

Chapter 301 - 301. Bombs

The soldiers of the Empire were prepared for that eventuality.

They opened a path for Noah and focused on defending against the ethereal sabers that surrounded him, they didn't have any way to block his real weapons.

'They learnt quickly.'

Noah judged as he entered the enemy's army, he smiled seeing their reaction.

'The more focus they put on me, the less there will be on their feet.'

He ran for a few meters and, when he was sure that he was at quite some distance from the soldiers of the Odra nation, he injected "Breath" in one of his Instabilities and dropped it on the ground.

That movement was smooth, it was covered by the storm of attacks that surrounded him and wasn't noticed by the soldiers around him.

The small grenade was successfully armed and left in their lines.

'Twenty seconds, I should be able to plant a few more.'

He was the maker of those inscribed weapons, he knew exactly how delayed the explosion would be with each quantity of "Breath".

He continued in his charge.

Most of the soldiers were able to withstand Noah's offensive but some of them were still injured by the First Form, that martial art was still in the fourth rank, some blue soldiers simply couldn't block it.

Then, when the timer in his mind hit five seconds, he dropped another Instability on the ground.

The quantity of "Breath" injected in it was small, it corresponded to the maximum possible delay that the bomb was capable of.

Another five seconds passed and Noah planted another bomb with the same programming.

'Ten seconds!'

Five seconds later, another Instability was dropped.

There were four bombs on the terrain, right under the feet of the soldiers of the Empire.

'They came rather quickly this time.'

Noah's killing intent rose as he saw two red figures coming in his direction.

'Four seconds for these two.'

Noah quickly calculated the needed quantity of "Breath" before injecting it into two Instabilities and dropping them on the ground.

Then, he turned toward the Odra army and began to make his way back to his allies!

The blue soldiers in front of him opened a path while the red soldiers behind him continued in their chase, however, Noah's attention was on the countdown in his mind.

'Two... One... Zero!'

BOOOM!

Precisely twenty seconds after he planted the first Instability, an explosion resounded near the first line of battle.

The blast was powerful, it directly flung away any blue soldier that was in a three meters radius from its epicenter.

Those soldiers were just in the liquid stage, that blast had their same power, their natural defenses weren't enough to protect them from the explosion.

Soldiers flew in the air, their legs had been destroyed due to the explosion while those closer to the blast had been directly killed!

Burned corpses and severed limbs flew everywhere, one simple Instability had reaped a few victims already.

Then, the spikes came.

The soldiers were still surprised by the sudden explosion that they didn't have time to protect themselves from the incoming fuming needles.

Their bodies were stabbed without mistake, all the cultivators that had survived or avoided the explosion were hit by that sharp rank 4 material.

Ten or so blue soldiers fell on the ground, their bodies were covered in spikes and their faces showed their surprised expressions, they still couldn't understand how they had died!

One Instability killed more than fifteen rank 2 cultivators in the liquid stage!

The red soldiers chasing Noah were surprised by the sudden blast and moved their attention toward the vanguard of the army.

Yet, in that moment of distraction, the two Instabilities under their feet exploded!

Noah had precisely planned for them to detonate shortly after the first Instability and had left them on the red cultivators' path, he knew that a blast out of nowhere would distract them for an instant.

That planning paid off.

The red soldiers were still running when their bodies were swept by a hot wave of energy.

Their robes and hair were burned in an instant and their legs were blown away during that process.

They found themselves in the air, the burning sensation completely covered the pain from the countless injuries that the spikes stabbed in their bodies had created, everything had happened too quickly, they couldn't even understand why life was abandoning them.

Yet, they died anyway, their bodies weren't any different from those of the blue soldiers, they were only slightly more resilient.

'Being underestimated sure has its advantages.'

A cold aura was radiated from Noah's figure as he inspected the results of his creations.

'Those two Instabilities have killed two red cultivators and nineteen blue ones, the first grenade should have produced a similar result.'

Then, another explosion occurred.

The soldiers on the frontline were still recovering from the first blast when they were hit by a second one.

BOOOOM!

'Two more to go.'

BOOOOM!

BOOOOM!

Noah carefully listened to those noises, he wanted to be sure that the weapons had worked as intended.

Most importantly, he wanted to be sure that they had exploded exactly as he had planned, the delay had to be perfect in order for those weapons to be reliable.

Nevertheless, the Instabilities worked perfectly.

The morale of the soldiers of the Odrea nation skyrocketed when they saw Noah safely returning in their ranks, they had greatly benefitted from the commotion created by his weapons, the army of the Empire was in a state of complete chaos after all.

All the soldiers were too scared that another explosion would occur that they forgot about the enemies in front of them.

The result of that chaos was a total victory.

The blue soldiers of the Odrea country completely overwhelmed those of the Empire, the red cultivators were forced to step in the battle to limit the casualties on their side but they still couldn't stop the unrestrainable wave of cultivators coming at them.

A hidden threat was scarier than a visible one, the army of the Empire couldn't focus on the enemies in front of them at all for fear that a bomb was under their feet.

Chapter 302 - 302. Onslaught

The third battle in which Noah participated was even more one-sided than the first one.

The number of blue soldiers dying in the Empire's side was too high to count, the red cultivators had to step in to stop the slaughter.

Yet, they had lost too many cultivators, even those in the solid stage were being overwhelmed by the sheer number of the soldiers of the Odrea nation.

"What the fuck were those explosions!?"

Seth shouted from his position at the top of the mountain.

He had seen how even the most experienced blue soldiers had died under the might of Noah's weapons, he really didn't know how he would explain those losses to his superiors.

Lisa maintained an expressionless face as she watched the battle, she was doing her best to suppress a radiant smile from appearing on her face.

Leo and Luke did the same but they were far more surprised than her.

They clearly understood the power behind each of those weapons, they couldn't help but applaud Noah in their minds.

"That kid totally deserves the title of "devil"."

Leo spoke in a soft voice, he wanted to maintain that conversation away from Seth.

"The weapons themselves are not that powerful, a defensive spell would block most of their effects. Yet, he actually gathered the attention on himself to mask his real intentions... What a scary kid."

Luke replied in that same tone, he was aware of Noah's character but he would have never thought that he would use himself as the bait to test his weapons.

The two protectors didn't ask for Lisa's opinion, she was busy pretending that everything was going according to her plan.

"So, do you think they are worth the expenditure of a rank 4 material?"

Luke asked Leo, the latter was the one controlling Noah's expenditure of magical beasts' corpses, he had the last word on that matter.

"If they can produce this result every time, then yes, they are definitely worth it. We don't have a better use for them anyway."

Leo gave his approval.

The Odra country had lost all their inscription methods as well as their knowledge in runes and formations.

Their only usage of the magical beasts' bodies was for the creation of good weapons but rank 3 creatures were enough for that.

Using rank 4 materials for an inscribed item that could damage red cultivators was completely acceptable.

"The only problem is that the Empire won't simply watch as we slaughter their troops. We are used as a training ground after all, there is a limit to how many soldiers it's willing to lose."

The battle in the valley continued.

The red cultivators of the Empire were continuously pushed back, they couldn't do much about the wave of soldiers launching attacks at them.

Yet, they held on.

Battles between cultivators could last for hours, the solid "Breath" in their dantian allowed them to fight for protracted times without ever being expended.

They focused on defending, they just had to stall the battle till the night arrived.

Noah ran freely on the battlefield, the defense of the red cultivators was tight but there were still some of them that were forced to abandon the formation to recover.

Of course, he wouldn't waste such opportunities.

The Mental tremor spell was cast as soon as he found an isolated red soldier, his mind kept track of each assassination that he managed to accomplish.

'Eight!'

That number was the total amount of red soldiers that he had killed in the three battles.

Two were killed during the first one, two in this one due to the Instabilities, and the other four after the onslaught started.

'Surprise effects really suit me the most. Yet, I don't think it will be this easy next month.'

His thoughts were already on the next battle.

Noah knew that the Empire would proactively create battle formations to counter his tactics, there wasn't much that he could do about it.

'I should be fine next month, they won't expect the other blue soldiers to be armed with my weapons. However, what about the following one? What about the one after that?'

Unless he was able to continuously surprise his enemies, he would be forced to wait for his breakthrough before reaching the set number of kills for his release.

'I have tons of materials and all the time I need. What is lacking is my ability in the Elemental forging method but that can be fixed by constant exercise... I should use my time here to increase my ability as much as I can, I need to diversify my creations!'

The only solution that he found was to be unpredictable.

Defending from one unusual weapon was easy, one had just to understand how it worked and plan accordingly.

Yet, what about defending from two of them at the same time?

What about three?

Noah had the knowledge of two words, there were many things that this one had yet to experience.

The only thing stopping him was his inexperience in the inscription field and his limited knowledge of weapons.

He had only fought using his sabers after all, he knew nothing about the other types of weapons.

'If I was to arm the soldiers with two to three different weapons, they would be able to diversify their offensive according to the type of defense that the Empire is setting... I can already imagine my next prototype.'

Noah smiled under his hood as he looked for any other isolated red cultivator.

Yet, they had become too wary of him, no one else dared to leave the defensive battle formation.

The few surviving blue soldiers of the Empire did their best to support the red cultivators but they weren't that effective due to their low number.

The losses on the side of the Empire were huge that day, almost all the blue cultivators had died and many red ones did the same.

When the black soldiers stepped inside the battlefield, they were surrounded by hundreds of corpses that tainted the valley with countless red puddles.

The cause of that scene could be found in a hooded cultivator safely watching the battles at the peak of the human ranks.

Chapter 303 - 303. Arming

The third battle ended, confirming the spectacular victory of the Odrea nation.

Almost all the blue soldiers of the Empire had been killed and many red ones had suffered the same fate, the Empire had never experienced such huge losses.

It couldn't be helped, Noah had disrupted their formation and instilled the fear for the Instabilities in their minds, the soldiers simply couldn't focus on the battle after that.

"That was amazing! When will you arm us with those weapons?"

Logan excitedly asked as he saw Noah exiting the valley.

"I should have around fifty Instabilities ready for the next battle. You saw their effects, I'll leave the battle tactic to you."

The Instabilities were powerful but they needed to be used in the proper way to produce satisfying results.

Noah had studied battle formations in the academy but he had always fought alone, he had little experience in that field.

Instead, Logan was the appointed captain of the blue soldiers, his cultivation level and experience made him the perfect man for the creation of a battle tactic that involved the inscribed weapons.

"That many!?! Does the inventory even have that many rank 4 materials?"

Logan's worries were understandable.

He had no knowledge about the inscription field but he knew some of the specifics of Noah's creations, he was aware of the expenditure of precious materials.

"One Brown hedgehog in the fourth rank has enough spikes for ten Instabilities. The inventory has enough bodies for two hundred more bombs, I'll swap to another material after that."

Noah explained the situation to him, giving Logan a detailed picture could only benefit the next battles.

"Just one thing, you'll need to practice a bit before using the Instabilities. I can use them skillfully because I'm the one that has created them but you need to be careful, I don't want to be blamed if one of them explodes in your hands."

Logan nodded at those words.

"Give us some instruction and leave it to me, I'll handle my soldiers."

After Logan reassured him, Noah went to the Mausoleum and resumed his cycle of training and forging.

He was really using his time in the best possible way.

His cultivation was steadily increasing, his mind was becoming stronger, and he was also accumulating useful experience in the Elemental forging method.

The continuous absorption and usage of the "Breath" in his mental sphere further increased the expansion speed of his sea of consciousness, he had never trained his mind so efficiently.

One month passed quickly.

Noah successfully delivered fifty Instabilities to Logan and explained many times the connection between the quantity of "Breath" injected and the delay of the explosion.

He didn't really know how Logan intended to use them so he wanted to be sure that some careless soldier wasn't going to set them off next to him.

The power of the Instabilities was great, Noah would have to enter the complete Demonic form to protect himself from them.

The truth was that he had managed to forge more than just fifty bombs, he could only create two Instabilities per day at the beginning of the month but, towards its end, he had increased the production to three per day.

That surplus was added to his secret stash, he didn't really care if Leo noticed it, he needed them for his personal protection.

The day of the battle came and he went to the now-familiar valley early in the morning.

Logan was already there, together with some of his most trusted soldiers.

Noah recognized some of their faces, he had fought side by side with them after all, he couldn't help but memorize some of them.

'They are all in the liquid stage.'

Their power matched his own but they looked at Noah with reverent expressions as he neared their group.

They had witnessed his battle prowess, anyone able to kill a red cultivator while still being in the liquid stage would be considered a genius.

Then, they discovered that such a genius could also perform inscriptions and was willing to arm them, the level of admiration that they felt toward Noah couldn't be expressed by simple words.

"Are these the cultivators that will use my weapons?"

Noah asked as he reached Logan, he wanted to understand the battle tactic that he had decided to perform before he made his own.

"Yes, they have the best control over the "Breath" among the blue soldiers and they all are of the fire or earth element, they won't waste your efforts."

Logan proudly replied, he had chosen each one of them according to Noah's instructions, they really were the best he could find.

"So, how will you fight?"

Noah nodded before asking what really interested him.

"We will launch them right after the exchange of spells, I suggest you don't barge into the enemy's army this time."

'Not that I wanted to.'

Noah thought.

He knew that the Empire had its eyes on him, he had created too much havoc in two of the three battles that he had fought.

'I will die if they manage to encircle me with red cultivators, I should just lay low for a while.'

Laying low didn't mean that he would stop attempting on the lives of the red soldiers but that he would stop attracting so much attention on himself.

'The Odra nation can take the fight head-on, I will just be on the sidelines reaping the benefits.'

The battle started a few hours later.

Spells were launched right after midday, they were the attack with which each battle began.

It couldn't be helped, spells had a wide area of effect, they would most likely hurt the allies if they were launched after the two armies collided.

Yet, that time, some blue soldiers from the Odra nation stopped their charge to throw spiked spheres toward the opposing army.

Noah saw that scene and immediately slowed his assault, he wasn't sure of those soldiers' ability so he decided to wait for the detonations before reaching the army of the Empire.

Chapter 304 - 304. Sly

Forty or so spiked spheres rained on the charging army of the Empire.

The soldiers had never seen those items, Noah had secretly dropped them on the ground the last time, they didn't know what to expect from those spherical things.

Yet, that was still a war.

The Empire had to completely refill the ranks of the blue soldiers after the last battle, it had warned the new troops about the unusual battle tactics of the hooded cultivator.

So, they slowed their charge and raised their weapons toward the incoming Instabilities, they prepared themselves against that attack.

The bombs detonated mid-air, right over the troops of the Empire.

They were too far away to actually damage any of them with the blast but the spikes were successfully released on the army.

However, the soldiers didn't passively endure that attack.

As soon as the explosions resounded in the battlefield, they deployed their defensive measures in order to counter the incoming spikes.

Spells and martial arts were performed to fend off the power of the Instabilities, the army completely stopped its charge to defend against the inscribed weapons.

Some of them still died but the majority managed to block the destructive effects of the bombs.

It was at that moment though that a second wave of spells was launched by the army of the Odrea nation.

Logan wasn't stupid, he knew that the Empire would warn its soldiers about Noah's creations, he couldn't just hope to take them by surprise a second time.

That's why he decided to use the Instabilities as a decoy!

Generally speaking, spells could only be blocked by other spells, they were the most powerful weapons of a cultivator after all.

There were a few exceptions.

A rank 4 martial art could easily block a rank 1 spell if the centers of power of the cultivator performing it were at a decent level.

The same went for inscribed items: Noah's Demonic swords were an example of that case.

However, the soldiers of the Empire didn't have powerful inscribed weapons nor centers of power strong enough to block the incoming wave of spells.

It was a slaughter.

The first line of the army of the Empire was swept by the torrent of magical abilities, they had just used their protective measures against the Instabilities, they were basically defenseless after that.

The damage didn't stop on the first line, it reached even the depths of the opposing army.

Hundreds of spells created havoc, they could finally show their might instead of being blocked by a similar force.

'Who would have thought that Logan was such a sly commander...'

Noah completely approved that battle tactic, it perfectly exploited the weakness created by the Instabilities.

Burned corpses, frozen limbs, severed heads, the scene after the spells was filled by the remains of those blue cultivators.

Hundreds had died, more than half of the army of the Empire was destroyed in a few seconds.

That outcome was even more astonishing than the previous battle, the two armies had still to clash but the victor had already been set.

Then, the army of the Odrea nation resumed its charge.

The remaining blue cultivators on the other side saw the seemingly endless tide of enemies and became disheartened, there were simply too many of them, they couldn't hope to survive with that difference in number.

Also, their battle formation had been wrecked, their inexperience didn't allow them to adapt to that sudden change in the battlefield.

Huge losses were suffered as soon as the army crashed on them, the cultivators of the Odrea nation were unrestrained in their slaughter.

They knew that the Empire wasn't actually suffering that much but they still had to vent years of abuses, the soldiers in front of them were the only ones where they could redirect such feelings.

Noah, instead, didn't have any enmity with the Empire.

He limited himself to kill anyone in his reach but his attention was on the red cultivators, they were the requirement for his release after all.

As for which side was right or wrong, he couldn't care less.

He would have done the same if it was the Empire holding him captive, he was willing to fight as long as he gained something out of it.

He had long lost count of how many men had died because of him.

He remembered his first one though.

Balor, the fat guard that trapped him with the rank 3 Ironclad spider back when he was still in the outer circle of the Balvan mansion.

He had the appearance of a kid back then but an old guard was still willing to kill him because of a petty reason.

It was then that he understood that the world was merciless and that, in order to survive, he had to be even more merciless.

That decision accompanied him through countless battlefields, ultimately ending in that valley surrounded by mutilated corpses.

He didn't hate the Empire nor had any grievances with it.

Yet, he was willing to kill as many of its soldiers to obtain what he wanted.

'The pile of bodies that I've created managed to bring me in the second rank, I wonder how big I need to make it to become a god.'

His thoughts wandered as he severed the head of an isolated red cultivator, the battle was progressing way faster than the other ones, the sudden loss of the blue soldiers had forced the more powerful ones to join the battle.

The events then unfolded in the same way as the battle in the previous month.

The remaining blue cultivators of the Empire worked together with the red ones to defend against the relentless assault of the Odra country.

Noah jumped from battle to battle to kill the isolated cultivators, managing to slay a few red ones in the process.

Hours passed and the night came.

The black soldiers did the usual show of power, Noah had become used to watch them from the side of the valley.

'Today was quite profitable, my kill count of cultivators in the solid stage reached fifteen. It's going better than I had predicted.'

It was with those thoughts in mind that the night came, decreeing the end of Noah's fourth battle.

The troops returned to the city on the mountain peak, Lisa had issued a celebration to honor that overwhelming victory.

The soldiers would drink to their fullest and take a break from the constant battles that they were forced to fight.

The mental state was an important factor for a cultivator's battle prowess, exhausted soldiers would perform poorly on the battlefield after all.

Noah, however, wasn't in the mood for parties, his mind wandered between the many possibilities that the Elemental forging method offered.

Also, he didn't share the same feelings of the soldiers, the Odra nation wasn't his home after all.

That's why he went in the Mausoleum, nighttime was the best moment to use his cultivation technique and the battle in the day had been quite easy, he had no reason to skip his training.

The second layer of the Mausoleum was empty, Noah quietly cultivated at its bottom on top of his "Breath" blessing.

Cultivating had become a habit by then, he could easily concentrate on other matters while the vortex between his hands absorbed "Breath".

His thoughts were on the possible items that he could forge, the Instabilities were useful but they had a great weakness: they could not be used next to allies.

'The explosion is not enough by itself, I can't remove the spikes from the structure. Also, I have no control over the direction of the spikes, the whole point of the Instabilities is to exploit the natural destabilization of forged weapons... There should be a way to apply the same theory on items that can be used after the armies have clashed.'

To do that he needed to think of a way to reduce the area of effect of the weapon without reducing its power.

'Precision over destruction, lethality over sheer power, the blueprint of the Moon needle might actually work.'

The main problem of his inscription method was that the items created in that way would need a cultivator of the darkness element to express their full power.

That's why Noah chose to create disposable weapons, the issue with the conflicting elements was solved in that way.

Yet, another problem appeared due to that: the precious materials were expended too quickly.

'I will wait for the Empire to develop a countermeasure to the Instabilities and then forge something else, I should create a weapon only after I've discovered the weaknesses of their battle formation.'

Noah simply concluded that it was better to see how the Empire reacted next month rather than blindly create a new weapon.

'A bit more than one hundred Instabilities and all the spikes of the rank 4 Brown hedgehogs in the inventory will be depleted, I should use the Steeled corals next.'

Noah was already planning the new rank 4 material to use for his Instabilities when a person entered the second layer of the Mausoleum.

Noah noticed the newcomer and slightly opened his eyes.

He recognized the cultivator, she was the red soldier that had protected him during his first battle, one of Logan's personal troops.

She casually walked inside the room and neared Noah, the smell of wine and sweat immediately filled the air, Noah guessed that she had just come out of the party.

The battle had just ended, the soldiers didn't care about their smell enough to wash before the celebration, both she and Noah had still some red stains on them.

Noah didn't mind her and simply closed his eyes again to resume his brainstorming, that place was usually crowded after all.

Yet, she didn't sit on a mat to cultivate and neared Noah's position while wearing a smile.

"You should relax too."

She spoke in a soft voice, stopping at a few steps from Noah, she didn't want to forcefully stop his cultivation.

"Did Lisa send you?"

Noah, however, was already guessing that the encounter was a scheme to bound him to the nation.

The woman was, after all, attractive.

She looked in her thirties, her body was slender and fit, and her black curly hair perfectly matched her dark skin.

"Our only obligation is toward the monthly battles, the Lord would never control what we do in our free time. This nation is already a prison, if even our actions were to be restricted, we would feel like prisoners rather than soldiers."

She calmly answered while sitting right next to the mineral, she would eye Noah from time to time as she stared at the passage leading to the first layer.

"I knew I would find you here, I've never seen someone so dedicated to his training. The other soldiers would have enjoyed your presence to the celebration though."

"I don't belong to this nation, I'm just being paid to fight."

Noah honestly replied, there was no reason to lie.

"Yet, the other blue soldiers look at you with admiration, they respect you."

"They would just fear me if I was their enemy."

Another quick exchange of phrases resounded in the room, Noah was just replying honestly to her.

"Then we can consider ourselves lucky that the mighty hooded devil was captured by the formation, I really don't know what we would do if your weapons were to be used against us."

She laughed at that statement, she didn't seem to mind that he had no attachment to the Odrea nation.

"Why did you come looking for me?"

Noah sighed, the conversation wasn't bothering him but he was still wondering about the actual reason behind her presence there.

"I figured that this was the only time where I could have a conversation with you alone. I was born here, everything I know about the outside world concerns the Empire, seeing an outsider like you awakened my curiosity."

Noah arched one of his eyebrows as he gazed at the woman below him.

She was smiling and was looking at him with eager eyes.

"You... Do you want to know about the outside world?"

She nodded at that question and continued to stare Noah, she seemed really interested in his knowledge.

Noah lowered his gaze, reviewing all the information that he knew about the various countries before opening his mouth to speak a few simple words.

"The world is cruel."

Chapter 306 - 306. Nina

Noah wasn't exactly what was called a sociable person.

His only real interest was his personal power which generally occupied all his thoughts.

Yet, that didn't mean that he was completely detached from the usual human emotions, he still felt them but he had far more important things to do.

The truth was that he pitied the woman a bit.

'Born in a prison, forced to fight for her country, life here mustn't be easy.'

He understood her situation because he had lived a similar one too.

'She also reminds me of June, their appearance is totally different though.'

Seeing her battle outfit and her spontaneous answers, Noah couldn't help but think about that wild girl with whom he had shared his life in the academy.

Her image unconsciously appeared in his mind, her long silver hair casually laying on her white skin were a memory that gave him some peaceful sensations.

There were really a few persons in his second life that he could trust and June was one of them, well, he was sure that she had no ill intentions toward him at least.

Yet, recalling her also reminded him of the reason why he was in that situation and he couldn't help but make that statement.

"Cruel?"

She asked, she wanted a more detailed explanation.

Noah didn't mind speaking to her, his cultivation wasn't hindered by that action and he felt that interaction quite pleasant.

Being always alone was a habit of his but that didn't mean that he couldn't enjoy a normal conversation.

"The powerful exploits the weak to become even more powerful. The Utra nation is ruled by nobles who detain the cultivation methods of the country, commoners are treated like beasts or turned into loyal soldiers, no one can escape that fate."

Noah spoke calmly, he knew exactly how the noble families managed that nation.

"But you did it, right?"

She asked but Noah simply shook his head.

"I just exchanged one prison with a bigger one, freedom seems to always escape my grasp."

Balvan mansion, the Royal family, the Odra nation, everywhere he went, he would always end up in the same situation.

"Well, rejoice! We are all prisoners here!"

She laughed again, trying to lift Noah's morale a bit before she resumed her stare on the upward passage.

"My name is Nina in case you were wondering."

"Adam."

Noah plainly replied.

"I was sure it was Noah... You might not remember it but I was there the day you were captured."

Nina said in a playful tone.

"Call me whatever you want, it's not like you can spread this information to my enemies."

"Oh my, you even have enemies, maybe you should really be a prisoner."

That last line made Noah chuckle, he couldn't help but agree with her.

"You can even laugh! Can you do that again in front of the other soldiers? No one would believe me otherwise..."

Nina playfully mocked Noah, making him enjoy her company even more.

They spoke for a long time, Nina basically told him her whole life, she seemed really happy to have found someone that didn't know her.

The whole nation was concentrated in one city after all, they all knew each other and the monthly battles further deepened their relationships.

Then, Noah interrupted his cultivation and jumped off the "Breath" blessing, carefully taking it back in his space-ring.

"It's time for me to go, I need to rest. Just know that I've appreciated your company."

Noah slightly smiled as he spoke those words but Nina snorted.

"You never stopped cultivating. Tell me the truth, you would have kicked me out if I was to hinder your training, right?"

Noah coughed a little and turned toward the passage for the first layer, he didn't really want to answer her question.

"Hey."

Nina reached him and grabbed his arm before continuing to speak.

"Do you mind if I come with you?"

She blushed a little as she said those words, it was quite obvious what she meant.

Noah didn't hide his surprise at which Nina promptly explained.

"Death can reach each one of us every month, we have abandoned those restraints a long time ago. Also, our population is constantly declining, certain activities are strongly encouraged."

She spoke without releasing her grasp on his arm, her hand trembled slightly during her explanation.

"I have no intention of having a child and I will eventually leave this nation. I believe that one of your fellow soldiers can be a better match."

Noah refused her, he really didn't want to become a father.

"But I like you."

Nina's answer was so blunt that even Noah was surprised.

She then neared her face to his and timidly kissed him on his lips before whispering a simple plea to his ear.

"Please, I don't want to be alone tonight."

At that moment, Noah gave up.

He had no reason to refuse.

His days were carefully planned, he had time for activities that weren't training or forging.

Also, cultivators had great control over their bodies, there wasn't any chance for her to get pregnant.

Ultimately, Noah simply wanted her.

She was beautiful and funny, Noah had initially refused because he was wary of any hidden meaning behind her actions but she was simply doing that for herself.

The monthly battles placed a heavy burden on each of the soldiers of the Odrea nation, they needed ways to vent that pressure.

Nina wanted Noah and simply went for him, resorting to a blunt request when she saw that he didn't make any move.

Noah spent what remained of the night in her room with her and fell asleep with her head laying on his chest.

When he woke up in the morning, he carefully moved her away to resume his forgings.

Even if he had indulged in those happy moments, he didn't forget his duties.

Nina woke up after noticing the missing body below her.

"You really never rest, do you?"

"Remember that I'm doing this for your nation."

Nina complained but Noah's answer was ready, she couldn't reply in any way.

She sighed and dressed herself before crouching next the cross-legged Noah and kissing him on his cheek.

"Can I come here tomorrow too?"

She asked with the same timid tone of the previous night.

Noah placed the materials for the Instabilities on the floor and opened his mouth to say a single word.

"Yes."

Chapter 307 - 307. Powerlessness

Noah's days became slightly different.

He would still forge in the morning, memorize the Kesier rune in the afternoon, and cultivate during the night, yet, when he went back to his room, Nina would follow him and remain with him till morning.

That relationship was quite casual, they were just relieving each other's stress after all.

However, Noah appreciated her company.

Being always on the edge would ultimately lead to a breaking point, Noah wasn't aware of how much he needed to relax until he eventually did that.

He found his mind clearer after he began to take those mental breaks which made him further enjoy the nights spent with Nina.

She, on the other hand, simply wanted to spend time with him.

Noah soon learned that the soldiers of the Odrea nation would often engage in those kinds of relationships, the monthly battles were a constant attempt on their lives so they simply wanted to make the best out of time between them.

"Did you become faster?"

Nina asked Noah as she watched him forging the Instabilities.

She would remain in his room sometimes and stare at him in wonder as he created weapons out of magical beasts' bodies.

Inscriptions were a practice reserved only to a few cultivators, most of them didn't even know that there were different schools in that field.

"Yes, I can make four of them every day now."

Noah's ability increased as he continued to forge, he had become used to the form of the Instabilities, reducing the time needed for their creation.

"How many will you deliver to the army? Your secret stash should have reached twenty bombs already."

She had noticed that Noah kept some of his creations for himself but she didn't care much, if Leo agreed to that behavior, she had no right to interfere.

"Most of them, I just keep one every now and then. I'm alone after all, I don't need that many of them."

Noah spoke the truth but he wasn't being completely honest about his reasons.

The Instabilities were powerful but they were also heavily limited.

They had a wide area of destruction, meaning that Noah couldn't use them in a one versus one battle.

Also, he was nearing a breakthrough, those weapons would become unsuitable for his power after that.

He was just storing a few bombs for unexpected situations, it was always good to be prepared for any event.

"Do you simply like to train or there is a hidden reason for that?"

Nina would probe Noah from time to time, she knew that he had many secrets but she still couldn't figure out how he became so diligent in his cultivation.

Noah placed one bomb in his space-ring and took out more materials from the one belonging to the Odrea nation, the one carrying all his requested beasts.

Meanwhile, he thought about Nina's question and the memories of both his lives came to his mind.

He clearly remembered the powerlessness that he felt when his previous life reached a dead end, he was just a normal man that couldn't have success in the modern society and didn't feel any attachment to it.

Then, he was reborn only to be stuck in the same situation.

Bastard son of a noble family, forced to witness the abuses endured by the only person that loved him and surrounded by what he initially thought were superhumans.

Yet, this world offered him a chance to obtain power.

His situation wasn't good but he gave his everything only to take the few steps that ultimately brought him to his current level.

The constant training, the unflinching willpower, the endless schemes and plans that barely got him through his misadventures, everything piled up till that point.

"Once you know how powerless you can be, it's hard to see anything different from the road to power."

That was a simple reason but it was enough for Noah.

Nina seemed satisfied with that answer, she could understand his feelings when he said those words.

She was born in a prison after all, her life was spent under the shadow of the Empire, she knew powerlessness too well.

It was with a bitter expression that she replied to him.

"The next battle is in one week, I wonder how the Empire will react."

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One week later, the two armies faced again each other in the valley.

The same thing as the previous month happened, only on a larger scale.

Noah had provided more than one hundred Instabilities that time, their joint power could rival the wave of spells of the blue cultivators.

The Empire didn't come up with many countermeasures in one month, it simply decided to split the defensive spells into two parts: the first one to defend from the spells and the second one to defend from the Instabilities.

That tactic, however, had many flaws with the most important being the fact that there were fewer cultivators performing spells each time.

The Odrea nation had two powerful long-distance attack methods after all while the Empire only had one, it had to divide its troops to prevent one of those methods from devastating its army.

It was obvious that a weaker defense would create more victims but the Empire was still willing to pay that price to maintain a sort of balance in the battle.

Only around two hundred blue soldiers of the Empire died during the launch of spells and Instabilities that time, those were still huge losses but they were somewhat acceptable.

That outcome forced Noah to focus the blue soldiers for the entirety of the battle, no red cultivator dared to expose himself to his sneak attacks.

'They have indeed learned... I can't force an opening in their formation with this little difference in numbers.'

Noah thought, aimlessly wandering on the battlefield.

The tactic of the Empire revealed itself successful, the battle ended with only a bit more than three hundred casualties on the Empire's side and a few dozens in the Odrea's one.

His disappointment though didn't last much thanks to a joyous Nina happily following him after he came out of the Mausoleum.

Chapter 308 - 308. Hidden blast

'To think that I would prefer straightforward women despite the twisted personality that I have...'

Noah found himself thinking about his relationship with Nina as their nights together continued.

'Maybe it's precisely because of how I am that I prefer them.'

He didn't trust people nor did they give him reasons to do so.

Yet, with people like June or Nina, he could relax knowing that they wouldn't try to scheme behind his back.

'Well, when things are like this, they are easy... I don't know how it would go in an actual relationship.'

His rapport with Nina was purely physical, there wasn't any affection between them.

'I guess I'll think about it when I'll feel something for someone.'

Noah put those thoughts in the back of his mind as he continued with his routine.

The Empire was slowly building countermeasures for his creations and the spikes of the rank 4 Brown hedgehogs were exhausted by then, it was time to change materials.

"You shouldn't remain here in the morning from now on, I need a few days to stabilize the new structure."

Noah said to Nina in the morning when the rank 4 Steeled corals arrived to his room.

"Why is that? Some secret technique of yours?"

She crouched behind him as she said those words, Noah could feel Nina's warm body laid on his back.

"No, my weapons simply tend to explode in this phase. I know when I need to protect myself but I fear that you might be taken by surprise."

Noah was the maker of the Instabilities, he knew exactly when the destabilization escaped his control and he had to throw them away.

Because of that, he could defend himself with impeccable timing but any other cultivator would risk being one second too late and suffer some injuries.

"Do you realize that I'm stronger than you?"

"Are you saying that you'll be fine if one of these were to explode inside the room?"

Noah smiled as he took one of the Instabilities from his space-ring and raised it over his shoulder, right next to Nina's face.

Nina stared at the spiked sphere for a while before sighing and hugging Noah from behind.

"Ok, I'll leave you alone for a few days, but you make up for them now."

Noah released a small laugh and shook his head before placing the Instability on the floor and turning, pushing Nina on the mat.

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Explosions resounded again from Noah's room but they stooped after a few days.

Noah's ability in creating Instabilities had increased by a large margin, he could easily modify their structure in order to adapt it to the new material.

The newly created weapon was dark-gray due to the new spikes that made its outer layer and they were also slightly heavier.

"Do they work in the same way as the previous ones?"

Logan asked Noah after the latter had delivered the new batch of Instabilities.

"Yes, nothing has changed in the inside. I will reduce the production a bit to work on another weapon now, I will give another list of materials to your soldiers later."

Noah answered.

He didn't really need to create a different weapon but he had become so skilled in channeling the innate destabilization of his creations that he couldn't help but have many inspirations for new items.

"Oh? I'll leave you be then."

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Another battle occurred.

The Empire was still struggling against the Instabilities of the Odrea nation but it was slowly reducing its losses.

That battlefield was a simple training ground after all, there was a limit to the resources that it was willing to invest.

In the end, the Odrea nation was skimming its soldiers as planned, the Empire simply wanted to reduce the casualties.

That's why it began to use red soldiers during the first exchange of long-distance attacks.

It didn't use random red cultivators though, simply being in the solid stage of the second rank wasn't that helpful in that situation.

Instead, it sent those who had a strong mental sphere, almost at the peak of the second rank.

Those soldiers could be considered prodigies of their generation, it was rare to have such a powerful sea of consciousness before reaching the third rank of the dantian.

The result was that the defensive spells cast by them, together with those of the other blue soldiers, were able to further reduce the damages inflicted on their army.

Another battle went by, the two armies seemed to have returned to the kind of balance that they had before Noah's weapons, it was needless to say that Noah couldn't add any other red soldier to his kill count.

Noah spent the following month testing a new weapon while providing a fewer number of Instabilities, their power had been heavily countered in just two months, it was time to create something else.

The result of that month of experiments was an improved version of the Moon needle.

Its core was formed by rank 4 Cloud eagles' bones but its insides were filled by rank 3 Fire snakes' flesh.

'This should be far more useful in battle.'

The improved Moon needle solved the issue of the friendly fire, it could be used after the two armies clashed and there was virtually no possibility of accidentally hurting an ally.

'Hidden blast should be a good name. Its full power can be expressed only when used by darkness, fire, or wind cultivators... I should test its effects in the next battle.'

When the other battle arrived, Noah calmly waited for the two armies to clash before joining one of the group combats.

The battlefield had returned to the state it was when he first arrived to the nation, the soldiers of the Empire were simply more focused on the defense.

'It seems that they have received a better training, it should be because of me.'

Noah judged as he neared one battle.

Eight blue cultivators and four red ones were fighting each other.

That combat was obviously one-sided, the soldiers of the Odrea nation had far better teamwork while those of the Empire were simply focusing on their defense.

Then, a simple looking gray needle shot through the air toward one of the red soldiers of the Empire.

The cultivator snorted at its sight and dodged it easily, doing no unnecessary movements.

However, just as the needle passed next his right shoulder, it exploded.

Chapter 309 - 309. Purpose

The explosion wasn't that strong, just as powerful as the Instabilities.

The needle exploded right next to the red cultivator's shoulder, creating a blast with the power of rank 2 cultivator in the liquid stage.

The soldier had a rank 4 body, the power behind the explosion was enough to pierce his natural defenses.

However, just as his skin was burnt and his flesh was destroyed, he released the "Breath" inside his dantian in a protective manner.

That raw "Breath" wasn't enough to completely block the blast but it still offered some sort of protection due to its intrinsic power.

The explosion destroyed his robe and engulfed his body, yet, he barely managed to survive, the soldiers there could see how his charred body came out of the cloud of dark smoke created after the needle detonated.

"Who dares to-"

He cursed loudly but his words were interrupted by a black saber that severed his head, Noah wasn't the type to waste such a precious chance.

The remaining soldiers of the Empire were still stunned by the even that they understood what had happened only after Noah's hooded figure entered their field of view.

'Hooded devil!'

That thought was shared among them.

Noah was, after all, renown in that battlefield, his actions had created far too chaos in the previous battles.

And here he was, ready to make a scene again.

"Retreaaaa-"

One of the blue soldiers of the Empire tried to warn his allies but that action only gave enough time for the cultivators of the Odra nation to reach him.

They were far more experienced after all, even if Noah's appearance had surprised them, they managed to recover far quicker than their enemies.

Noah, however, completely disregarded the weaker soldiers around him and focused his gaze on the other red cultivator.

A mental shockwave shot from his eyes which directly pierced the mental sphere of his opponent, making him fall on his knees as he screamed in pain.

Months had passed since Noah was granted access to the Mausoleum, his centers of power had steadily improved and his sea of consciousness was nearing the limits of the second rank.

The difference in power between his mind and that of his opponent was too big, the red cultivator couldn't withstand Noah's Mental tremor at all.

It was with quick steps that Noah neared the kneeling cultivator and cut his head off, the Demonic sword severed his neck without any obstruction.

The power of a single Hidden blast made him kill two cultivators in the solid stage, bringing his kill count to seventeen.

However, there was no happiness in Noah's expression.

His allies were rejoicing at the sight of his feat but they were immediately scolded by his loud words.

"Kill any witnesses! We can't give the Empire intel about the new weapon!"

Noah's words awakened them from their astonishment, they immediately understood that the sooner the Empire knew about any new weapon, the sooner it will create countermeasures.

The soldiers around him quickly raised their heads and swept the battlefield with their gazes as they looked for the blue soldiers that had escaped when Noah appeared.

The cultivators of the Odra country shot in three different directions, Noah could see how three powerless blue soldiers of the Empire were killed in a few instants.

'Damned idiots!'

Noah cursed in his mind but was relieved seeing all the witnesses dying, the Hidden blast that he had just used was the first of its kind, he didn't want its details to be revealed so soon.

'At least the test went well.'

He nodded internally at the power of his new creation.

'The actual damage that it's capable of can't be compared to the Instabilities but it can be used in far more situations. Also, it expends fewer materials.'

The Hidden blasts were the size of a finger, the Cloud eagle's bones were simply used to contain the concentrated flesh of the Fire snakes that he filled with his "Breath", their structure was really simple.

The only problem was that he still wasn't used to their forging, he would need some time to become used to the process like had done with the Instabilities.

'It's not that strong singularly and it can deal some damage only if the opponent isn't aware of its dangerousness... Ideally, each soldier should have five to ten of them... If I exclude the black cultivators, I would need to create between five thousand and ten thousand needles...'

Noah brainstormed as he wandered in the battlefield.

There wasn't much else that he could do, his surprise effect had been used, there weren't other situations where he could kill red cultivators.

'Five thousand is too much, the inventory simply doesn't have that many materials. Also, how much time would I have to spend forging? It took me more than two months to surpass two hundred Instabilities, I don't plan to stay here for much longer.'

Noah didn't forget his real purpose.

He needed cultivation techniques and methods to continue in his pursuit of power which the Odrea nation could not offer.

That country had sold its future for the chance to survive, the only thing that could save it was someone offering help from outside.

Also, he was still escaping, the formation around the nation prevented any external investigation but his traces still led there.

'I don't know how far the Royals can reach, this is Empire's territory in the end, yet, I don't see them giving up on me just because of that.'

The Empire had a God at its lead, it was safe to assume that the Royals had a similar power or they wouldn't be in the top three countries of the continent.

Noah didn't know if they had methods to freely chase him or if they had simply given up on his capture, waiting for him to appear in neutral territory.

'I can consider the Empire as my protector for now but it won't be the same after I come out of the formation, I should think of a plan before continuing my journey.'

Chapter 310 - 310. Joke

Noah was just a passerby before all the events in the Odrea country, the Empire didn't have any reason to target him.

Now, however, he was the Hooded devil, he was the reason behind thousands of casualties in the ranks of its army, Noah couldn't just hope that they will forget about his deeds.

'I guess that I'm back at planning escapes, why do I always end up in these situations?'

Noah sighed internally as he went to the side of the battlefield to prepare for the fight of the black cultivators.

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Months passed without much changing.

Noah would simply stick to his schedule and grow stronger each day as he investigated for an escape route.

Nina gladly passed information to him, she knew that he was set on leaving so she felt unnecessary to hinder his plans.

The truth was that leaving was easy, Noah had just to cross the formation and he would be back in the wilderness.

However, the Empire strictly guarded the borders, it would investigate anyone leaving the country.

His forging though led to positive results in the monthly battles.

The Hidden blasts offered the soldiers another type of offensive, one that could be used after the two armies had clashed.

The soldiers of the Empire found themselves burnt to death or heavily injured without even knowing what hit them, a couple of months had to pass before they identified the cause of those explosions.

Even after that though, there wasn't much they could do about it.

Those blasts had the power of the liquid stage of the second rank, they weren't any different from the spells of the blue cultivators.

Their strong points were their immediate effects and their size: The Hidden blasts didn't need time to be cast and their size allowed them to easily slip between the defenses of the soldiers.

The soldiers of the Empire would often raise their weapons to defend against their enemies only to find a needle in front of them.

It was needless to say that another period of overwhelming victories occurred.

Noah saw his kill count steadily increasing, his centers of power becoming stronger, and his forging ability improving, he felt his whole self being sharpened in that environment.

The Empire couldn't come up with many countermeasures, the Instabilities increased the power of the long-distance attacks while the Hidden blasts performed extremely good in the group fights, its only option was to give its soldiers a better training focused on defense.

Then, the inevitable happened.

Noah had been in the Odra country for almost two years, he was twenty-three by then when the breakthrough happened.

He was in his room with Nina, diligently memorizing the third Kesier rune while she read a book.

Really few cultivators could dedicate their entire life to their training, it was normal for the others to occupy their days with things they liked.

However, Nina hurriedly closed her book as she saw Noah dropping the sheet in his hands and crouching on the floor while holding his head.

"What happened? Did you hurt yourself?"

Her worries weren't misplaced.

She had seen how Noah never stopped training, incidents during cultivation could happen if the centers of power were too stressed.

Yet, what was happening was the exact opposite of that.

Noah's mental sphere trembled violently, it sent waves of pain that forced Noah to shut his eyes to resist them.

Then, there was an unparalleled clarity.

The tremors stopped, allowing Noah to finally open his eyes and evaluate the changes.

His eyes shone with a blue light as he moved away Nina's embrace and looked at the world in wonder.

The room was still the same but Noah could see every detail in it.

His focus went on the inscriptions that reinforced it and, even though he still couldn't understand their meaning, he could vaguely make out their purpose.

It was similar to a feeling, Noah could sense what those inscriptions were meant to do.

As his focus increased though, he seemed to see some sort of invisible layer that prevented him from looking more in depth, as if the world itself was stopping him from uncovering its secrets.

'The world itself is a prison, what a joke.'

He understood the meaning behind that layer, it represented the limits of the human ranks, it hid the world that only entities could see.

Yet, he laughed at its sight.

It was a loud laugh, Noah seemed unable to contain himself.

'My mind has reached you, Master.'

The master he thought of was William, the one that had introduced him to the cultivation world, one of the two persons that had protected him as he grew.

Twenty-three years, rank 3 sea of consciousness!

Monsters would hide in front of that achievement.

"Are you ok?"

Nina was somewhat relieved seeing that he wasn't hurt but she still couldn't understand his behavior.

Noah moved his gaze on her, his mind was exuding a boundless ambition, the sight of the invisible layer had triggered his deepest emotion.

Nina felt danger.

Noah's mind waves radiated a suffocating pressure, she instinctively retreated to a corner of the room but her mental sphere was still affected by his gaze.

Noah shut his eyes and turned his head, his focus went inside his sea of consciousness as he tried to contain its power.

The third Kesier rune stood proudly over his half-transparent figure, the black roots of the Demonic form spell had entangled around it as the rune completely formed.

Stillness, no waves could be seen in the sea that represented his thoughts, the crystalline water seemed somewhat heavier.

'As I increase the rank of my mind, my thoughts become stronger. I should be able to affect the material world when I reach the fourth rank.'

Then, he tried something that he had stalled for too much time.

The non-refined "Breath" over his sea was immersed in the water, Noah's will was immediately injected in it, his ambition powered the image of a figure jumping from the ground and reaching the sky in one leap.

The "Breath" was refined in no time and Noah immediately redirected it toward his right leg with which he stomped twice on the floor.

A shockwave resounded in the room, Noah lost control of his leg which propelled him in the air, making him smash on the ceiling.