

Chapter 261 - 261. Charming Demon Sect

Noah came out of the Broken Cup in a hurry.

His hair was messy and disheveled and his robe was untidy and open in many spots.

Yet, Noah didn't seem to care and ran directly from the gate leading to the countries of the empire.

'That damned woman will cause me troubles for sure!'

It was with those thoughts in mind that he hurried for the gate, it was time to leave Slyfall!

Meanwhile, back in the underground room of the tavern.

Gillian was still laying naked on a bed, pensively looking at fifty thousand Credits that were in front of her.

"Was he to your liking, Matriarch?"

A waitress neared the bed, handing Gillian a clean robe and her pipe.

"Well, yes, he was less inexperienced than I thought. Yet, he kept on interrupting the positions required for my technique, he maintained his awareness of me even while we were at it."

The waitress opened her eyes in disbelief and covered her mouth with one hand.

"Matriarch, don't tell me, did he discover our secret technique?"

Gillian shook her head and took the pipe from the bed.

"No, the diagrams of the Charming Demon Sect are long lost, the orthodox sects of the Papral nations have made sure of it when we were forced to escape. He must have simply felt the danger coming from our positions."

The waitress heaved a sigh of relief.

"Then, what should we do about him?"

Gillian took a long drag from her pipe and stared absentmindedly at the walls of the underground room for a while.

"I didn't manage to absorb any of his yang during our intercourse but he was still tainted with the scent of the Pink Rose, tracking him shouldn't be a problem."

She fell silent again, taking her time to slowly smoke.

"Go after him and retrieve the item, he should also have a considerable number of Credits due to how detached he was with his purchase."

The waitress bowed and turned to follow her orders but Gillian continued to speak.

"Oh, try to capture him. He has such a strong body for his age, I'm sure he can survive our cultivation method for many years."

The waitress bowed again and disappeared in the darkness of the room, leaving Gillian alone on her bed.

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Noah left the city of Slyfall, a few thousand Credits had to be spent to bribe the soldier appointed for that gate but that wasn't a problem for Noah.

He didn't really care if the investigations of the Royals would ultimately reach that city, he was sure that they couldn't operate so openly in another area of influence.

'I have finally managed to escape the domain of the Utra nation, there should be only nations affiliated with the Shandal Empire from now on.'

Noah had finally escaped the area of influence of the Elbas family!

However, there was no happiness or relief in his expression.

'That damned woman, she has actually tried to use me for a demonic technique! Having sex with her is a thing but being part of her cultivation technique? She can just keep dreaming.'

Gillian was quite beautiful, he didn't mind her request too much.

Yet, he had already noticed that something was wrong with her gestures but he didn't pay much attention to it while they were conversing.

However, after they had laid in bed, she had started performing strange positions which alerted Noah's senses.

'I couldn't even enjoy it because I had to change position every time to interrupt her... The map is the real deal at least.'

He had bought the most expensive item of the three and he was pleasantly surprised by its quality.

The map depicted the entire continent and highlighted all the known danger zones.

Also, it had the geopolitical division of each country and one could use his mental energy to inspect what information the map held.

The information mostly regarded their alliances and other general aspects but the owner of the map could add more details if he wanted.

The only flaw of the map was that it didn't show any detail of the three big nations, there were basically three large empty spots on the picture of the continent.

However, that was far more than enough for Noah.

'With this, I can stop running blindly in other countries and can actively choose a route. The only problem is, will Gillian let me go?'

The reason why he left in such a hurry was that he wasn't sure about Gillian's reaction.

He had done his best to please her without endangering himself but that didn't mean that he was out of troubles.

'Killing her wasn't an option, I can't just fight her in her own home and hope to escape the city afterward. Also, the maps were locked by the inscriptions on the tables, I needed her to be willing to hand them to me.'

Noah reviewed the events of the previous night before shaking his head.

'I did everything I could, now it's up to her. Well, if she really decides to rob me, I will just kill them all.'

Noah didn't think that Gillian would personally come to rob him, her position seemed quite important in that secret market, she couldn't just leave it.

'She seemed strong but I should have hidden my power quite well, there is a high chance that she will underestimate me.'

Noah had, after all, the aspect of a young man, most of the people that met him wouldn't believe about the rank of his centers of power.

'It is better if I don't make many stops though, I should get away from here first.'

The city of Slyfall was quite isolated from the society and the mountain range repelled strong magical beasts, preventing danger zones to form.

Basically, the area around the city was quite deserted.

'Dammit, they have come already.'

Noah felt ten presences in the distance that had their focus on him.

'I should let them follow me for a while, they might have reinforcements in the city, I'll just wait till I reach that mountain to kill them.'

Noah's eyes shone with a cold light as he continued to run with his usual hurried pace toward a mountain in the distance.

#### Chapter 262 - 262. Ambush

The mountain right after Slyfall didn't have a name but it was signed in Noah's map as a danger zone.

'It says that there is a pack of Loud eagles, they are strong in sound attacks but they usually prefer long-distance combat, I won't find them at the base of the mountain.'

Once he knew the type of magical beasts that occupied the mountain, Noah was immediately able to decide which was the safest place where to fight the cultivators behind him.

'They are picking up speed, it seems that they don't want to fight too far away from the city.'

Noah smiled under his hood and accelerated.

The ten cultivators following him were surprised by that gesture.

Noah was going quite fast already but that speed was still in the human ranks.

However, Noah's new pace completely surpassed that limit!

"He has a rank 4 body!"

One of the cultivators whispered.

"And he was able to perceive us, let's hurry!"

Two female voices sounded in the group following Noah, they had just realized that they had underestimated Noah.

Yet, they needed to retrieve the map, they couldn't just go back and reorganize.

'I've revealed the power of my body but they are still after me, they must have some confidence.'

Noah continued to run toward the mountain, those behind him weren't able to catch up but they also weren't losing ground, their speed was the same.

However, Noah could sense the usage of "Breath" behind him.

'Some of them are using spells to keep up, it seems that not all of them have a rank 4 body.'

That realization reassured Noah.

His trump card was the Demonic form spell and it was almost impossible to resist it with only a rank 3 body, it was enough for Noah to touch them and they would vanish.

'I can't be that naïve, they will surely use their number against me. I should avoid being encircled if possible.'

He was far away from his usual environment, he didn't know which techniques they used nor how organized they were.

'The forms used by Gillian weren't orthodox, it's safe to assume that her followers would use something peculiar too.'

There were many ways to fight in that world and Noah only knew a small part of them.

The academy had taught him well but the world was too big, it was impossible to learn every single technique, especially the unorthodox ones.

The mountain neared and soon occupied all of Noah's field of view.

'I should first make them lose track of me.'

As he had that thought, his figure was enveloped in black flames, disappearing completely from the sight of his followers.

"What!? A teleportation spell?"

"Calm down, he couldn't have gone far and we can still track his position thanks to the scent of the Pink Rose."

The cultivators stopped their march and gathered in a circle.

They stood in silence, they were using a specific technique to follow that peculiar scent.

"He is on the mountain."

"Yes, but he stopped at its base?"

"Is he trying to ambush us?"

"No, he probably thinks that his last spell made use lose track of him. Come on, let's go."

They spoke for a bit before deciding to resume their chase.

Meanwhile, Noah had appeared to one of the branches of the trees at the base of the mountain.

His attention was completely focused on his followers and Echo was using its innate ability to help Noah's perception.

'They are coming right at me, this isn't just luck. It must be Gillian's fault.'

Noah covered his figure with many layers of mental energy and proceeded to carefully inspect his body, he had been cautious the previous night but the actions of the cultivators behind him had aroused his suspicion.

However, even after he analyzed his body inch by inch, he couldn't find anything out of the ordinary.

'I guess I'll have to ask them.'

Noah dug a hole in the tree and hid inside it, he was preparing his ambush!

The ten cultivators reached the base of the mountain.

They had a clear idea of where Noah was but they couldn't pinpoint his exact position.

They were following a scent after all, there was a margin of error.

Yet, they still reached the area where he was hiding, they simply had to search and they would find him.

"Let's divide into five groups and search, we will meet at the center of this area."

The group of ten formed five groups of two people and continued their search for Noah.

They were all relatively close, if something happened to one group, they could immediately help them.

RUSTLE RUSTLE

One group of two sensed some movement behind a series of bushes and carefully neared them.

They slowly approached the area only to find that a plain-looking black panther was there, tossing around a large bat with its maws.

"They were just magical beasts."

"Mh, what a peculiar scene though, you don't see these types of beasts in this mountain every day."

The two women exchanged a few words and turned to continue their search but, to their surprise, the two beasts stopped fighting and jumped on them.



"Hmph, merely rank 3 beasts, learn your place."

One of the women snorted and attacked with a whip that had suddenly appeared in her hands.

The whip tore the panther's chest and severed the bat's head, making the woman relax at that sight.

However, the beasts still moved after being mortally wounded and reached the two cultivators, stabbing their remaining fangs on them.

"Fucking beasts!"

The two tried to react but they soon understood that something was wrong.

The beasts had a long fuming line that connected them to something at the top of a tree.

Then, black smoke began to envelop the two beasts, spreading to the women that they were holding still.

Screams resounded at the base of the mountain, turning the attention of the other eight cultivators in their direction.

What they saw was gruesome.

A fuming bat and a fuming panther were biting with all their might their two companions and black smoke continued to envelop their figures, consuming their skin and flesh.

They were too engrossed by that sight that they were one step too late in noticing that black flames had appeared behind two of them.

Chapter 263 - 263. Warp

'Second Form of the Ashura!'

Noah immediately used his strongest attack.

The ten cultivators had their features covered in black hooded robes, he couldn't distinguish them with only his eyes.

However, if he relied on his senses, he could understand which one of them was the strongest.

They were his first targets.

Using his blood companions to create a diversion and executing the Warp spell to catch by surprise the strongest cultivators, that was his simple but effective plan.

His six arms joined together to slash at the incredulous cultivator.

His heart pumped liquid "Breath" throughout his body and his white sabers released black smoke, he was using his most powerful moves without hesitation.

The cultivator below him could just watch as the air above her distorted and a vertical cut severed her in two.

"Surround him!"

An order resounded from the assailants but Noah didn't allow them to take the initiative.

Black flames enveloped his figure again and he reappeared behind one of the remaining powerful cultivators.

One clean diagonal swing with his joint sabers severed the hooded figure in half, of the ten cultivators, only six of them were still alive.

Noah was using the Warp spell with extreme precision, appearing right in the blind spot of each enemy.

Also, that spell made up for the weakness of the Second Form of the Ashura, even though his attacks were slowed by the pressure on his arms, the surprise effect didn't allow his enemies to dodge.

Noah warped again.

The remaining cultivators anxiously turned, they tried to intercept Noah's sneak attack.

However, Noah didn't teleport behind any of them but in front of two of the weakest ones.

'First Form!'

His sabers multiplied mid-air and slashed at the two helpless cultivators.

Ten fuming attacks crashed on them, their bodies were only in the third rank, they were powerless against Noah's offensive.

Then, Noah sensed a strong fluctuation in the area around him and hastily deployed his wings to shoot in the air.

BOOM!

Two fireballs and two columns made of ice converged on the terrain below him, creating a deep hole on the ground.

'I lost the initiative.'

Noah cursed in his mind as he watched the remaining four cultivators standing around him on the terrain.

They began to execute strange forms that affected the environment around Noah.

Inscriptions shot from their bodies and created deep signs on the terrain that then converged in the form of shining bullets toward Noah.

BOOM!

Another explosion resounded on the mountain.

Noah couldn't avoid that attack and was hit by the joint technique of his enemies, his flying speed was only in the human ranks after all, and he didn't have enough time to warp away.

"Is he dead?"

"Don't know, cultivators of the darkness element have strange spells."

"Didn't the Matriarch ask to bring him back alive?"

"Are you saying that you have the ability to capture him alive?"

The four cultivators spoke between themselves as they watched the gray cloud in the air that was created by their last attack.

'Quite peculiar, not only were they all women, but they can also perform these joint techniques.'

Noah thought inside the cloud as his fuming armor reformed.

He had activated the Demonic form spell at the last moment and managed to avoid any fatal injury, yet, that last attack had still managed to break the protection of his spell, arousing Noah's interest.

The women on the ground watched with wide eyes as the gray cloud darkened.

Black smoke covered the air around them and they gasped at the sight of what became visible after a while.

It was a black humanoid figure, with two short horns and a small tail.

It wielded two fuming sabers and its skin was uneven and moving, it didn't have a solid state.

Noah didn't hesitate, it launched a rain of fuming wind slashes toward the ground, disrupting the position of his enemies and forcing them to retreat.

However, his attacks were too deadly and two of them had a rank 3 body, even though they dodged Noah's slashes they were still hit by the toxic smoke.

Screams resounded in the black cloud that was being created on the ground, the last two cultivators knew that it was time to retreat.

Yet, one of them was hindered by a black panther that had suddenly appeared in front of her.

She immediately used her strongest spell to open a path.

Countless ice shards formed right in front of her and then shot toward the panther, destroying Shadow's body repeatedly.

However, Shadow wasn't a living being, its body reformed after each destruction and continued to interrupt the woman's escape.

"Damned beas-!"

Her phase was interrupted since Noah appeared right behind her and severed her head.

The last of the group was running at a high speed back to the city of Slyfall.

She didn't have time to care about the cries behind her, she could only do her best to keep her life.

Nevertheless, black flames appeared in front of her from which a young man with a cold gaze came out.

She wanted to speak but the man directly slashed at her, his sabers bent the air and neatly severed her legs.

The woman began to fall but Noah grabbed her head and threw her back toward the mountain.

She was smashed on the ground, her head felt dizzy but the pain coming from her severed limbs kept her aware of her surroundings.

Noah slowly walked toward her.

His complexion was slightly pale, he had used the Warp spell for a total of five times and he had also transformed in the Demonic form, his mental energy had mostly depleted.

Yet, he had managed to win the battle virtually unharmed and he had finally used all his abilities.

'It seems that I still can't use the Demonic form and Warp at the same time, they consume way too much mental energy and using them together would just increase that consumption.'

He had deactivated the black smoke before warping, he wanted for the teleportation to be as precise as possible.

Noah arrived in front of the woman and squatted toward her, uncovering her face in the process.

The beautiful face of a young woman was shown to him, yet, that sight wasn't enough to melt his cold gaze.

"I'll be honest, I will never let you live. Why don't you simply answer my questions so I can avoid torturing you?"

Chapter 264 - 264. Torture

"I'll never betray the Matriarch!"

The woman gritted her teeth and spoke with a firm voice.

Noah sighed and grabbed her hair as he walked back on the battlefield.

The woman screamed and cried but Noah was unmoved, he simply returned at the base of the mountain and left her on the ground.

Then, he went looking for the remains of the other nine cultivators but he wasn't able to find much: he had fought using the partial Demonic form for the whole time, the toxic smoke had devoured most of their bodies.

They had one space-ring each but they only contained their weapons, there weren't any potions of wealth inside them.

'It seems that they were afraid of being recognized. I understand the absence of Credits but bringing no medications is quite foolish.'

Noah shook his head and gathered the weapons in his space-rings before destroying those of his enemies and clearing every remaining trace of their battle.

Only he and the surviving woman remained.

"I understand that you don't want to reveal your identity but I'm still interested in your techniques. How are you able to perform inscriptions by just moving in that strange way?"

That last spell was able to break Noah's defenses, he had to admit that he was quite surprised by its power.

However, the woman didn't answer and turned her head away from Noah.

"You spoke of a Matriarch, are you referring to Gillian?"

The woman's breathing stopped for a moment before resuming at a normal pace.

"Let's see if I have understood correctly. Gillian asks each man that comes to purchase from her secret market to spend the night with her. Yet, that's just a way to perform an unorthodox technique, I believe that's a cultivation technique of some sort."

The woman's eyes widened but Noah continued with his speech.

"Also, her followers are all women who are able to perform even stranger techniques, I can't help but think that she is in charge of some organization."

Noah had his head raised as he spoke those words, he was trying to link every detail that he remembered.

"Then, she doesn't even allow her followers to bring potions or pills in their missions. For someone that has spent his life hiding, I can recognize those that do the same."

"You have no proofs."

The woman finally spoke.

"Nor do I care. The way I see it, if a man is so weak that can't suppress his arousal, he deserves to die at Gillian's hands. I just want the theory behind your joint attack, I can't neglect the knowledge of the other countries in the cultivation field."

The woman listened to his words and gulped, suppressing the pain coming from her missing limbs.

"The technique originates in the area of influence of the Ultra country-"

Noah wielded a saber and severed one of her arms.

"That's a lie and I've never asked for its origins, you just want me to think that you have given up."

The woman cried in pain as another of her limbs was cut away.

She had a rank 4 body, her vitality was extremely high but that wasn't an advantage in that situation.

A high vitality meant that she would be able to resist for a longer time under Noah's torture and he didn't seem to have any restraint in doing it.



"It's a martial art! It is extremely similar to a spell in power since there are more people performing it. That's all I know!"

'So, they just use quantity to make up for the lack of quality. Martial arts are weaker than spells but, if enough people perform them in harmony, they can match their power. It seems too easy.'

Noah fell deep in thought, his mind tried to remember every detail of that attack.

'Those were clearly inscriptions but their creation was too fast.'

"It's a formation, right? You use your bodies as the cores of the formation and use a martial art to power it, creating a devastating effect."

The woman nodded at his words, she was quite surprised that he could understand so soon how it worked.

"Is there a version that can be performed by a single person?"

"No, they are battle formation especially created for groups of people."

"Oh, right, how could you pinpoint my location?"

"The scent of the Pink Rose of the underground room is all over you, we have a technique that can trace it. It will naturally disappear in a week."

Noah nodded at her and stabbed his saber on her heart.

Black smoke came out of his weapon that quickly devoured every trace of her.

'I guess that the other nations have managed to create formations that can be deployed almost immediately, that increases the power of their weaker cultivators by a large margin.'

Noah checked his condition and decided to resume his march for a few days before finding a place to rest.

'I shouldn't underestimate weaker cultivators from now on, there are simply too many techniques that I'm unaware of. The safest approach would be to increase the level of my centers of power but that would slow my travel by a lot.'

Noah picked the map and unfolded it.

'The countries under the Empire's influence occupy almost half of the continent and I want to reach the opposite border in order to feel completely safe.'

Noah searched on the map for a country that fitted his needs.

He needed to find a place between the Shandal Empire and the Papral nation where he could develop, what he needed was time to raise his strength.

'War zone.'

Noah read those words while he inspected the countries on the opposite border with his mental energy.

'Efrana, war zone. Only place where the defensive formation of the Empire has fallen. Constant battle between the Empire and the Papral nation. Mercenaries set their tribes there to have a better chance of being hired.'

The information on the map ended there but they were enough for Noah.

'It took me four months to arrive here and I have basically never stopped. The distance between this place and the nation of Efrana is even longer and I surely don't want to arrive there tired and exhausted. I've decided, I'll take my time to reach Efrana and then accumulate wealth as a mercenary, my centers of power should improve quite a bit before I arrive there.'

Chapter 265 - 265. Martial art

Noah was in a cave at quite a distance from Slyfall.

Two weeks have passed since he had been chased and he had used that time to increase his distance from the city.

Then, he had chosen to rest.

The scent of the Pink Rose had vanished by then and he needed to recover from the battle.

The cultivators under Gillian had a dantian between the solid stage of the first rank and the gaseous stage of the second one, adding the fact that some of them had a rank 4 body, they were basically on Noah's level.

However, Noah had a rank 2 sea of consciousness that had further improved after the Bloodline Inheritance.

Also, he had ambushed them, making full use of all his techniques and spells, expressing his experience in combat to the best.

'It definitely feels good to use all my power, hiding my strength for so long was becoming too annoying.'

Noah heaved a sigh as he thought of that.

In the Ultra nation, revealing his element would have alerted the Balvan family.

There, however, he could simply fight how he wanted.

Information would take a while to reach the ears of the Royals and they didn't have the same influence on that side of the formation.

'I should still try to leave as few witnesses as possible, I don't want another big organization taking interest in me.'

He had virtually suffered no injuries in the fight but his centers of power were still heavily stressed, four months of constant travel were still weighing on him.

Also, Shadow's figure in his sea of consciousness was full of cracks, the last spell from that cultivator had surpassed the limits of what it was able to endure.

'Rank 3 beasts are too weak but the will of a rank 4 creature is too strong, I'm quite sure that I can't contain it. It seems that I found another weakness of this spell.'

The Body-inscription spell was his first spell and was what had allowed him to surpass the other contestants in Eccentric's inheritance ground, it could be said that, if he had not fallen inside Twilboia Cliff, he would still be struggling to escape the grasp of the Balvan family.

That's why Noah valued that spell a lot, not only could it allow him to ably fight when outnumbered, but it was also what gave him the ability to fly.

However, those strong points were slowly being outclassed by his other powerful abilities.

The First Form of the Ashura was way more effective than a rank 3 beast and his running speed had long surpassed his flying one.

'Should I create another blood companion? To what end? Even if I forge it, it still won't be able to surpass the limits of the human ranks, my spells or martial arts would still be the better choice in every situation.'

Noah refused that idea.

'The main weakness of the spell is its requirements, the other one is its uselessness in these middle ranks.'

Having a rank 3 beast against cultivators in the first rank or with a rank 3 body was useful but it became pointless against stronger enemies.

Yet, to have a rank 4 creature as a blood companion, a cultivator needed to have at least a sea of consciousness in the third rank, meaning that he couldn't really use the spell for two entire ranks.

'I should focus on what can increase my battle prowess quickly, namely the Demonic sword and the new technique.'

Noah inspected his space-rings.

There were thirty-two buckets that contained the Undead chameleon's bones immersed in his own blood, their refinement had long ended but Noah didn't have time to resume his experiments.

'I have a basic outline of the sword in my mind but that will require another series of experiments and a long period of time, it's best if I focus on that after I near the center of the continent.'

The Elemental forging method required long procedures and many mistakes to succeed.

Noah had managed to create a shard of his finished product but that was only the simple version of his sword: something created only with two materials wouldn't be sturdy enough to last.

That's why he decided to leave that matter for when he was in a safer place.

'Then, I'm left with this.'

Two scrolls appeared in front of him, they contained the diagrams of his two rank 0 spells.

'Blind wasn't that useful. As my power increases, the number of enemies that rely only on their eyes diminishes, not even magical beasts do that anymore.'

Noah had bought that spell to increase the variety of his attacks but his power had increased too quickly and he was also forced to hide his element for the whole time, he really never needed to use the Blind spell.

'I can't even imagine to use it for what I want to do, I'll just store it for now.'

One scroll returned to his space-ring, leaving only one of them in front of Noah.

'Shadow step spell, rank 0. It was useful to complete my ability to fly and it has increased my battle prowess while I still had a rank 3 body. Its diagram is extremely simple since its power is limited, yet, it's really a pity to not be able to use such a useful ability.'

Noah's idea for a new technique was precisely about that spell.

He knew the importance of abilities that improved the mobility of a cultivator, his last fight using the Warp spell was a proof of the advantage that they could give.

'Martial arts are an imitation of spells, which means that I could theoretically turn this diagram in the forms of a martial art. Also, since my centers of power are on a superior level, I should be able to set its strength to a level that can be useful to me.'

Noah's eyes shone with excitement as he studied line by line each part of the diagram of the spell.

'Also, if I manage to succeed, I might also be able to mix some of the effects of the Warp spell in it. That would create an incredible martial art focused on agility!'

#### Chapter 266 - 266. Study

The process of the creation of a martial art from the diagram of a spell wasn't an easy one.

The first phase consisted in the identification of what effects each line of the diagram produced.

Then, a cultivator had to reproduce those lines with his body to obtain a similar effect.

The issue was that a spell was generated with a mixture of mental energy and "Breath", those two energies could be manipulated easily, it wasn't hard to follow the rhythm of a diagram with those.

A martial art, however, needed for the body to execute that rhythm while following the lines of the diagram, it was impossible for a material figure to have the same maneuverability of an immaterial matter.

That was why martial arts were generally weaker than spells, the body would not keep up with the rhythm of the diagram and would produce weaker effects.

Also, the fact that the Shadow step was a rank 0 spell, its diagram was extremely simple, it wasn't created to produce strong effects.

'Body, dantian, mind are the three centers of power on which a cultivator relies.'

Noah had his eyes closed, he was still in the same cave but the density of "Breath" was far higher than before.

He had taken out his "Breath" blessing and resumed his cultivation as he pondered over the creation of his technique.

'Spells are created from mental energy and "Breath", their complex diagrams and those two energies are what make them the strongest weapons of a cultivator.'

The knowledge learned in the academy stormed his mind, he wanted to consider all his options.

'Martial arts only use the "Breath" and the body, the lack of another type of energy is what eventually determines their inferior power. Also, a body can't execute complex diagrams, leading to simplified imitations of the spells.'

The Three Forms of the Ashura depleted a large amount of Noah's mental energy because he required an insane amount of concentration to perform it.

The mental energy was the representation of his thoughts after all, the more complex an action was, the more thoughts would be expended.

'Simply speaking, I would just obtain a martial art in the second or first rank if I just try to imitate the diagram of the Shadow step. That won't do, I need it to be in the third rank if I want it to have some utility.'

Noah was sitting cross-legged on the bare ground, his hands were joint according to the Dark vortex cultivation technique.

'Yet, my body alone is in the fourth rank, creating a rank 3 martial art might be useless too.'

The Shadow step spell could not withstand the power of his body, it was normal that Noah wondered if a rank 3 martial art would do the same.

'There is only one way to approach it: I will identify the lines of the diagram that produce the propulsions of the black circles and remove everything else. Then, I have to balance that simple effect on the strength of my centers of power.'

The more he thought about that idea, the more he felt as if it was the best course of action.

'The complete martial art should produce a sudden acceleration, yet, its weakness will be the need for a foothold to perform it.'



The black circles allowed Noah to stand on them before having the propulsion and he wanted to completely remove their creation from his martial art, meaning that he would need a foothold to perform it.

'Picking the simplest of the effects and then reconstructing it using my body as the foundation, it will take a lot of trials and practice.'

Noah sighed in his mind and interrupted his cultivation, his dantian had completely recovered by then and his body was at its peak form, there was no reason to delay the creation of his technique.

The diagram of the Shadow step spell was in front of him, Noah had observed it from time to time when he interrupted his cultivation.

However, he was now actively studying it, trying to discern the effects that each of its lines produced.

'That won't do. Not only my inscription method is different from the "attunement", but diagrams are meant to be performed as a whole, I can only test the effects of each line.'

It was after that thought that his study began.

Noah would use small amounts of mental energy to trace the diagram in his mind.

Yet, he would always interrupt it after some effects started to appear.

Half of a dark circle appeared under his sole but he forcibly interrupted its creation, making it vanish in the air.

The small line in his mind vanished and the mental energy accumulated there exploded, making his mental sphere tremble from the impact.

The shacking didn't last much but it was enough to make Noah frown.

'Forcibly interrupting a spell isn't really a safe process. Luckily, I'm working with a rank 0 spell, the energy accumulated in its diagram isn't that dangerous.'

That was one of the risks involved in the creation of techniques.

If, for example, Noah wanted to study part of the diagram of the Warp spell that way, he would incur in severe repercussions to his mental sphere.

Creating a technique wasn't easy.

Noah studied the diagram for days.

He traced longer and longer lines in his sea of consciousness, he needed to identify the part where the propulsion effect was added in the diagram.

That process was slow, not only Noah had to constantly interrupt the spell, but he also had to test the half-formed circles to see if he had reached the part that he was interested in.

His mental sphere trembled unceasingly in those days and Noah had to spend many hours resting to prevent the creation of any long-term damages.

However, in the end, he had successfully managed to isolate the part of the diagram that added the propulsion to the black circles.

'Finally, now it's time for the testing phase.'

Chapter 267 - 267. Repetition

Noah resumed his march toward the nation of Efrana.

His centers of power had recovered and he had decided the route to take, staying near the border of the Empire would only increase the chance of being found by the Royals.

The road toward Efrana was long, Noah needed to cross many nations and danger zones of which he only had a few information.

However, that was far better than his initial situation.

'This country is basically deserted, there are only some sparse danger zones, yet, I should find more human settlements in the next one.'

Noah reviewed the information on the map in his mind as he proceeded to walk in a strange rhythm.

He would take short steps, then he would suddenly accelerate, then he would stomp his feet repeatedly.

If anyone watched his actions, they would label him as a mad man.

Nevertheless, Noah was actually training!

He had isolated the lines of the diagram of the Shadow step spell that produced the propulsion effect of the black circles and he was currently trying to recreate those lines with his body.

What he knew about the creation of techniques were only the theories and the records of previous cultivators that had succeeded in it, there wasn't a set method for that.

Every new technique was extremely personal to the cultivator that created it, it reflected his attitude during the creation process and his preferences, there wasn't an established method for that procedure.

Yet, it was recognized that there were three main stages: isolation, experimentation, and perfection.

The isolation stage indicated the part when the cultivator decided and identified the effects that his technique had to have, it was called that way because most cultivators isolated certain parts of a diagram like Noah had done.

The experimentation stage consisted of attempts in the reproduction of those effects.

Many trials were needed when creating the forms of a technique, Noah was currently in that stage, trying to find the movements that produced a propulsion similar to the Shadow step spell.

In the end, the creation of a technique entered the perfection stage.

Once the wanted effects were successfully isolated and reproduced, what was left to do was perfecting those forms so that they could have the intended power.

Only after all those stages had been completed, a technique could be considered finished.

Noah had yet to find the right movements.

He would attempt in every kind of different move that he felt imitated the lines that he had isolated, however, he still couldn't achieve any results.

His body was partially made of "Breath", he didn't need to use the one in his dantian in that process, once his movement met the required rhythm, the propulsion would be produced.

That's how his days were spent.

Noah had previously decided to alternate two days of march to three days of rest and cultivation, he didn't want to neglect his training because of his travel.

Personal power was the most important thing in his mind, that wouldn't change based on where he was.

He spent his time traveling walking in that strange manner, limping and jumping around to synchronize his movements with the chosen lines of the diagram.

The other days were spent in caves or inside trees, making full use of his "Breath" blessing to obtain the best results from his cultivation technique.

His dantian steadily improved in that period and his mental sphere did the same, Noah could already feel that a breakthrough was nearing.

Three weeks had to pass for a change to appear.

Noah was still running in that strange manner, he was moving slowly, his training had a huge impact on his traveling speed.

Then, he pressed twice on the terrain, using just enough strength to continue moving forward, and the effect that he was expecting so much finally showed itself.

Noah felt a slight propulsion when his foot touched the ground for the second time.

He immediately stopped and focused all his attention on his left leg.

TAP TAP

He tried again to make the same exact action but he didn't manage to match the previous rhythm.

However, Noah tried again and again, he had finally found the right movement, he couldn't allow his body to forget that sensation.

Forty-one was the number of times that Noah repeated that movement before he was able to produce that effect again.

'Again!'

Noah didn't stop, he had to automatize that form before he continued to move.

The number of failed attempts between one successful form and another shortened.

It went from forty-one to thirty, from thirty to twelve, from twelve to four.

It was only at that moment that Noah stopped using his left leg and began to train with his right one.

Failed attempts piled on but Noah was becoming more and more used to that form.

When he managed to complete the right movement every four attempts even with his right leg, Noah returned to use the left one.

The day became night and the sun soon rose again in the sky.

Noah hadn't moved from his position for an entire day.

Two deep holes had been created on the terrain due to the constant repetition of that gesture, Noah's legs were buried in them but he didn't seem to care.

There was only the form of his new martial art in his mind!

When the sun disappeared again on the horizon and the night enveloped the world, Noah stopped his training.

He forcefully kicked his legs free and sat on the ground, his hand went autonomously under his chin as he fell deep in thought.

'I can now execute this form without making mistakes, the easy part is over.'

His body was basically still at its peak condition, he didn't use much strength while he memorized that move.

'The problem now is that I have to increase the overall power of this move, it can barely match a weak rank 1 martial art in this stage. I should first learn to perform it with my body and "Breath" at the same time though, I'll think about increasing its power later.'

Chapter 268 - 268. Chains

Noah's march became a bit faster.

Adding the "Breath" to his move wasn't a hard task, he had only to match his body's movements with it.

However, the results were already starting to satisfy him.

Noah ran at a normal pace but his speed suddenly increased every time he pressed twice on the ground with the move that he had memorized.

'This is the right feeling! I'm still far away from surpassing the acceleration that I can obtain by simply using the full power of my body though.'

He had a rank 4 body, a martial art that weak couldn't give him any real advantage.

'This is one of the issues with using the diagram of a rank 0 spell, if I limit myself to the simple imitation, I can only obtain a somewhat similar power.'

Noah had no use for a martial art with the power of a rank 0 spell, he needed something that could match the Three Forms of the Ashura for it to be useful.

'Well, if I had tried to work with more complex diagrams, I would still be in the isolation stage.'

Noah's fast results were mostly due to the simplicity of the spell that he was imitating, his hard work and dedication only helped in shortening the process.

'The form is basically set, now I have to see how far I can go with it and then apply some modifications.'

Reaching the limits of what the imitation of the spell could produce and then modifying it to raise its power, Noah knew what he had to do.

His journey continued quietly.

Noah spent his days doing what he liked the most, the feeling of having his centers of power becoming stronger after each session of cultivation was extremely appreciated by him.

The four months of escape didn't allow him to train at all, they were a huge blow on his morale considering his addiction to cultivation.

Yet, he had finally gone back on track and he had no imminent limit.

He had even absorbed again "Breath" in his sea of consciousness, that gaseous energy stood like a black cloud over the sea in his mental sphere, generating an incredible internal pressure.

Like that, his mind enlarged even during the days spent marching, he was really making a complete use of his time.

A whole month had to pass before he reached the next country.

The scenery was about the same, forests and small hills covered the landscape but the atmosphere felt way tenser to Noah.

'This country is inhabited and there is a high percentage of cultivators!'

Noah couldn't help but become warier of his surroundings.

He didn't really think that he could meet many people stronger than him, he was entering a country far away from the center of the Empire after all, there could only be that many powerful cultivators.

'Soprad nation, an underling of the Empire, I wonder how it is structured.'

The map told Noah those few information and he was quite eager to discover the differences between the peripheral countries in the area of influence of the Utra nation and of the Empire.

'It is said that the Empire gives to everyone a rank 3 body-nourishing method, I wonder how they manage to maintain control over the masses if that's true.'

The nobles in the Utra nation kept control over the population by restricting the access to techniques and spells, there could never be a revolution of the commoners there since they simply didn't have the means to cultivate.

Commoners saw cultivators as superior beings, they wouldn't ever think about rebelling.



Noah advanced, his pace was quite slow since he was still experimenting in his martial art.

During the last month, he had increased the amount of strength and "Breath" used when he performed his technique and he had obtained some satisfying results.

The martial art had reached the power of the second rank, Noah was using more power of his centers of power as he used it, it was obvious that its effect became stronger with it.

Yet, he felt that he had reached a certain limit.

No matter how more strength or "Breath" he put in the technique, the effects didn't increase.

Instead, they would completely disappear, meaning that the execution of the martial art had failed.

Noah knew that the lines that he had isolated from the diagram of the Shadow step spell had reached their limits, they simply couldn't express more power in that form.

What he had to do now was to make a modification to those lines in order to surpass the limits of the original spell.

However, he really didn't know how to do it.

'The creation of spells requires diagrams which are a composition of different lines in a certain order. Those lines are generally a form of inscription, cultivators study a natural event and reproduce it in the form of diagrams. That's quite a disadvantage for me.'

To recognize and translate an event in the form of inscription, one had to be proficient in the "attunement" method.

Noah's inscription method, however, was completely unrelated to Heaven and Earth, it was his will that set the meaning.

'I don't have any other spell from which I can isolate lines that express effects useful to me... Well, I have them but it's too dangerous to break up their diagrams with my current level. The only thing I can do is to create completely new lines but my inscription method works in a different way...'

The "attunement" method was the best option for the creation of new spells and techniques, practitioners of that method could literally hear the meaning of the "Breath" after all.

However, that method was precluded to Noah, he couldn't create diagrams with the help of the world.

'Either I find a way or I drop this idea until my sea of consciousness reaches the heroic ranks.'

He had never stopped moving while he had his mental discussion and he had arrived near a human's settlement.

The scene that unfolded in front of him was quite far away from his expectations.

It was a small encampment, with a hundred or so tents.

Yet, most of the people there had metal collars around their necks, linked together by large chains that were fixed on the ground.

#### Chapter 269 - 269. Slaves

'Are they prisoners?'

That was Noah's first thought.

He could recognize the strength of their bodies, they were all between the second and third rank, yet they seemed malnourished and exhausted, they resembled commoners while they moved.

'What are they excavating?'

All those people wearing metal collars were digging holes on the ground with their bare hands, some of them were covered in blood, Noah couldn't imagine how much work they had to do to injure their hands with the terrain.

The chains linked to the collars didn't allow them much freedom, they were fixed on the ground, forcing those prisoners to work in a circular area based on the chains' length.

Noah didn't find anything wrong with learning more about the situation, he had escaped precisely in order to stop hiding, he felt no need to avoid that encampment.

A layer of mental energy enveloped his figure as he moved forward toward the tents.

Noah soon discovered that the one in front of him wasn't the only camp, many more of them entered his field of view as he gazed toward the sea in the distance.

'The area there is quite crowded, is it because of the sea?'

The camps were more populated along the coastline while the ones more inland had had only a few hundreds of people, it was normal for Noah to think that the sea was the cause.

He walked casually toward one of the chained people and waved his hand to greet him.

"What are you excavating?"

Noah asked the first man in sight.

The man had his head lowered and completely ignored Noah, he was only focused on digging the terrain.

'Is he ignoring me or is the chain that forces him to work?'

Noah arched one of his eyebrows as he saw that the man didn't answer.

His gaze eventually went on the collar and then on the chain.

Inscriptions could be seen on both those items, their brilliance flickered under the daylight, they seemed to be applying some unknown effect to the chained man.

He was about to ask another question when a rough voice sounded from one of the biggest tents.

"Hey, you! Don't talk to the slave!"

'Mh? Slave?'

Noah first gave another look at the chained man and then he turned toward the voice.

A half-naked burly man who was still halfway through the entrance of the tent was looking at him in an angered manner.

"Who are you? These mining fields belong to the Empire!"

'Mining fields?'

Noah's eyes shone with a cold light as soon as he understood that there was something valuable there.

He performed a bow to the burly man and wore a wide smile before speaking.

"I wasn't aware of that, I'm just a traveler with very little knowledge of this country and it is my first time seeing an actual slave. I hope you can forgive this misunderstanding."

Noah's words slightly eased the man's temperament but he was still somewhat wary of him.

"You better get going, you can't disturb slaves when they are working, we have a schedule to keep up with."

The man snorted and folded his arms around his chest, his muscles became more evident that way.

'I can't understand his level but I don't feel any danger either, he should be as strong as me.'

Noah took out a jar of Ivor's wine from his space-ring, after his prolonged habitation with him, Noah had become used to stashing some for himself.

When he opened the lid, the scent of strong wine filled the area.

Noah took a slight sip from the jar but his attention never left the man, he was wondering if such a good wine could attract his attention.

Luckily for him, the man was immediately interested in Noah's jar, his eyes followed its movements in Noah's hand.

It couldn't be helped, Ivor's wine was of the best quality and extremely expensive, Noah was sure that a cultivator in such a remote location couldn't have access to something so precious.

"Hey, where did you get that? It's my first time smelling something so delicious."

"Oh, it's nothing much. Wine is a passion of mine and I like to keep a reserve of the most delicious ones."

Noah lied casually, he waited for an invitation from the man as he continued to drink from the jar.

However, the invitation never came, the man simply limited himself to stare at the jar while licking his lips.

'Why doesn't he just ask for it?'

"Would you like to taste it?"

Noah became tired of waiting and took the initiative.

The man's eyes lit up at that question and he happily moved the curtain of his tent in a welcoming gesture.

"Yes, please! You can come inside if you don't mind."

Noah nodded and entered the tent, the man stood still on the entrance, waiting for him to cross it.

'So, that's how the life on the borders of the Empire is spent.'

Noah suppressed a surprised gasp as the scene inside the tent unfolded itself.

There wasn't much, only a small table, a few chairs, and a large bed.

However, on the bed there were two naked women with a collar on their necks.

Also, the tent seemed to have some kind of inscriptions on its surface, Noah guessed that they were meant to suppress the noise.

'Slavery doesn't cover only the working field then.'

"I'm sorry for them, I wasn't expecting visits. I will send them away immediately."

The man clapped his hands and ordered the women to leave the tent, they didn't even dress as they went outside.

"Are all slaves cultivators?"

Noah asked loudly as soon as the women left the tent, they were cultivators too.

"Well, yes. Mortals die too easily, they aren't worth their price in the long-run."

Noah nodded in understanding while he moved toward one of the chairs and placing his jar on the table in front of him.

"I've heard that the defeated countries provided slaves to the Shandal Empire but I have greatly underestimated their quantity. Did you win many wars?"

Noah wanted to gather information about the Empire, he had planned to spend a long time in its area of influence after all.

"Hmph! Almost every country in the central area of the continent has surrendered to the might of the Empire, if it wasn't for the Utra nation and the Papral nation, we would have conquered the whole landmass already."

Chapter 270 - 270. God

There was pride in the man's words when he spoke about the Empire.

'I guess I should avoid telling him that I come from the Utra nation.'

Noah carefully observed the expressions of the man, he wanted to discover as much as he could about the central countries, he had to take advantage of him when he could.

"Oh? Are they that powerful?"

Noah asked, taking out two cups from his space-ring and filling them with Ivor's wine.

"Hmph, each one of them alone can't match the Empire. The only problem is that they both have to suppress the Empire or they will be conquered, their geographical position makes them allies against us."

The man snorted again as he sat on the opposite chair and took the cup, immediately drinking from it.

"Good wine!"

He exclaimed after taking a small sip and then he resumed his drinking with enthusiasm.

"It's just something that I picked up randomly."

Noah rejected the compliment before speaking again in a casual manner.

"How is it possible though? I've never seen such a concentration of cultivators and this is just a peripheral country! I think that the Empire has enough manpower to take down both the Ultra nation and the Papral nation."

The man wore a prideful smile after Noah's comment, he seemed really attached to his country.

"Well, the truth is that we have far more cultivators in the human ranks than any other country but those in the heroic ranks are about the same. We people of the Empire like to boast around and act mighty but the cultivators of the other countries aren't weaker than us."

He admitted, placing the empty cup on the table.

"Is that the reason why you didn't ask for my wine as soon as I opened it?"

Noah filled both cups again with a smile on his face, he was obtaining some decent information already.

"Haha! People from the Empire never ask for anything, they earn it! Anyway, my name is Ross, I'm in charge of this encampment."

"Adam."

A moment of silence followed their presentation, they simply sat on their chairs, enjoying the flavor of the wine.

"What are you mining here? I can't imagine what precious mineral requires so many slaves."

Ross looked at Noah in disbelief.

"Is this really your first time here?"

Noah nodded and waited for the man's answer.



"Well, it's quite widespread as information. All men and women of the Empire have access to a rank 3 body-nourishing method. This method requires a particular terrain called Vostum that can be found only near the sea. All the commoners in the Empire need it to cultivate so the Empire handles the mining operations to make a gain out of it."

'They create the demand and then set a monopoly, gaining an endless stream of wealth and increasing the number of cultivators at the same time. Smart, really smart.'

"What about cultivation techniques and spells? Are they that accessible too?"

Noah asked with interest, if the conditions were good, he would gladly change his route and head for the Empire.

However, Ross immediately shook his head at that question.

"You must either perform a meritorious service or work for some higher-up in the army to obtain those. Why do you think I'll be living in a tent surrounded by slaves if not for the payment?"

"Will you obtain a technique for this?"

Noah asked, receiving a wide smile as an answer.

"That's right. I and the soldiers in the other encampments will join a high-ranking troop after our job is done. That will give us access to rank 3 cultivation techniques and rank 2 spells, truly a fortune!"

'Rank 3 cultivation techniques so easily? I bet that these high-ranking troops are similar to the noble families in the Utra country, just more loyal to the head of the country.'

Then, Noah remembered one particular piece of information in Ross's last sentence.

"Soldiers? Is there someone like you in each of the camps here?"

Ross nodded.

"Yes, the law imposes a soldier every one hundred slaves. There have been cases of revolt in the past, that number is necessary to suppress them before they start."

'So, I'm not alone with him, there are more soldiers here and I can suppose that they are all on my level. Well, there wasn't anything valuable anyway, I have no need for a material useful for rank 3 body-nourishing methods.'

Noah refused the idea of creating a mess in that place and simply continued to converse with Ross.

Their topics covered mostly the political situation of the Empire, how it was structured and its actual strength.

Simply speaking, the cultivators of the Empire valued strength over everything, their whole hierarchic system was based on it.

Basically every citizen was a soldier but his mansions depended on his personal power.

They could be allocated in mines to handle slaves, as farmers in the fields, or even as servants.

The most powerful of them could become full-time soldiers and join specific troops led by a captain.

'I have to admit that I'm starting to like this country. They have no care for your birth and they only look at your strength, well, you still need to be born in the Empire to obtain these privileges.'

There was only one thing that Noah wasn't sure of.

"How can the Empire suppress so many cultivators? I mean, there has to be someone in charge, right? How can he or she handle so many powerful people and prevent a revolution?"

Ivor's wine had relaxed both Noah and Ross, they were speaking in a more friendly manner since the jar was almost empty by then.

"Why would someone revolt? The Empire strongly pushes cultivators to become more powerful and to take down their superiors, we are not bound by some anachronistic law."

"Yet, that still can't prevent weaker cultivators from organizing and jointly attacking the stronger powers."

Ross listened to Noah's words and nodded at them.

However, his gaze was then filled with reverence as he opened his mouth to speak.

"No one will revolt because there is a God leading the Empire."