and jump in the air, warily inspecting the terrain as his wings kept him flying.

'Mh? Did it come from above?'

A sound shifted his attention toward the upper parts of the lair.

As he watched, two figures fell from one of the passages, doing their best to slow down their speed.

One of them was a woman wielding a spear that continuously tried to stab on the walls to create a handhold.

However, her efforts were vain since she could not exert much strength as she fell and her weapon always failed to stick in the wall.

The other one was a man with a sword that Noah found familiar.

He was panicking, looking at how the floor was nearing him.

Then, the woman gave up on stopping her fall and used the spear to launch herself toward the man.

Once she reached him, she grabbed him and prepared herself for the landing.

THUD!

A loud thud resounded in the area as the two cultivators hit the ground and created a cloud of smoke.

Noah was surprised and calmly went back on the terrain without moving his gaze from those two cultivators.

When the smoke vanished, he was able to see that the woman was squatting with a pained expression as she held the man safely in her arms.

Chapter 230 - 230. Wrong

A rank 4 body was extremely strong, inhuman even.

However, falling for a few hundred meters and landing while holding a person was too much even for those that had it.

Phoebe felt as if her legs were going to break.

Yet, they held on and she also managed to save Manuel who was still in her arms.

"Get off, I need to sit."

Phoebe said, waiting for Manuel to realize that he had been saved.

"Thank you so much! You saved my life, please take this."

Manuel took out a potion from his space-ring and handed it to Phoebe who accepted it without saying a word.

She then sat on the ground stretched her legs to speed up their recovery.

The injury wasn't bad but it still required a few days of rest to completely heal.

'What are they doing here? I thought that this danger zone wouldn't attract anyone. Wait, isn't that Manuel?'

Noah thought, looking at them.

He had retracted his wings out of habit, in case the two cultivators were hostile and tried to attack him.

After all, his ability to fly was extremely useful, he would rather hide it when he met with strangers.

His presence though couldn't be hidden and the two nobles soon noticed that someone was staring at them.

Phoebe raised her gaze and looked toward him with a surprised expression.

What she saw was a young man with long combed dark hair and a pair of piercing blue eyes.

His clothes were tight and black and a cold aura was spread all around him.

'He is wary of us.'

She concluded and began to speak.

"I am Phoebe, from the Ramgett family. I've come here with-"

However, her words were interrupted by a loud yell shouted by his companion.

"VANCE!!!"

Manuel had turned and had recognized Noah.

At that moment, all the accumulated anger that he had felt after their match exploded and he jumped straight at Noah.

Sparks accumulated on his sword as he ran at full speed toward the man in front of him, uncaring of the fact that his specialty was the long-range combat.

His anger had taken control of his body and all he could think of was to kill the man that ruined his cultivation journey.

However, Noah wasn't the same man that he had fought in the academy.

As soon as he saw traces of hostility, Noah attacked.

His speed was way higher than Manuel's one, allowing him to reach his position when Manuel was still mid-air.

That burst of speed surprised Manuel but there was nothing that he could do about it.

He could only watch as Noah's saber slashed his waist and used his other hand to grab his throat.

THUD!

Noah roughly slammed Manuel on the ground and pointed a saber to his head, his foot pressed on his throat to hold him still.

Then, another saber appeared in his free hand which he pointed toward Phoebe.

"Why are you here?"

Manuel's robe denied all the damage of his weapon.

Also, he had decided to hold back.

After he recognized Manuel and Phoebe gave some explanation, he was sure that there were more people in their group.

Their status had to be quite high too since those two cultivators were noble.

So, he decided to not instantly kill Manuel and probe them.

"Are you Vance from the academy?"

Phoebe asked in a surprised voice but Noah only pressed harder on Manuel's throat as an answer.

Phoebe understood the meaning behind his actions and hurriedly resumed her explanation.

"Wait! I am an heir of the Ramgett family and he is the heir of the Gousho family. We joined Lord Daniel in his mission to collect Excavating worms but we fell here after the floor of the Bare Dungeon crumbled."

Noah remained impassible but his thoughts raced like crazy.

'Daniel? What need does he have for the worms? Also, why did he bring these nobles with him? Couldn't he just use the guards of his family?'

Doubts assaulted his mind but then he focused back on the situation in front of him.

"How many are with him?"

Phoebe listened to his words and became slightly irritated.

"Can you stop threatening us? We are nobles! You need to give us some respect!"

She had never been treated so rudely in her entire life!

She was aware of some rumors that concerned Vance but she had never been too interested in them.

She was older than him after all, she wouldn't care about a nameless genius when she had the true genius of her generation on her side.

However, Noah didn't care for status and simply stabbed Manuel on the shoulder with the weapon aimed at his head.

The robe could not stop the strength applied by Noah and easily pierced the inscribed item.

Manuel's shout was suppressed by the foot on his throat but a few rough words could still be discerned.

"You...ruined...my...life."

Manuel struggled those words out of him but Noah simply stabbed his other shoulder without moving his gaze from Phoebe.

"We are five, we split up during the fall."

Phoebe said after seeing the cruel reaction that her words had caused.

"Why do you need the worms?"

Noah continued with his questions.

"I don't know, it was a mission of the alchemy division of the academy."

'Do they need some material? Why though, the worms are only useful for their blood.'

Noah was confused but he stopped trying to guess the intention of the alchemy division, he wasn't an alchemist after all.

'What should I do with these two?'

His pressing concerns were the two cultivators with him.

Noah lifted his gaze toward the upper parts of the lair and focused all his mental energy to inspect the area.

Echo helped too, scanning a large area around him.

Yet, its ability was heavily restricted in that environment, Noah didn't discover anything useful.

"Tell me, if you were me, what would you do now?"

Noah spoke casually.

Phoebe was a bit surprised and timidly gave an honest answer.

"Let Manuel go and help us escape the dungeon. Manuel has attacked you first but you used him to threaten me so you will have to answer for that."

"Wrong."

Noah said, crushing Manuel's neck with his foot.