

A God!

That simple word caused waves of shock in Noah's mind.

'He must be referring to a cultivator in the divine ranks! Yet, how couldn't the Empire conquer the continent if they have such a strong leader?'

The divine ranks were a world on their own, Noah couldn't even imagine the actual might of someone on that level.

That's why he found suspicious that there were still free countries in the continent, nothing should be able to match a God after all.

'Unless, both the Utra nation and the Papral nation have a similar power.'

Noah knew that the stronger cultivators of each nation would abandon the mortal world and focus exclusively on cultivation.

It couldn't be helped, cultivating required more time as one's level increased, Noah had been in the gaseous stage of the second rank of the dantian for two years and a half by then and he was still in the middle of the human ranks!

'How many monsters are living outside of people's sight? How many Gods there are in this world?'

He didn't notice it but his gaze was being filled by the flames of ambition as he kept thinking of that.

"We are proud of our country and proud of our leader, rebellions are for rats and criminals. Why would someone choose to act like a rat? The Empire is waiting eagerly for another God to be born, it pushes us to our limits and provides resources to anyone willing to work with it, it's a fair request!"

Ross continued to speak but Noah had completely lost interest in their conversation.

"I should probably go, my family is waiting for me."

Noah stood up, placing a new jar on the table.

Ross was confused at first but, seeing that Noah was willing to leave another jar of that wine as a sign of goodwill, he didn't bother asking much.

Noah left the tent in a hurry, he had a strange feeling that was making him uneasy.

'Gods, actual Gods! Cultivation opens the path to godhood!'

He knew that humans could reach incredible levels but that was the first time he heard about someone that powerful.

Gods in his previous world came from religions and cults, he had never believed in any of them.

Yet, here people could watch them and dream of reaching their levels.

Ambition, anxiety, restlessness, those emotions mixed together and led Noah outside of the encampment, back on the large forest on its other side.

He had not lied to Ross, his family was waiting for him, he was sure of that.

However, he knew that he was just an ant compared to Thomas Balvan, he couldn't even defeat William with his current power.

Noah ran in the forest, his feet released shockwaves every time they touched the ground.

Yet, those propulsions didn't make Noah any faster, his body was too strong for such a weak technique to have any effect.

He stopped in the end and found an empty cave where he could resume his cultivation.

'I need to succeed with this martial art.'

He had reached that conclusion along the way, too many things depended on his ability to create techniques.

'The path toward the heroic ranks is blocked, organizations detain cultivation techniques and they give them away in exchange for personal freedom. I can't end up in another system that tries to use me, I want to be independent!'

Even if the Empire's requirements were vaguely loose, Noah still couldn't accept them.

He sat on the ground, his gaze swept his legs as he thought of a way to solve the problem with his martial art.

'Inscription methods are what have allowed cultivators throughout history to create spells and techniques, at least for the majority of them. However, the Elemental forging method doesn't take inspiration from the "Breath" of Heaven and Earth but relies of the will of the cultivator to power up its effects.'

Noah knew that he had to find a way to create his own techniques, he would soon reach the limits of his current ones, his body was already at that point.

'The Body-inscription spell wasn't created with the "attunement" method, I'm sure of that. It uses the power stored in the beasts and the "Breath" of the cultivator to create an animated puppet, the body is just a vessel that powers it.'

He felt that he was about to find the solution that he was waiting for.

'Basically, it takes power from its materials while the cultivator depletes "Breath" and mental energy to control it.'

Noah's eyes were still on his legs.

'My body is a rank 4 material, it has less power than a beast's body but it's still incredibly strong.'

The "Breath" blessing was taken out of his space-ring and laid on the terrain, Noah needed the perfect environment for his training.

'The meaning behind the lines that I've isolated is weak, it can't express much power, I'm basically trying to force a toy car to run as fast as an actual car just because I'm giving more power to it.'

No matter how strong the power source was, a toy car could never surpass an actual car, it would just explode, unable to withstand that much pressure.

In the same way, the lines of a diagram from a rank 0 spell couldn't express much power, the moment their limits were surpassed, they would simply stop working.

'My inscription method requires good materials but also a strong will. My will can be imposed on the world and produce the effects that I want without imitating the behavior of the "Breath". If I want those lines to surpass their limits, I have to add my will in them.'

Noah closed his eyes, he had become used to refine the "Breath" in his sea of consciousness by then but he had only worked with his meaning of sharpness.

However, he needed something different at that moment, something explosive!

The "Breath" in his mental sphere entered the crystalline sea while Noah focused completely on finding a new will to refine it with.

Chapter 272 - 272. Emotions

While Noah was busy traveling and training, the Ultra nation had been filled with rumors about him.

The first cultivator of the darkness element that had appeared in decades was, in reality, the bastard son of a medium-size noble family.

His crimes became widely known and many linked tragic events to his person. Doris' disappearance was one of them, cultivators couldn't think that she had vanished because of personal matters anymore after they had learnt that Noah had been in her same hunting area.

Phoebe and Manuel's death were the same, a second investigation on their weapons revealed some conflicting clues about the cause of their deaths.

Yet, while the most powerful nobles viewed his figure as a stain on their authority, the weaker cultivators thought of him with some reverence.

Noah was a man that had defied his status to become stronger, he had hidden among the most powerful organizations in the country and was now on the run.

'My dear disciple, I've really failed you.'

William was in the outer circle of the Balvan mansion.

His mood was sour as he looked at a picture portraying some of the most dangerous criminals of the nation.

It was needless to say that Noah was among them.

'You have really grown, not even those lofty heirs in the academy were your match, it seems that the whole world has underestimated you.'

His eyes showed some affection as he remembered scenes from the past.

'You were just a smart kid in a difficult situation back then, how could you end in such trouble?'

He sighed.

He knew that Noah had grand ambitions but he had never thought that they would lead him to become a man wanted by the whole nation.

'Please, be safe wherever you are and, if you can, abandon the hate that links you to this family. Abandon all of us and only look at the road in front of you, we are lost causes anyway.'

Sandford and Mark neared him and sat on his table.

"Vice-captain, that kid is crafty, I honestly pity the next organization that will welcome him."

"My brother is right, he has managed to escape from the Royal family, the Balvans will never find him."

They tried to lift William's morale a bit, they had fought together with Noah after all, they had more feelings for him than for their masters.

"You guys... Do you know that I can have you hanged because of these words?"

William smiled and teased the brothers who laughed back.

"You should be happier, the kid is safe and well and is becoming stronger every day that he is on the run. Old men like us can only watch as the new generations take over the world."

Mark commented but then he took a glance toward his brother.

Sandford nodded and wore a stern expression.

"William, the family wants to go to the Ballor mansion and have a meeting with their heir. Noah has lived together with her for quite some time so the Lords want to ask her some questions."

William's brow arched at those words.

"Did my disciple finally manage to think about something that is not cultivation?"

Sanford showed a proud smile.

"It seems that my teachings had some effects on him. *Sniff* They grow so quickly, one day you are hunting rebels with them, the next one they make noble girls fall in love with them. Such a good kid..."

Mark suppressed a laugh at Sanford's act and William couldn't help but release a happy sigh as he shook his head.

The last period had been a tense one for him considering his relationship with Noah, but Sandy and Mark had always supported him, easing some of that tension.

"So, they want me to go to the mansion?"

Sandy and Mark nodded at the same time.

"You know him better than anyone in the mansion, they want you to hear the girl's story to see if you can understand where he went."

William snorted at those words.

"Hmph! I've betrayed him once, I won't do it again. However, I suppose I should see this woman, she needs my approval if she wants to be with my disciple!"

Mark and Sandy couldn't suppress their laughter anymore, they understood William's intentions, he was simply eager to know more about Noah.

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Some days later, in the central part of the Ballor mansion.

June was silently cultivating.

She was in a dark underground room covered with inscriptions and a shining orange rune was in front of her.

"I've created countless techniques but only a few of them could be considered actual masterpieces. You lack the talent for runes but you are quite good with formations. Remember, Heaven and Earth is petty but also fair, every road can lead to the same result, you just have to find out how."

Eccentric Thunder's voice resounded in the room, the rune in front of June carried some of his teachings.

"Runes, formations, inscriptions, each one of those methods can be used for the creation of new techniques. You have a big advantage since you have my whole inheritance but you can't slack off on your study of formations, the day will come when you'll be forced to create something by yourself."

"The first thing will be something to replace your damned hat!"

June shouted at the rune but there was no response.

The rune carried only registered teachings, there wasn't any will in them.

She sighed looking at the inanimate rune, it wasn't her first time hearing that explanation but she still couldn't force herself to spend hours in the study of formations.

The constant stream of rumors about Noah made her wander in the memories that she had with him.

Their first battle on the air-ship, the events in the Royal Inheritance, their cohabitation spent stealing Ivor's wine.

However, Ivor was now dead and Noah was a criminal, her happy memories had been turned in constant guilt.

'You hid so much but still decided to trust me with Eccentric's inheritance. I acted so grumpily and spoiled and yet you have never asked for anything.'

She clearly remembered Noah, she remembered how his cold gaze stared at the world with indifference.

'Vance, where are you?'

She missed him, Noah was basically her first friend and he had given her an incredible opportunity, asking only to not use it against himself in return.

'In the end, you couldn't even trust me.'

Noah's last words made her feel regretful, she wished to do more for him but he had vanished and she had no idea when he would come back.

"June, the envoy from the Balvan family has arrived."

June came back to reality after that communication and she immediately stood up, trying to suppress the anger that she felt.

Chapter 273 - 273. Regret

A table filled with delicacies was placed right in the middle of one of the most luxurious rooms of the Ballor mansion.

The table divided the cultivators in the room according to their families.

June, her father, and the Patriarch of the Ballor family were on one side while William, Rhys, and Adrian were on the other one.

"Lord Otis, I want to express my appreciation for allowing us to meet the heir of your family today."

Adrian spoke in a polite manner to the Patriarch of the Ballor family.

Otis was an elderly man with short silver hair and a long white beard, he waved his hand at Adrian's words with a wide smile on his face.

"This is just a small matter, we are happy to help the Balvan family."

The Ballor family was just a small-size noble family, even if they were in a different domain, they had still to respect a more powerful family.

"I've already spoken to my daughter, she has agreed to answer all your questions."

June's father joined the conversation, expressing his good intentions toward that meeting.

June didn't speak, she simply stared at Rhys with cold eyes.

"Thank you, Lord Max, we just want to ask a few questions to your daughter. Specifically, we would like to know what kind of relationship did she have with Noah."

Five heads turned toward June who simply continued to stare at Rhys.

Max pressed his hands on her shoulder and spoke to her in a soft voice.

"June, they have asked their question."

June nodded.

"I know, I was just confused."

"Confused by what exactly?"

Rhys asked that question, he had become quite impatient under her gaze.

"You know, when they told me that you had driven out a genius like Vance, I imagined that you were some kind of powerful asset. It seems that I was wrong."

June plainly answered.

She was really surprised that Noah's father was only an ordinary cultivator, her mocking though was purely out of anger.

"How dare you!?"

Rhys stood up from his seat and was about to slap her when William grabbed his arm.

"My Lord, she has a rank 4 body, you will only hurt yourself."

Rhys' pupils constricted as he stared at the young woman in front of him and he coughed loudly before sitting again.

"I'm sorry for her temperament, it's my fault if she came out this wild."

Max performed a slight bow but he was unable to hide the proud smile that had appeared on his face.

The truth was that the Balvan family could bully them but they couldn't touch June at all.

Not only was she a former student of the academy, but she was also actively working for the Royal family, her position was too high.

Otis Ballor had simply approved the meeting to silence any rumor concerning June's relationship with Noah.

"It's fine, you too please forgive my brother's temper. You can imagine how this situation is affecting his mental health."

Adrian spoke.

He didn't care about June's words, they were true after all, he just wanted to obtain any valuable information.

"So, were you in a romantic relationship with him?"

He asked.

June lowered her gaze, that question reminded her of the one that Noah asked her back in the academy.

"No, we were just fighting partners."

"But you have lived together with him for quite some time, right?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if you have learned anything from your cohabitation with him."

Adrian led the conversation right to the part he was interested in.

June lowered her gaze again, her mind reviewed the memories that she had of Noah.

"No, he has always been extremely careful, he has never revealed anything about himself."

Otis coughed lightly to join the conversation.

"June, he is a criminal, try to remember something at least."

However, his words only triggered June's anger again.

"What something? All I knew of him was that his name was Vance and that he was stronger than me. He has never spoken about himself, he has never asked anything to anyone, he has basically spent three years cultivating like a madman!"

William lowered his head at those words, they perfectly described the youth that he remembered.

"So, you don't know where he went?"

June shook his head at Adrian's question.

"No, he didn't trust me either."

Silence enveloped the room, the cultivators from the Balvan family understood that they had just wasted their time.

William wanted to speak but his position didn't allow him to do so, he was just there to try to understand any hidden message in June's words.

'You forsake even this girl's affection...My disciple, I'm really sorry.'

He couldn't help but blame himself for Noah's trust issues, his position had always been complicated in the mansion, he had never had the ability to actively help him.

June, on the other hand, was just venting her anger.

She had joined the meeting to learn more about Noah but she had been clearly disappointed.

Her anger didn't come from the men in front of her but had birthed from Noah's last words.

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

She clearly remembered those words spoken while she was receiving the inheritance.

'In the end, you couldn't trust me.'

Her anger came from that single moment.

Noah had nothing, no one to rely on, no one looking after him.

He was carrying the burden of Eccentric's inheritance and he had to give it to someone.

He had chosen June but he had done so because of the situation.

That realization had hurt June and she was still carrying that sorrow.

Her hands tightened in a fist every time she thought about that moment, that last interaction with Noah.

'I bothered you so much about your true self... I was really an idiot. The next time I see you, I'll make sure that you understand my position toward you.'

With that resolution in her mind, June stood up from the table and left the meeting, going back to cultivate.

Chapter 274 - 274. Meaning

Meanwhile, Noah stood up from his cross-legged position.

His eyes were focused, his mind had never been sharper.

He pressed twice on the terrain, applying basically no strength at all, and his foot released a shockwave that resounded throughout the cave.

'Rank 3.'

His gaze was shining, he stared at the results of his refinement with excitement.

'I finally understand how I will create techniques with my inscription method.'

Noah had refined the "Breath" in his sea of consciousness fixing his mind on the image of a plane setting off.

He needed explosivity, he needed acceleration, the planes of his previous world were the only thing that matched those qualities.

'Imposing my will on the world of Heaven and Earth, this is my path.'

He had refined that "Breath" and he had used it to power the martial art, creating an effect that matched a rank 3 martial art.

Using that "Breath" for his techniques gave him a strange feeling, he wasn't using his dantian after all, he felt as if his body was breaking some kind of natural rule.

'My mind is a world of its own.'

Noah heard a humming sound as he had that realization, his mind was resonating with him.

'I can't produce "Breath" but I can give it a meaning. My techniques were never meant to follow the will of Heaven and Earth.'

A few lines of the diagram of a rank 0 spell couldn't be used to create a rank 3 martial art.

However, Noah had just done that.

'Steal the "Breath", refine it according to your own will, use it to break the limits of this world. The "Breath" is life, the "Breath" is everything.'

The wonders possible thanks to that kind of energy were limitless, Noah couldn't help but be surprised every time he thought about it.

'This energy can create matter! It is the very foundation of the world, its true origin. Heaven and Earth produce it to fill their world but I can steal it for my personal reasons.'

His gaze went on his low waist, he was figurately staring at his dantian.

'That energy doesn't belong to me.'

Then, his attention went to his back, where his acupoints were.

'Neither that energy belongs to me.'

His focus returned to his mind, the real personal place of every cultivator.

'This is my personal world.'

Succeeding in breaking the limits of the diagram had enlarged his point of view, he had finally understood how to create techniques with his inscription method!

'My mind can only contain so much "Breath", I need my dantian to steal that too.'

He was making a plan for his future.

'I've refined the "Breath" in my sea of consciousness and used it for my martial art, the effects have greatly surpassed my expectations.'

A rank 3 martial art had birthed from a rank 0 spell, which was theoretically impossible.

However, if "Breath" containing a specific meaning was used, those effects could be obtained.

'Heaven and Earth fill their "Breath" with a neutral meaning, it doesn't have any specific usage. Yet, when I set its meaning to one single effect, it helps in surpassing the limits of the world.'

Heaven and Earth were impartial and fair.

Their "Breath" could be absorbed and used by all living beings.

Yet, that energy was simply a form of fuel, it couldn't be used to surpass certain limits.

Nevertheless, Noah was adept in the Elemental forging method.

That method required him to impose his will on the "Breath" to create wonders, his own meaning could shape that energy according to what he was going to do, vastly increasing its effectiveness.

That was exactly what he had done with his martial art.

'The only problem is that I have a limit on the number of times in which I can perform it, the "Breath" in my mind will eventually be expended.'

The sea of consciousness wasn't meant to store "Breath", its capabilities were limited in that field.

That meant that Noah could only use his martial art for a set number of times before the refined "Breath" was completely depleted.

'In the future, I need to create a cultivation technique that allows me to store stolen "Breath" in my dantian, I can't neglect this kind of usage.'

If his dantian became able to absorb and store the "Breath" stolen from Heaven and Earth, he would solve the issue of its limited quantity.

'Right now, my centers of power are still weak, I can only perform a martial art with the power of the third rank. When my mind improves, I'll be able to

imprint a stronger will on the "Breath", obtaining an even more powerful result. Damn, the applications of my inscription method could be endless!

Noah was excited beyond reason, he had finally found his personal way of making techniques!

He still had to improve his centers of power and he wasn't completely sure of how to apply that method in every field of cultivation but he had discovered his path at least!

'The black smoke of the Demonic form could be controlled if I generated it with refined "Breath"... The answer was right in front of me but I couldn't see it.'

Noah pressed again on the ground, his foot released shockwaves every time he imbued them with the "Breath" in his mental sphere.

He performed that movement many times, always expending that refined energy.

The black cloud over the sea in his mind was consumed quickly, it had only allowed ten usages of Noah's martial art.

'Only ten times, that's not bad. It is only in the third rank, my body alone can match this acceleration. Well, it seems that any new progress can wait for my mind to reach the third rank.'

The third Keiser rune came out of Noah's space-ring, he was set on speeding the arrival of his breakthrough.

'I wonder, if I was to refine all the "Breath" in my dantian and use it to enter my Demonic form, how strong will I be?'

Chapter 275 - 275. Hunt

One year quietly passed by.

Noah didn't have any enemies in that part of the continent so his travel had been extremely peaceful.

Also, most of his time had been spent in seclusion, improving his centers of power as much as he could.

The countries in the area of influence of the Empire that he had crossed worked in the same way as the Soprad nation: they were filled with slaves forced to work for the mining of Vostum.

It couldn't be helped, Noah had always stayed near the western coastline and that material was what allowed the commoners of the Empire to cultivate, its demand on the market couldn't be met by just using one country.

Noah had chosen to avoid the other encampments that he found along the way, he had learnt everything he could from Ross, there was no point in meeting other soldiers and risking to incur in troubles.

That kind of travel allowed him to focus cultivation and, due to his dedication, some breakthroughs had finally arrived.

The first one concerned his body, his dantian had nourished it for a long time, making it reach the peak of the lower tier of the fourth rank.

His body had then stopped improving, if Noah wanted to continue training it, he would need a rank 5 body-nourishment method.

The second one concerned his dantian.

More than three years had passed since he became a rank 2 cultivator and more than one year had been spent while having a rank 4 body.

With the "Breath" blessing maintaining a high density of "Breath" everywhere he cultivated and his rigid routine, Noah had reached the liquid stage of the second rank of the dantian.

What surprised him in that breakthrough was that he had not needed to use the Earth pill or any other resources to help in that process, his mind had improved too much after the Bloodline inheritance, his mental energy was enough to force the compression.

As for what concerned his mind, after the breakthrough of his dantian, he had been able to store liquid "Breath" in his it, further increasing the internal pressure on his sphere and improving the effects of his martial art.

Though, the power of the art remained in the third rank, Noah knew that the issue was on the power of his will.

'Soon my mind will reach the third rank, that's when I will actively resume my forgings.'

Noah was in a cavity that he had dug in a tree, he was using that moment of rest to return to his peak condition.

He had understood by then that the power behind the will that he could impose on the "Breath" depended on the power of his mind.

Even if his emotion was strong, the level of his sea of consciousness still prevented him to create extremely impactful wills, lowering the power of his creations as a consequence.

He would use liquid "Breath" in his forging after all, he wasn't sure that he could control the process as well as when he used the gaseous one.

'My Yin body is finally complete, it won't become stronger unless I find a new nourishing method; my dantian has enlarged since it entered the liquid stage, my reserves of "Breath" are enough for a prolonged fight; my mind is nearing the limits of the second rank, the constant internal pressure and the Bloodline inheritance will make me reach the third rank quite soon. There is no point in avoiding danger zones anymore.'

The reason why he had crossed inhabited countries in the first part of his journey was that he still had no confidence in entering danger zones with his level.

The fight with the leader of the worms in the Bare Dungeon had made quite clear that he was still too weak to face rank 4 magical beasts alone.

However, his dantian had finally reached the liquid stage of the second rank!

That was one of the basic requirements to defeat a rank 4 creature.

Of course, Noah wanted to test his actual prowess.

The tree where he was resting was at the borders of a danger zone called Leston forest.

That area was the fastest way toward his destination, avoiding it would mean wasting months of travel.

Also, Noah couldn't find any reason to avoid it: danger zones usually didn't have human settlements and were harder to investigate, his tracks could be covered more easily.

He was still on the run after all, crossing inhabited countries would only leave a trail of his passage, Noah didn't believe for one second that his short hair could cover his identity.

'The map says that the forest has a few packs of wolf-type magical beasts and that some of them are led by a rank 4 creature. It isn't exactly the safest place where to test my current power but it will have to do.'

Wolves couldn't fly and they only had slow long-range attacks, Noah had nothing to fear from them.

What he was worried about was that the map gave him no information about the other magical beasts in the area, Noah knew only the name of the forest and that it had strong wolves in it.

'Fighting strong beings improves the sturdiness of my mental sphere and I need to be sure that my power is enough to kill a rank 4 creature. Too many things will change once my mind enters the third rank, I need to know that I can defeat it.'

Noah had put most of his plans for the future in hold, waiting for his mental sphere to have the breakthrough.

Simply speaking, he had three projects for the future.

The first one was to bring the power of his martial art in the fourth rank and his mind was too weak to do so.

The second one was the creation of the Demonic sword, having a rank 3 sea of consciousness would allow him to better control the process and to insert a stronger will, it was worth delaying its creation since he was relatively safe now.

The third one was the creation of a blood companion from a rank 4 magical beast, Noah had decided to play it safe and to wait for his mind to reach the third rank before attempting in that feat.

'It's time.'

The sun disappeared on the horizon, leaving its place to the night.

Noah exited the cavity he was in and calmly jumped on one of the branches in front of him, he was going to hunt!

Chapter 276 - 276. Wolves

The forest was dark and filled with tall trees, the night was the perfect cover for a cultivator like Noah.

He didn't think that the rank 4 creatures would have difficulties in the darkness but he wanted to be in a situation where he could escape whenever he wanted, hunting at night gave him that possibility.

Noah was jumping from branch to branch, looking for a pack of wolves that met his requirements.

He wanted to choose the weaker type of wolves and he wanted to study the terrain before fighting it, he wouldn't just barge in a pack of magical beasts without studying the environment.

'There is movement in that direction.'

Echo heard something moving at a few hundred meters from Noah's position, which made him change his course.

Forty or so Thunder wolves sat quietly in that area, Noah could discern their type by just giving a quick look at the beasts.

'They are quite problematic, the joint attack of the Thunder wolves is strong and, with the leader there, I'm afraid I'll be forced to escape before I have a chance of vanquishing the pack.'

Thunder wolves could make joint attacks, the population of their pack was part of their strength.

'I better find something easier to deal with.'

Noah could choose to slowly kill all the beasts in front of him but that would create a commotion in the forest, a protracted fight could only attract other magical beasts.

In another part of the forest, Noah found a pack of Four-eyed wolves.

'They are far weaker than the Thunder ones but I don't know if my mental sphere can withstand so many mind attacks. I should probably look for something else.'

Hours passed, Noah explored all the forest and found more than six packs of wolves.

'Six rank 4 wolves, this danger zone is quite populated.'

Noah was at the top of a tree, silently staring at a group of thirty or so beasts below him.

They were Three-headed wolves, their specialty was close-combat since they relied mostly on their bodies.

The leader of the pack was a rank 4 wolf five meters tall and its three heads exhaled a nauseous smell that could slow the mental faculties of its prey.

'They are the best target. As the weaker type of wolves in the forest, they have been isolated in this remote area, I should be able to act as I want here.'

Two white sabers appeared in his hands and a layer of mental energy covered his figure.

Then black flames covered his body, making him disappear on the spot.

The wolves were silently sitting on the ground.

The leader was at the center of the pack while all the weaker beasts were all around it for protection.

Life in the forest was rather peaceful for them, there wasn't much food in that area but they could at least avoid fights with the other packs.

Then, all of sudden, black flames appeared right over the head of the leader.

Noah came out of the flames and slashed immediately below him.

Thirty fuming slashes cut the air and crashed in a circular area all around the leader, killing all the weaker beasts in the impact.

A circle made of black smoke isolated the leader from the rest of its pack, the weaker beasts couldn't pass through the smoke or else they would die in a few instants.

Noah was alone with the rank 4 creature!

He didn't hesitate, the membrane around his heart poured "Breath" in his circulatory system and an armor made of black smoke covered his figure, transforming him in a fiend.

Full power right from the beginning of the fight!

The leader was still surprised by the sudden event and couldn't block the descending slash that Noah immediately performed.

Six sabers became one and crashed on one of the heads of the wolf.

Noah was using the Second Form of the Ashura together with the full power of his body and his strongest spell, coupled with the surprise effect, his assault was unstoppable.

The slash pierced the central head and stabbed Noah's sabers deep into the wolf's skull where they released a torrent of black smoke.

The wolf cried loudly and used its frontal paws together with its other two heads to fend off Noah.

Two pairs of wings came out of his back and his legs kicked the air to distance himself from the wolf's attack.

However, he couldn't match the speed of the leader, its fangs managed to land on Noah's body.

Noah was flung away, the sheer strength of a rank 4 beast was incredible but the protection of the Demonic form and the regeneration ability of his body prevented any serious wound.

In that short exchange, the wolf had lost one of its heads while Noah was still at its peak condition!

'My attacks are effective! I can kill it!'

Noah shot toward the leader and the beast did the same, its specialty was close-combat after all, it would never refuse to fight in that field.

However, Noah suddenly halted his charge and dispersed the Demonic form, revealing his face filled with bulging black veins.

'Warp!'

Black flames covered him right before the leader arrived in his position.

It was still confused by Noah's disappearance when it felt a piercing pain on its right head.

Noah had teleported again over it and transformed back in his fiendish form, inflicting another severe injury to the beast.

'Two heads are down, what will you do next?'

Noah stopped his assault and waited for a reaction from the leader.

The wolf had two of its heads hanging lifelessly from their necks, only its remaining one was staring at Noah with venomous anger.

'It has stopped mindlessly charging, it's waiting for its pack to arrive. Well, I can't allow it.'

Noah jumped ahead, creating more than ten ethereal sabers around him.

The leader looked in disdain at the First Form of the Ashura and used its paws and teeth to fend off most of Noah's attacks.

The effects of the First Form were less evident, Noah's attacks could only pierce the leader's skin and inflict some slight damage, they weren't attacks focused on power after all.

Yet, since he had managed to destroy two heads before the close combat began, he held an incredible advantage.

The rank 4 Three-headed wolf was slow in its reaction time, losing two of its heads had greatly impacted its mental capabilities.

That's why, even though it could potentially match Noah's offensive, it was pushed back toward the edge of the circle of smoke.

Noah's offensive was relentless.

Twenty fuming sabers danced around him and continuously crashed on the wolf's body, the number of superficial injuries piled up, further weakening the beast.

Then, the wolf made a mistake.

It tried to move its weight on its frontal legs to pounce Noah but it wasn't able to realize that those legs had suffered an incredible amount of damage already!

Those limbs bent, unable to sustain the weight of the wolf, and left a long opening in the beast's defense.

Noah didn't waste that opportunity, the ethereal sabers around him disappeared and converged in his six arms as he lunged toward the remaining head.

Six sabers became one, curving the air where they passed, and swiftly pierced the last head of the rank 4 creature.

The Three-headed wolves were different from the Excavating worms, they had a stronger body but they also had a clear weak point.

That weak point was precisely their head.

Noah had managed to destroy two of them due to the surprise effect of the Warp spell and the last one by exploiting the advantage previously created, his battle had been precise and without mistakes.

It was with a smile on his face that Noah watched as the wolf fell lifelessly on the ground, he had finally killed his first rank 4 creature all by himself!

'I depleted too much mental energy, I should retreat.'

Noah hurriedly took the body of the leader in his space-ring and warped away after dispersing his Demonic form.

That fighting style comported a heavy burden to his mind, entering and dispersing the Demonic form consumed far more energy than simply fighting in that state.

Also, using the Warp spell as soon as the spell was turned off further increased that depletion.

It couldn't be helped, Noah had to use all his power when fighting a rank 4 beast, he couldn't hold back at all.

Yet, he now knew that his strength matched rank 4 creatures!

'I think that I'm still a bit weaker than the average beasts, I've killed this wolf because I managed to use my most powerful attack on its weak points twice.'

The advantage of using movement techniques to fight was evident, destroying two heads while the wolf couldn't react was what allowed him to use the First Form in the last part of the battle.

'My Second Form is now completely able to inflict real damages while my First Form still struggles to surpass the natural defenses of the beasts. It's fine, this was somewhat expected.'

Noah analyzed his battle from the top of a tree.

His eyes casually observed as the pack of wolves below him erupted in a chaotic fight now that their leader was dead.

Magical beasts in the human ranks were generally stupid, they only acted by instinct.

'They are fighting for the position of leader, what a ruthless world.'

The rank 4 creature died not even a minute ago but the remaining beasts of the pack were already fighting for its position.

'If I manage to complete my martial art, I would be able to fight without dispersing the Demonic form. Fighting like this is really tiring and it won't work well when I'm outnumbered, I leave too many openings in my defense while I warp.'

It had become a habit for Noah to analyze his battles in order to improve his fighting style.

He had a clear idea of his weaknesses and his most evident one was the lack of a suitable movement technique.

His flight was one of his stronger abilities while he still had a rank 3 body but it had become useless once he had the breakthrough, he needed something that could substitute that.

The Warp spell was the best option at that moment, however, that spell had many weaknesses.

It required a large amount of concentration and mental energy to be activated, Noah couldn't use it efficiently while he was in the Demonic form.

Also, it wasn't immediate, there was a casting time which could become a fatal weakness in a fight against more than one enemy.

Lastly, it couldn't be paired effectively with his martial art, it could only be used to catch the opponent by surprise a couple of times.

'The martial art that I have designed would perfectly combine with the Three Forms of the Ashura and would increase my battle prowess by a lot. It's a pity that my sea of consciousness still needs some time...'

The propulsion designed by Noah would have the weakness of being limited to ground usage but it would have far more advantages.

It would be highly maneuverable, allowing Noah to perform any kind of movement he wanted.

Also, it would expend far less energy since it was a martial art and not a spell, allowing Noah to use it without dispersing his Demonic form.

'Well, I can't force any breakthrough, I'm already stupidly strong for my age.'

Noah's most monstrous advancement concerned his mental sphere.

He was only a bit more than twenty-one but he was already thinking about reaching the third rank, that thought was simply madness for the cultivators of that world.

However, Noah had always relied on that advantage since his rebirth, even pushing the limits of that center of power in the process.

Generally speaking, geniuses would become rank 3 mages around the age of thirty, they simply didn't have the means to further improve their training speed.

Mental spheres were quite fragile, they were hard to temper and even harder to enlarge, cultivators usually spent years to reinforce its walls.

'It should still take a year or two to breakthrough. Well, I might shorten that time by filling my head with "Breath" but that would leave me defenseless in this foreign environment. It's safer to just take it slow and steady.'

Chapter 278 - 278. Trap

Noah didn't leave Leston forest in a hurry.

He had tested his new battle prowess so he could take his time to slowly march toward the new country.

'Odrea nation, there is basically no information about this country in my map.'

Noah's map usually had some data but, when he swept that nation with his mental energy, he could only see the words "strong soldiers".

'It shouldn't be another nation forced to slavery... I must be careful.'

The edge of the forest was clear, Noah couldn't see any danger in the mountainous landscape that followed that danger zone.

'I don't see anything wrong either, is it a wasteland?'

Noah couldn't see anything out of the ordinary from the borders of the Odrea nation.

He enveloped his figure with a layer of mental energy and exited the forest, his attention was raised to the peak and even Echo helped with its innate ability.

'It seems deserted.'

At that moment though, a humming sound resounded from the border of the nation and a series of runes lit up on the terrain.

'I couldn't perceive it, dammit!'

Noah hastily tried to warp back in the forest but he soon discovered that he could not focus his mental energy outside of the formation, teleporting was impossible!

He immediately decided to run but he found that an invisible layer was blocking the path toward the forest.

'This formation traps everyone inside!'

Noah wielded his sabers, he was ready to unleash his most powerful attack on the barrier that prevented his escape when Echo perceived many figures moving in his direction.

'Dammit!'

Noah gave up on trying to force the formation and shot toward one of the mountain peaks in the distance, if he could not escape, he would just continue on his way!

"Stop right there!"

A voice sounded from his side but Noah didn't even turn to look at its origin, he simply activated the Warp spell to make them lose his tracks.

Noah reappeared at a few kilometers in the distance and continued to run for his life.

He didn't know those cultivators nor did he know their alliances.

What he knew was that he wouldn't allow them to capture and interrogate him!

'A formation that I can't perceive, their defenses must be incredible!'

His thoughts collided non-stop inside his mind, he was analyzing the situation as fast as he could.

'Are they at war with the Empire? Are they from the Empire? Dammit, dammit!'

Noah felt even more figures nearing him, they were coming from different directions, they wanted to encircle him.

'How do they know my position? Don't tell me that the formation has marked me!'

He didn't know much about formations but he guessed that it had something to do with the quick catching up of his followers.

'Come then!'

Noah warped again and managed to escape the encirclement.

Yet, when he resumed his escape, he found out that even more cultivators were coming from him.

'I don't have enough mental energy to escape this country while continuously using the Warp spell and I'm not even sure that the formation on the other side will let me leave.'

Noah stooped himself, if he couldn't escape, he would fight!

A potion appeared in his hand and he hastily drank it, he was trying to refill as much mental energy as he could before the cultivators reached him.

"You surely ran fast."

A voice sounded from behind him.

Twenty or so cultivators appeared all around him, Noah found himself surrounded.

'They all have a rank 4 body and I can't understand the power of some of them. I can't win.'

That realization forced Noah to abandon his plan of fighting his way out.

"Who are you? Are you a spy of the Empire?"

The same man spoke again.

'So, they are enemies of the Empire.'

Noah smiled internally, he was beginning to understand their wariness.

"I'm just an outsider that was passing through. I didn't expect to find such surveillance in a seemingly desolate nation."

Noah plainly answered, his expression showed no emotions.

"That's for us to decide, do you have any proof?"

Noah took out the token acquired in Slyfall city, the name "Adam" could be clearly seen on it.

"I come from the area of influence of the Utra nation, I have crossed the border through Slyfall city. This is my proof."

Silence enveloped the area.

Noah's words made sense, it was unlikely for someone to enter that city unless they came from a different nation.

"So, why did you run when you were found out?"

Noah shrugged his shoulders before answering.

"I don't have any information about this country, as soon as I saw the runes lighting up, I thought I had fallen into the trap of some bandits. Actually, I'm still not sure of who you are."

Noah was exaggerating, no bandit would place that kind of formation just to rob some passer-by.

"What bandits!? We are proud soldiers of the Odrea nation and you just sneaked in our country like a little rat! The martial law allows us to cut your toes for that!"

"Lucy, enough, he is just probing us."

A woman couldn't stand Noah's mocking and revealed some of their information but she was soon stopped by the man that had been asking questions till then.

"Well, you are soldiers and I'm just trying to reach the northern border of the area of influence of the Empire. We don't have any business with each other."

Noah expressed his intentions and waited for the man's answer.

"I can't allow that, your story doesn't prove that you are not a spy. Men, seal his centers of power and apprehend him."

Five cultivators nodded and neared Noah but they were forced to stop due to a wave of killing intent that exploded from his figure.

Noah was staring with cold eyes at the five cultivators, his pressure was completely unleashed and his figure began to release black smoke.

"You try to seal anything and I'll gladly die to take down half of you with me!"

Chapter 279 - 279. Lord

'My centers of power are my life, I'd rather die than allow you to seal them!'

Those were Noah's thoughts after he heard the man's order.

Noah had based his reason to live on cultivation, his whole second life had been focused on that.

Hearing that his centers of power could be sealed had triggered a wave of unparalleled anger in him, he had dropped any kind of pretense at that threat.

The cultivators nearing him had all a dantian in the solid stage of the second rank but they stopped their tracks at the sight of the black smoke.

They felt danger from it, they couldn't help but take the threat seriously.

Also, Noah's declaration was backed by his chilling pressure, it was with a stern expression that they watched the young man wielding a pair of sabers and getting ready to fight.

"What is your name?"

The man in charge spoke again, Noah's seriousness actually made him take a step back.

"Adam."

Noah understood that something had changed and answered him.

"I mean your real name."

Noah's eyes sharpened at that request.

He hadn't revealed his real identity in a long time but that situation was really dangerous.

The cultivators encircling him were at least in the liquid stage of the second rank, he knew that he would probably die if they began to attack him.

"I'm Noah Balvan, I'm a criminal from the Ultra nation."

Noah revealed his most hidden information.

Noah and the man stared at each other for a while.

The man knew that Noah was being serious.

The black smoke coming out of him gave him a dangerous feeling but he had the advantage in numbers, he knew that he could kill or capture him.

However, was it worth it?

A man willing to die only to inflict more damage was the most dangerous one, he didn't really want to lose any soldier for a simple capture.

"Come with me, I'll take you to the Lord as a guest."

Those words caused a lot of surprised gazes in the cultivators around Noah.

'Lord? Is he someone in the heroic ranks?'

Noah hesitated, he couldn't really match a cultivator that powerful but he couldn't even win against those around him, he didn't have that many options.

The man understood his worries and spoke to ease them.

"The strongest cultivators of this country are in the third rank of the dantian, if you decide to die, you can do that fighting them. I said that you will be treated

as a guest so you can be assured that we won't imprison you, you have my word."

Silence fell again in the area, Noah wouldn't believe the man's word so easily.

"I believe that you will die while killing half of us, please believe me when I say that you'll be safe."

The man spoke again to reassure Noah.

The truth was that Noah didn't have the slightest amount of confidence in surviving the joint assault of the cultivators around him, his anger came from the threat at his centers of power.

"I'll believe you, for now."

Noah retracted the partial Demonic form and hid his aura, a peaceful solution was the best outcome from that situation.

The other cultivators were surprised but they didn't dare to disobey the orders of that man, they simply lowered their heads and escorted Noah toward one of the mountain peaks of that nation.

Noah followed the man while he analyzed the environment, he couldn't see anything out of the ordinary with both his sight and mental energy.

"Where are we going?"

"You couldn't perceive the formation around the country so you won't be able to see our home unless you enter its borders. Oh, my name is Logan, please restrain your threats in front of the Lord."

Noah didn't answer to that explanation and simply continued to follow Logan.

After they passed a certain height of a mountain, the environment changed, revealing the true form of the mountain peak.

There was a small city on the summit of the mountain, it was covered in snow and inscriptions but it seemed bustling with people.

'Don't tell me that this entire nation is amassed in one city...'

Noah had seen the capital of the Utra nation, the city in front of him paled in comparison.

However, he clearly felt that it was quite populated, he wondered about the number of cultivators inside it.

The gates of the city opened at Logan's sight, the building inside it unfolded themselves in front of Noah.

'Small, just a fraction of the capital.'

Noah wasn't moved by the tall structures after the defensive walls and continued to move, warily observing his surroundings.

There was a castle at the center of the city, Noah guessed that the so-called Lord lived there.

"The Lord might be inexperienced but we have sworn to protect her, watch your tongue when you speak with her."

Noah shrugged his shoulders at Logan's request and continued to follow him.

They crossed ample halls and luxurious stairs until they arrived to the tallest point of the castle.

Noah found himself sitting in a wide room, the cultivators from before were still surrounding him and they even seemed to be more wary of his actions.

'They must really care about this Lord.'

Noah sighed, he only wanted to continue in his travel but the recent events forced him to arrive right at the center of Odrea nation.

'Well, I'll just kill as many as I can if they try something funny, I'm not scared of death.'

He had already died once and the Forging of the Seven Hells had forced him to become used to that feeling.

Then, Noah's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of doors opening.

A gate at the bottom of the hall opened, revealing a young girl sided by two old cultivators.

They both had a long beard and a bald head, they seemed far stronger than the cultivators that surrounded Noah.

'Are they in the third rank?'

Noah couldn't understand their level so he moved his attention to the young girl.

She wasn't even eighteen, her long red hair was combed around a golden crown and her features were delicate, Noah couldn't help but think that she was quite cute.

She sat on a throne placed right in front of him and opened her mouth to speak.

"My men told me that a cultivator of the darkness element has invaded our country, is that true?"

Chapter 280 - 280. Spell

Noah's element was exposed as soon as the meeting began.

The cultivators around him released surprised gasps but Logan kept his stern expression.

'I bet that it was him that discovered it.'

Noah sighed, he understood that he had been granted a meeting because of his peculiarity.

"I'm not an invader, I was just passing by."

He uncaringly answered the girl, he had really done nothing wrong that time.

"Anyone that trespass our borders is an invader, we are at war."

The girl firmly answered, she seemed used to her position.

'Why did they put such a weakling in charge?'

Noah could clearly discern her level.

She had a rank 2 body, a rank 1 dantian, and a rank 1 sea of consciousness, she was just a weakling in his eyes.

"War? I can only see cultivators in the human ranks, you are not in the position to be at war with the Empire."

The Shandal Empire had a God as a commander, such a weak country couldn't call itself a worthy enemy.

Noah's words caused enraged gazes to be shot at him, the cultivators around him completely disapproved his stance.

"Our ancestor died to limit the invading forces to the human ranks, we are one of the few countries that still oppose the Empire."

The girl proudly declared.

'Limit to the human ranks? Is that even possible?'

Noah was confused.

The sheer power of the Empire was enough to submit any other country that he had seen, he couldn't understand how such a weak nation could survive thanks to the sacrifice of a cultivator.

"I understand your confusion. Our ancestor was a mighty rank 6 cultivator that imbued the formation around the country with his own life. Not even the God of the Empire can break it."

The girl's eyes were filled with pride as she told that story, the two cultivators on her sides lowered their heads as soon as the ancestor was named.

However, Noah saw things differently.

"So, he basically created a large prison for you all to live in, right?"

He could accept that a rank 6 cultivator could create wonders, Eccentric Thunder had built a seemingly endless world after all.

Yet, he didn't see anything worthy of praise, the actions of that mighty ancestor were only a temporary measure against the Empire.

Formations, runes, and inscriptions suffered from the passage of time, nothing was eternal.

The God of the Empire had just to wait for the defensive formation to lose some power before that country would be conquered.

"How dare you!"

The girl stood from her throne and pointed a hand at Noah.

"The ancestor sacrificed everything to keep his offspring alive. I have his blood in my veins, I won't allow anyone to taint his name! Men!"

The girl ordered and the cultivators around her neared Noah without hesitation.

However, Noah released his pressure again and his figure started to be surrounded by black smoke.

His eyes shone with a cold light as he answered the girl.

"I made myself clear already, try to imprison me and I'll use my life to kill as many of you as I can."

Noah had dropped any kind of pretense already, he was using his own life as a threat.

There was no hate between them after all, he didn't believe that they would sacrifice themselves just to kill a simple nobody.

"I really don't care about your situation but all I see is a weak girl leading a bunch of prisoners. The sacrifice of your ancestor means nothing to me."

Noah continued to speak, he made his stance clear to everyone in the hall.

The powerful cultivators next to her became incredibly enraged after Noah's mocking and shot toward him at an unimaginable speed.

"Stop."

However, the girl softly ordered and the two men blocked their attacks just in time.

Noah casually watched at the two fists that were standing in front of his face and turned his attention toward the girl.

"So, what do you even want from me? I just want to go on my way, I really don't have any business with the Empire and your war."

The cultivators retracted their fists and returned to their position next to the young girl.

She sighed and began to explain the situation of her country.

"Even if the formation blocks any cultivator that has a rank 4 dantian or above, the Empire still sends soldiers to fight us. We would appreciate your help in the war."

'It was about my element after all.'

Any organization that Noah had met wanted to exploit his superior battle prowess.

He was a cultivator of the darkness element after all, anyone would want him as an asset.

"I'm just a rank 2 cultivator, I can't influence your war that much. Also, I don't have a reason to help you."

If the war was limited to the human ranks, then cultivators in the third rank were the strongest assets.

Noah was strong for his level but he still paled in front of cultivators with a stronger dantian, he chose to follow Logan because he couldn't defeat his group after all.

"We need all the help that we can get and..."

The girl spoke, hesitating a bit toward the end of her sentence.

"We have a spell of the darkness element in our inventory."

Noah's eyes lit up at those words.

Spells of his element were rare, it was Heaven and Earth's way to balance the power of the rare aptitudes.

'Even the academy didn't have that many spells of my element, most of them were just rank 0 or 1.'

Noah was enticed by that opportunity, he would gladly enlarge the number of spells in his possession.

"Rank?"

He asked, he wanted to be sure that the spell matched his standards.

"Up to the fourth rank."

The girl promptly answered, she seemed well aware of the resources of her country.

'Fourth rank! It will be useful even in the heroic ranks and having its diagram as a reference will help me in my future creations!'

"Deal, give me the spell and I'll join your war for some time."