

Chapter 321 - 321. Archipelago

Noah's spectacular performance had one sole purpose: gathering all the attention on him and increasing his value in the eyes of the Empire.

As for why he had done that, it was to instill some urgency in the soldiers on the battlefield.

Anxious persons would commit mistakes and that was what Noah wanted.

He had to create the image of the genius running away from the battlefield, forcing the other soldiers to chase him immediately, the Warp spell played an important role in the matter.

Since his teleportation spell made him completely disappear, leaving no traces of his passage, he could deceive the soldiers, making them believe that he had gone toward the depth of the continent.

Noah's plan worked, the remaining cultivators of the Empire quickly moved to chase him, he guessed that it would take them a few days to realize that they had been fooled.

'One week and there is still no trace of land. Well, my speed is quite low.'

Noah was flying over the sea, his two pairs of black wings paired with the occasional usage of the Shadow step spell allowed him to travel even with the absence of a foothold.

The only problem with his flying ability was that his speed was far lower than what his body was capable of: That ability used a rank 3 magical beast and a rank 0 spell to work, it was obvious that it couldn't match the power of a rank 4 body.

'If only I could make a movement-type martial art that can be used mid-air... That would be too troublesome, it's best to wait for a rank 4 flying creature of the darkness element.'

Noah's martial art needed him to stomp twice on the ground to work, he couldn't pair it to his flight.

Yet, a flying rank 4 magical beast would solve the problem concerning his weak wings.

'I might even surpass the power of my body like that. Magical beasts have a stronger body after all, having their wings would surely add my ability to fly to my combat style.'

Noah didn't want to give up on his wings.

The ability to fly was usually restricted to cultivators in the heroic ranks or to specific spells, having it before that threshold was an advantage that Noah wasn't ready to abandon.

'Well, I don't think I'll find a suitable creature anytime soon, the environment of the sea doesn't fit the darkness element.'

When Noah escaped, he didn't follow the coastline.

The Empire was simply too powerful and he was deep in its territory, the few days that he had over his pursuers wouldn't be enough to make him reach the Efrana nation safely, he needed to change his route.

Noah stared in the distance, only the blue sea was visible on the horizon.

Behind him, the sight of the continent had long disappeared, he was quite far away already.

'Where the hell is this Coral archipelago!?'

Noah cursed in his mind as he continued to fly forward, he required rest and his reserves of "Breath" had never been refilled after the last battle in the valley, he needed to find a place where to recover.

As for the Coral archipelago, that was Noah's new direction.

If he couldn't reach the Efrana nation directly, he would just take the long road across the sea, the archipelago was his first stop in that path.

'I really didn't want to go there though.'

Noah's mood became sour at the thought of going to that place.

Generally speaking, there were many gray zones in the continent, places that had no rulers.

Most of them were danger zones, only super forces like the Empire or the Utra nation could transform them into research grounds and even they only chose those that suited their needs.

Apart from the danger zones, there were places that were ruled by more than one powerful nation.

The Efrana country was one of them, its geographical position put it between the influence of two great nations, making it a seemingly lawless zone where mercenary troops and tribes could develop.

The Coral archipelago was the same, the only difference was that it was under the influence of all three big nations, which is why Noah had excluded it when he obtained the map.

'More than two years have passed, are they still looking for me?'

The thought of returning to a territory occupied by the Royals worried him but he couldn't find a better solution.

The Coral archipelago was far away from the main territories of the three big nations, information about the continent was scarcer.

'It seems some kind of colony from the description of the map, I don't know much though. I should go for the part controlled by the Papral nation as soon as I reach my destination.'

Noah's new escape route was quite articulate.

He had first thought that he could travel in a straight line toward the Efrana nation but the events in the Odrea country had piqued the interest of the Empire, it wasn't safe to travel between its territories anymore.

So, Noah created an alternative path.

He would fly toward the Coral archipelago, enter the territories under the influence of the Papral nation, and find a way toward the northern part of the continent.

He wanted to enter the Papral nation!

Then, from there, he would head south toward the Efrana nation where he would continue to develop.

Noah's intentions for his escape were quite simple: He wanted time to develop without being controlled by powerful forces and wanted to gather resources where he could.

Being a mercenary would have helped in his search for techniques and spells but he had realized that many countries could produce unexpected benefits, just like it had happened with the Odrea country.

Simply speaking, Noah was worried about the possibility of being discovered by the Utra nation but he was also eager to see with his eyes how the cultivators of the other countries lived and trained, he couldn't wait to see what possibilities the archipelago offered!

Chapter 322 - 322. Cliché

The entirety of the sea was considered a danger zone.

The density of "Breath" in it was generally higher due to the lesser concentration of living beings.

The sea was simply too vast, even if it had numerically more living beings that absorbed the "Breath", its width made up for it.

Noah was still flying, the endless crystalline water prevented him from understanding how far he had traveled, only his mind was useful to keep track of his advance.

'More than one month, no land in sight.'

Noah sighed as he took a pill from his space-ring and ate it, the constant flight was slowly eroding his reserves of energy, only his pills and potions allowed him to continue in his travel.

Another week had to pass before Noah spotted one small island that stood alone in the immensity of the sea.

Noah didn't waste time, he dove directly toward its sandy terrain and landed violently, a small cloud made of yellow sand rose in the air due to the impact.

Noah didn't even wait for the cloud to disperse, he directly laid one the terrain and closed his eyes.

More than one month of travel without any sleep and right after a taxing battle had left him without energy, he fell asleep immediately, the blinding sunlight couldn't win against his exhaustion.

He woke up when the night arrived, the feeling of having his mental sphere refilled was refreshing after such a long period of travel, he was able to assess his condition more clearly.

'My mind and my body have recovered, I will halt my training for a few days just to be sure. My dantian needs to be refilled though.'

Noah took the "Breath" blessing from his space-ring and placed it on the terrain before jumping on it and activating his cultivation technique.

His dantian seemed to rejoice at that act, it greedily absorbed the dense "Breath" of the darkness element that the black vortex redirected toward it.

Potions and pills couldn't replace the "Breath" absorbed through a cultivation technique, they were only a momentary solution.

However, Noah had abused them for more than a month, he felt as if his dantian had been malnourished till that moment.

'Finally, I can relax a bit now.'

Minutes passed, the feeling of having his reserves slowly refilled improved his mood, Noah felt that it wouldn't take much for him to return to his peak form.

Then, a tremor ran through the island, forcing Noah to open his eyes to inspect the situation.

The sand dispersed in the sea as the tremor continued and a huge form could be seen rising from the water and appearing on the surface.

It was a reptilian head, it was seven meters large and four thick, it turned to look straight at the human figure over what Noah realized was its shell.

'Rank 4 Sea turtle, this is so cliché...'

Noah cursed in his mind at the sight of the magical beast that was hungrily staring at the piece of "Breath" blessing below him.

Sea turtles would often wander over the surface of the sea, waiting for a nourishing prey to appear.

Noah was always covered by his layers of mental energy, his presence was hidden from beings with a weaker sea of consciousness, that's why the turtle didn't react to his arrival.

However, the "Breath" blessing had increased the density of "Breath" right over its shell, awakening the beast from its slumber.

"Be good and nothing will happen."

Noah warned the turtle, releasing his cold killing intent in the area.

He had felt what was like to be a magical beast, the Bloodline inheritance made him experience the mindset of those powerful creatures.

Their behavior was dictated by their hunger, that feeling was so strong that it ruled their every action.

Yet, there was one instinct that could put a hold even on their hunger: The survival instinct!

Noah tried to convey his power to the beast through his mind waves, he hoped that the turtle would give up on the mineral below him.

The Sea turtle was, after all, his foothold, he didn't want to fight with it.

However, Noah's luck wasn't that good.

The turtle had saliva coming out of its maws, it seemed that it had starved for quite some time already and the sight of Noah's power couldn't stop it from pouncing at him.

'Dammit!'

Noah cursed in his mind as he took back the "Breath" blessing in his space-ringing and warped away from that location, the head of the beast landed there just one instant later.

The Sea turtle had attacked!

Noah reappeared in the air over the beast and performed a descending slash with his two black sabers.

His weapons fused and traced a black line in the air as they stabbed themselves on the turtle's neck.

An enraged roar resounded in the area, Noah's attack had pierced the natural defenses of the creature and it inflicted a deep wound on its neck.

Yet, the beast was alive and its head shot again toward the human figure that was still standing over it.

Noah warped again, slashing again on its blind spot as he reappeared.

Warp, attack, warp, attack, that type of battle tactic was quite exhausting but Noah didn't mind it, he would rather try to keep the shell intact than enter the complete Demonic form and consume the first foothold that he found in more than a month of travel.

In the end, the turtle lost too much blood and died, more than twelve wounds could be seen on its lifeless neck.

'That was easy.'

Noah judged as he placed again the "Breath" blessing on the shell and resumed his cultivation, the blood that had tainted the remaining sand didn't bother him at all.

'Luckily, it does still float, I should refill my dantian as fast as I can before this place becomes too crowded...'

His attention went on the blood that had dispersed in the sea, he knew that the body of the turtle would soon be noticed by other beasts.

'I might as well refill my reserves of materials since I'm at it.'

Chapter 323 - 323. Sea

The blood dispersed in the sea during the battle with the Sea turtle would attract other magical beasts, Noah was sure of it.

'It's a pity that the Blood drain spell is only up to the second rank, killing rank 4 beasts is quite easy now.'

The Blood drain spell had helped Noah in shortening the amount of time required for his body to reach the third rank, he held in high regard the mechanism behind such spell.

'Transforming the blood of an enemy into nourishment for my own body, that sound precisely like a magical beast. It's a pity, I can't use it since my level is too high and I don't even have a body-nourishing method to absorb the energy gathered in that way.'

The Yin body was a rank 4 body-nourishing method, it had brought Noah to the peak of the lower tier of the fourth rank but now it couldn't be used anymore.

The Yin body was formed, Noah needed a stronger nourishing method if he wanted to resume training his body.

'It's not really a problem right now, being in the fourth rank gives enough space for my other centers of power to grow, it doesn't apply any limitation yet.'

Noah thought about his previous nourishing methods, he knew that obtaining something in the fifth rank wouldn't be easy, creating a technique from nothing seemed more doable.

After all, who held methods and techniques in the fifth rank?

Only the biggest powerhouses of each nation could hope to see such rare scrolls.

Also, cultivators in the heroic ranks would start to detach themselves from the human species, they would become entities with their individualities.

'I don't even know if it's worth training in a rank 5 method, creating a technique that fits myself would be perfect, but...'

But Noah didn't have much experience in the training of the body.

The Forging of the Seven Hells didn't need for Noah to cultivate and the Yin body had already reconstructed his body, Noah was left with no ideas on how to improve.

'I'll think about it when the limitations return, my dantian is still in the second rank and I don't have a rank 3 cultivation technique either. Creating one for it should be easier though, I have already a few ideas.'

Noah had diligently cultivated till that moment, automatizing that procedure as much as he could, it was normal that he felt more experienced in cultivation techniques.

'Here they come.'

His mental energy detected something approaching from the distance, interrupting his thoughts.

'A pack of Toxic blowfishes, they are basically worthless for me.'

Noah stood up from the "Breath" blessing and deployed his wings to fly toward the incoming magical beasts.

The blowfishes were only in the second or third rank, they were the first to notice the corpse of the Sea turtle and they immediately began to swim toward it.

The body of a rank 4 creature held an unimaginable amount of "Breath", it was an irresistible meal for those weak beasts.

However, they were of no use for Noah.

He simply limited himself to fly toward the pack and launch a few fuming wind slashes.

The black smoke devoured the area of the sea where the beasts were swimming, vanquishing the pack in a few instants.

'Rank 3 beasts are just ants when I use spells.'

That realization made Noah sigh as he returned to the shell to cultivate.

He was a rank 3 mage now, the power of his spells was deadly even for rank 4 creatures, those in the human ranks simply couldn't hope to survive.

Not even a drop of blood remained in the area where he attacked, the black smoke had even consumed the water where the blowfishes were swimming.

A few minutes later, a pack of Giant seaworms arrived.

Their strongest specimens were in the third rank again so Noah destroyed the whole pack without leaving any trace, he didn't want the area to become too crowded after all.

'Finally, something strong.'

About an hour later, a pack of Razor-head dolphins neared the corpse of the Sea turtle.

Those beasts were white and had a sharp vertical fin that grew from the top of their head, it was a hard material used to forge weapons of the water element.

Also, the pack had a rank 4 dolphin at its lead.

Noah didn't waste time, he directly flew in the air and launched another series of fuming wind slash.

The pack was destroyed almost immediately, with only the leader surviving.

Noah was about to dive toward it in a descending lunge when the beast dove deep into the water, escaping from his reach.

'I guess it wasn't that hungry.'

Noah shook his head at that sight and returned to the shell.

The smoke released by his wind slashes had hurt the rank 4 creature, dispersing some of its blood in the sea, creating an even bigger bait for the beasts of the sea.

'At this pace, I might refill my dantian without gathering any material, maybe this area isn't that populated.'

The rank 4 dolphin had escaped because it realized the difference in power between it and Noah, its hunger wasn't that pressing so it had smartly decided to escape.

'The sea is just as it was described in the academy, huge and filled with threats.'

Noah concluded in his mind.

The magical beasts' course in the academy had taught him the differences between the land and the sea.

The sea had more magical beasts but was also incredibly huge, the strongest creatures were on its depths, silently absorbing the "Breath" in their solitary slumber.

'I wonder if there is something on the level of the Albino snake right below me... I still have to uncover the secrets behind the high density of "Breath" in Twilboia cliff too.'

Noah dreamed of the time when he could just barge into that cliff and kill the giant snake that had almost killed him when he still didn't have a dantian.

'I'll be sure to snore on your dead body, damned snake.'

He was forced to interrupt his fantasy since his mental energy sensed three rank 4 creatures swimming at high speed toward him.

Chapter 324 - 324. Sailors

'Three Hammerhead sharks, all in the fourth rank, no pack.'

Noah judged the situation from his position over the shell.

'One of them seems stronger than the others, this might be troublesome.'

Noah was a rank 3 mage but his techniques and spells weren't that effective in that environment.

The Mental tremor spell was extremely useful against cultivators but magical beasts didn't have a sea of consciousness, the spell could make them stagger at best.

The complete Demonic form was effective but it was too powerful for him to safely use it on the shell of the turtle, it would surely damage his foothold as he fought.

'My dantian is halfway refilled, I don't know if it's worth to fight this time.'

Noah took back the "Breath" blessing and stared at the incoming sharks with a pensive expression.

'Is the leader in the middle tier?'

The strongest shark was two meters longer than the other two beasts, it seemed far stronger than them.

The fourth rank had tiers too, Noah had fought only beasts that were in the lower one alone and didn't know the actual battle prowess of the stronger ones.

'I would love to fight it if we were on the ground but here it doesn't feel like the right thing to do.'

He was still escaping after all, he could completely relax only after he reached the Coral archipelago.

'I'll take the weakest one with me and then resume my travel.'

Noah quickly decided and deployed his wings as he took the twelve meters large shell into his space-ring.

Then, he warped.

The three sharks seemed enraged by the sudden disappearance of the Sea turtle and began to swim circularly to see if they could pick some remaining traces of its corpse.

A black figure appeared over them at that moment, its two pairs of wings coupled with its fiendish form created the image of a demon descending on the surface of the sea.

'Demonic form! Second Form of the Ashura!'

Noah slashed with his most powerful attack at one of the weaker sharks, severing its hammerhead in one neat blow.

His hands moved quickly, the head of the beast was immediately stored in his space-ring and he was about to fly away when a dangerous feeling hit his mind.

Noah warped away, turning his head to look at what had caused that sensation.

A blade made of water cut where he was previously flying and continued to cross the sea for a few meters, Noah knew that the power behind that attack would have broken through the defenses of his spell.

His gaze went on the biggest shark, its eyes radiated anger as it redirected its attention to the black figure hovering in the distance.

'That beast reacted faster than I thought... The fourth rank is indeed vast.'

Magical beasts were similar to humans, they had different power levels according to their species and the tier they were in.

The leader of the sharks was stronger than its followers but Noah didn't imagine that it could react as soon as he attacked.

'The Sea turtle and the head of the shark should be enough to make some quick trade in the archipelago, I should just resume my travel.'

It was with those thoughts that he turned and flew toward the direction pointed in his map.

Behind him, the two sharks noticed that Noah was leaving and began to eat the drowning corpse of their companion.

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Another month passed.

Noah had flown for the entire time without taking resting.

That time, however, his situation wasn't that bad: He had rested over the shell of the Sea turtle and his flight depleted only a small portion of his "Breath", his complexion was far better than before.

'Traces of life.'

His mental energy sensed some lifeform in the distance, that was the first change in his travel after he left the shell of the turtle.

Noah carefully changed his direction and flew toward those lifeforms.

Little by little, the shape of a ship became visible in the distance, Noah could see how its veils and hull had inscriptions all over their bodies.

'Humans!'

Noah neared the ship, the sailors on it were mostly cultivators in the first rank and they stared with wide eyes at his figure slowly descending on the main deck.

"Is there a captain?"

Noah asked in a loud voice, his manners were quite overbearing and resolute and his aura radiated part of his coldness.

"Who is asking!?"

A fat man with black curly hair came out from one of the lodgings below the deck, he was shirtless and held a golden cup as he walked on the deck.

Noah performed a simple bow before raising his head to speak some simple lies.

"I'm Zach, I come from the Shandal Empire and I'm on a journey to hone my skills. I wanted to reach the Coral archipelago with the help of my puppet but it seems that I've lost track of the right path. I wonder if you could help me."

Noah's attitude was straightforward and domineering, just like a soldier of the Empire.

Impersonating someone else had never been a problem for Noah, especially after living in the Odrea country for so long.

"My ship will return there in two weeks but we first have to finish our fishing route. Also, no one stays for free on my ship, I might give you a room if you help my sailors!"

The captain laughed as he spoke those words, he didn't seem to have much respect for his fake status.

'Are things different here? Maybe the society here has developed in ways that I'm unaware of.'

Noah took a few thousand Credits from his space-ring and handed them to the captain.

"Are these enough for your trouble?"

The captain looked at the crystals with wide eyes, the cup in his hand almost fell on the floor due to his astonishment.

"Y-yes yes, for sure, my Lord!"

That sudden change of attitude was unexpected, Noah couldn't help but think that he had misjudged the financial situation of those sailors.

Chapter 325 - 325. Hive

The captain of the inscribed ship happily took the Credits and welcomed Noah in his quarters.

His attitude drastically changed after Noah paid him, he became more hospitable and he tried his best to satisfy Noah's needs.

A small table was filled with the best food and wine that the ship had to offer, Noah found himself having dinner alone with the captain, only a few servants were in the room apart from the two of them.

Of course, Noah used that chance to gather as much information as he could about the Coral archipelago.

The name of the captain was Cody, he was a former cultivator in the Papral nation who was exiled in the archipelago due to some minor crime.

According to his words, the political situation in the Coral archipelago was quite far from Noah's expectations.

Each powerful nation had sent their representatives to colonize some of the islands that made the archipelago a long time ago but they all had different criteria for the selections of their envoy.

The Utra nation had sent professors of the academy escorted by royal soldiers to set up a branch of the academy.

Their job was to gather resources that would be sent back to the main country for research or cultivation purposes.

The environment of the archipelago was completely different from the one of the continent, some materials could only be found there.

The Shandal Empire didn't have a specific reason to colonize the islands, it simply did that because the other two big nations were doing it.

That's why it sent old and retired soldiers, their professions varied from the slave trade to anything they could get their hands on, leading to a disorganized control over the territory.

The Papral nation, instead, had a strict code of conduct.

Its cultivators emphasized balance and diligence, leading to a large number of minor crimes.

Simply speaking, the Papral nation used the Coral archipelago as a prison without bars, it would just send troublesome cultivators there and leave them be.

Yet, that was the situation of a long time ago.

Time had passed since the archipelago was colonized and the different factions slowly merged to form a more uniform political situation.

It couldn't be helped, every human had its own ambitions, being far away from the landmass gave them a lot of freedom.

Little by little, the citizens of the archipelago began to feel like an independent country, forcing the rulers on the continent to enforce a stricter control over their envoys.

Each one of the three big nation sent some trusted representatives to take control of their respective factions, restoring the barriers between the countries.

However, once an idea was created, it was almost impossible to destroy it.

Whispers about independence still resounded in the islands, the rumors spoke about an underground organization that secretly interfered with the powers sent by the continent.

"What's the name of this organization?"

Noah became extremely interested once the conversation with Cody reached that point.

Noah was a criminal in the Utra nation, the Royals had a complete profile of his strength.

Also, he was wanted in the Empire, even if it wasn't aware of his facial features, it still knew his abilities.

'I had initially thought that I would be joining some minor organization controlled by the Papral nation. Yet, between another big country and an underground society, I obviously prefer the latter.'

Noah knew himself, there was a high chance that he would become an enemy of the Papral nation too if he was to become too close to it.

Yet, an underground organization was perfect for his plans.

'Its members must be constantly hiding from the ruling powers, meaning that I can be as secretive as I want. Also, it might have a way to smuggle people back in the continent without alerting the big nations.'

Noah didn't forget his purpose.

He needed to reach a country where he could gather resources and develop, the Efrana nation was the best choice according to the information that he had.

However, he wasn't so delusional to think that he could simply fly toward the Papral nation and then walk to Efrana, the events in the Odrea nation had clearly proven that feat impossible.

That's why he had decided to join some organization that could lead him back to the continent while he was still flying over the sea.

Yet, realizing that a secret society existed had opened a more suitable path to him.

"My Lord, I'm just a simple sailor, how would I know matters related to those powerful forces?"

Cody didn't answer his question, he lowered his gaze on the golden cup full of wine and began to eat again.

'That's a lie.'

Noah was sure of that fact.

He had lived in a place that had secret organizations, the citizens there simply called them gangs.

He knew that the name of those gangs was well known in the minds of the common citizens, a name could inculcate more fear, it created a real threat.

Noah showed some displeasure, he silently sipped from his cup, keeping his gaze on the fat man in front of him.

Little by little, he showed more of his aura, Cody's habitation became colder as time passed.

Cody was a rank 2 cultivator in the gaseous stage with a rank 4 body, he wasn't weak for the average level of the cultivators in the human ranks.

However, in front of Noah's rank 3 sea of consciousness, he could only lower his head, his face began to exude cold drops of sweat that fell on the plates below him.

After a few minutes, Cody couldn't handle the silence anymore and sighed while placing down his cutlery.

"My Lord, you have to promise that you will never tell that I've revealed this information to you."

Cody seemed extremely serious as he spoke those words, Noah couldn't help but be slightly surprised by that.

'It's just a name, why is he so worried?'

Those thoughts didn't prevent him from nodding at Cody to accept his condition.

Cody lowered his head and used one hand to prevent the sound of his words to disperse in the room before he finally whispered a name.

"The organization is called Hive."

Chapter 326 - 326. Destination

"My Lord, you might want to know that this name is taboo in the archipelago, the powers there have been sent precisely to stop any rumors about a possible independence. I've seen good people imprisoned and interrogated only because they were aware of this name."

Cody added shortly after, his serious expression never left his face.

'It makes sense... I guess I'll see how the grave the situation is once I arrive, I don't really want trouble.'

If the situation of the Hive was too serious, Noah would simply go back to his original plan and join a legal organization.

It didn't make much difference to him which faction he joined as long as he succeeded in his plan.

"Thank you for your honesty, it seems that I've troubled you."

Noah changed the subject of their conversation while wearing a smile, Cody couldn't help but sigh in relief seeing that he didn't probe further.

That dinner ended shortly after, Cody gave Noah one of the best cabins on the ship and made sure that he had everything he needed before leaving him alone.

'Damned big nations, they have their influence everywhere.'

Noah felt a bit frustrated.

He only wanted to cultivate in peace and to have access to techniques but those things seemed always locked behind powers with whom he could not interfere.

'The Royals want to enlarge their family, the Empire wants more soldiers, I wonder what the Papral nation asks its cultivators.'

Noah had seen how two of the three big countries handled lone and promising cultivators and their ways conflicted with Noah's interests.

He didn't mind joining a powerful organization as long as he could maintain his personal freedom and his growth wasn't hindered.

Yet, in that world, that seemed too much to ask.

'Controlling power, securing your position through power, everything here is about power.'

Hindering the cultivation journey of your subjects was the best way to maintain your ruling position, no one would be able to take your crown from you if no one was strong enough to do so.

'I'm not sure about the inner circle of the Empire, that God must have had some kind of privileged position to be able to cultivate till that level. I wonder if the Royals have a God too.'

Noah's understanding of that world was limited to his level, he only knew about the matters handled by humans, the situations above his level were a topic that he was completely unaware of.

'The Papral nation doesn't seem so bad though, the sects willingly cooperate for the greater good of the nation before handling their internal conflicts. Well, that's what Cody says.'

Cody came from the Papral nation so he knew more about its political situation.

Also, he had been exiled, forcing him to make a living as a sailor.

That gave birth to negative emotions toward his nation which made it easier for Noah to gather information.

Cody's crime consisted in the illegal purchase of female slaves from the Empire, that simple crime was enough to exile him in the archipelago where he could only rent a fishing ship with the little finances that he had.

His crew was rented too.

However, since his sailors were quite weak, he could fish rank 3 magical beasts at best, barely meeting his monthly expenses.

'Balance and diligence, a code of conduct... There shouldn't be anyone more diligent than me but the other requirements are quite vague.'

Noah's thoughts wandered through the many information that he had gathered that day before he decided to rest, he had still to sleep after he left the shell of the Sea turtle so his centers of power needed another round of recovery.

Yet, he had finally found a safe foothold, the two weeks required to reach the Coral archipelago were more than enough to return to his peak form and even improve a little.

Noah barely came out of his cabin in those days.

Cody tried to give as much information as he could about the archipelago hoping to make some quick gain but Noah didn't hand him any more Credits.

Little by little, Cody stopped inviting him to dinner and limited himself to send food to his cabin.

Noah preferred that treatment since it left him with more time to train and to plan his next move.

His sea of consciousness was enlarging due to the "Breath" stored in it, it wasn't as fast as with the Kesier rune but it was still better than not training at all.

His dantian had completely recovered and was quickly nearing the limits of the liquid stage, the breakthrough to the solid stage was nearing even faster than Noah had predicted.

His body and mind were at a higher level after all, they were increasing the speed at which his dantian grew in order to restore some kind of balance between his centers of power.

The rest of his days was used to train in the Elemental forging method.

He had left the Odrea nation in a hurry and he knew that a long escape would have followed that event.

That's why he didn't bring any of the materials in the inventory with him.

They were already old and partially decomposed, only the formation of the inventory could slow their decay.

It would have been fine to take them if Noah was to have time to forge during his escape but the flight over the sea would have just wasted those precious materials.

To put it simply, he lacked the materials needed to improve the Demonic swords or to attempt in any other creation.

His training consisted of creating stronger wills to imbue in the "Breath", his ability had risen a lot due to the mass productions of disposable weapons but he knew that he could do better.

After all, when he was forging weapons for himself, Noah wouldn't aim to create self-destructive items, he wanted durable and stable creations.

Also, using his mind as much as he could was another form of training for the sea of consciousness which Noah gladly accepted.

It was in the silence of the cabin, with the occasional noise of the sailors in the background, that the ship completed its route, successfully returning to a port in the Coral archipelago.

Chapter 327 - 327. Matrix

A purple sight welcomed Noah as soon as he climbed to the main deck.

A dazzling purple halo illuminated the air, giving a peculiar shade to the environment.

'This should be the Coral halo that Cody mentioned, it is indeed striking.'

The archipelago was formed on top of the exoskeleton of an immense pack of magical beasts, the Purple corals, which naturally created a sturdy purple shell as a form of protection.

The pack had long died but the exoskeleton created by its specimens remained.

As time passed, terrain began to accumulate on top of that huge exoskeleton, ultimately becoming the foundation of the archipelago.

The magical beasts had died but their shells still radiated a purple light, illuminating the sea around it with a bright purple halo.

"You'll become used to it, it's barely noticeable on the ground."

Cody spoke some last words to Noah before he began to shout orders to his sailors, he had to unload the contents of the ship to sell his goods, that was his profession after all.

Noah understood the meaning behind his words and jumped off the ship without even saying goodbye, his eyes curiously wandered on the scenery of the port.

According to the information previously learned from Cody, this port was on one of the islands controlled by the faction from the Papral nation.

It was one of the poorest and smallest islands though, its only purpose was the trade of the goods that had to be sold in the richer markets in the internal parts of the archipelago.

Cody's shipment wasn't that precious, rank 3 creatures could be found anywhere in the sea, the market of the archipelago was full of those resources.

That's why their prices were low, beasts of the water, wind, and light element were quite common there, those in the human ranks at least.

'I should find a way toward the important markets, I don't think that this place has what I need.'

Noah could feel the precarious situation of the island from the scenery on the port.

Barracks and simple-looking wooden habitations were sparsely built on the terrain, sailors with their top exposed or wearing loose robes could be seen running everywhere near the many ships that filled the port.

They were weak, mostly rank 1 cultivators, those in the second rank were either captains of their ships or managers that handled the situation in the port.

As Noah walked away from the shore toward the center of the island, the purple halo diminished, leaving only a shade of its color that the terrain couldn't block.

The scenery didn't change much as he entered the deepest parts of the island, only a few better-looking buildings attracted his attention at times.

'This should be an area for the commoners of the archipelago, I can spot a few non-cultivators between its inhabitants.'

The sea was a danger zone, preventing any commoner from sailing from the continent toward those islands.

Also, the archipelago was a land colonized by cultivators, it was obvious that its citizens would have access to rank 1 cultivation techniques at least.

When Noah reached the other side of the island, he could clearly witness the vastity of the archipelago.

Hundreds of islands surrounded by a purple halo unfolded themselves in front of his eyes, they had different shapes and dimension but they all seemed inhabited by a large number of cultivators.

'I wonder how they protect themselves from the waves of magical beasts, I didn't see any soldier here.'

Noah pondered about the new environment when the sight of a cultivator wearing an eye-catching yellow robe stopped his train on thoughts.

It was an old woman with white hair combed in a simple bun, her face carried the marks of her age and she stood silently with her eyes closed next to a small formation.

Noah neared the woman, his gaze swept the formation many times as he tried to understand its purpose.

'It should be something related to the movement field but I can't understand its specifics.'

His rank 3 sea of consciousness made it possible for him to read the purpose behind the symbols on the ground but its true meaning was still obscure, only inscription masters of the attunement method would be able to understand that aspect of the formation.

"This must be your first time here, welcome to island two hundred and six."

The elderly woman opened her eyes and spoke to Noah when he became too close.

'Did they give a number to each island?'

"I'm trying to reach a market able to satisfy my needs, could you please help me with this matter?"

Noah bowed as he said those words, suppressing his curiosity for when he reached a better place.

The woman smiled and pointed the formation while giving a brief explanation.

"This formation can transport you to a bigger island controlled by our country. I suggest you take this teleportation matrix for island one hundred and seventy where you can find another formation for the market on island one hundred

and thirty-two. This may seem confusing at the beginning but our transport network is envied even by the continent, you just have to become used to it."

Noah nodded and moved his gaze toward one of the islands in the distance.

There were only a few kilometers of water between the two, flying there wouldn't be hard.

"What prevents me from simply swimming to travel through the islands?"

The woman didn't seem bothered by Noah's question, she seemed used to solve the doubts of the newcomers.

"The Purple coral is a precious material that can't be found on the continent and its also a natural deterrent against the assault of magical beasts. Many cultivators have tried to bring a piece of the coral back on the continent in the past so the authorities here have jointly decided to forbid the traversing of the sea. You can move between the islands only through the teleportation matrix of the various factions."

Chapter 328 - 328. Stick with yellow

'That seems expensive.'

Noah nodded at the woman's words and moved his gaze back on the formation.

Teleporting wasn't cheap, the Warp spell expended a lot of his "Breath" so Noah guessed that a decent sum was needed to use that service.

"How much would it cost to take the route that you suggested?"

Noah wasn't short of money, he could be considered quite rich for his status.

"Five hundred Credits to reach island one hundred and seventy and seven hundred from there to reach island one hundred and thirty-two. The prices are set based on the distance between the teleportation matrixes and the importance of the destination."

'That's not as bad as I thought, I guess they still want to give some chances to the people in the poorer islands.'

The price set on the matrixes was a clear barrier to the citizens of the archipelago.

The poorest ones would decide to remain on the peripheral islands and continue working there instead of moving to the inner parts, looking for a better occupation.

Noah could already guess that there was a connection between the richer islands and the level of their inhabitants.

'I wonder how much they gain with this system, the organizations behind the matrixes should be filthy rich!'

Owning the monopoly over a basic service was always extremely remunerative, Noah was starting to understand the reason behind the flashy yellow robe of the woman.

"I'll take the route that you suggested."

Noah handed five hundred Credits to her and stepped on the formation, calmly waiting for her to power it.

The woman stored three hundred Credits in her space-ring and placed the remaining two hundred on the borders of the formation.

The symbols and lines on the ground lit up as soon as the crystals touched their borders and began to envelop Noah in a soft white light.

"One hundred and seventy."

The woman spoke to the formation, completely activating it as the destination was set.

Noah felt a slight pressure on his mental sphere when the scenery changed drastically right in front of his eyes.

The barracks disappeared, replaced by many one or two-story buildings orderly built on the ground.

Next to him, many other matrixes could be seen inscribed on the terrain, Noah counted fifteen of them from his position.

A stream of cultivators walked calmly on the streets, they wandered between the many shops that filled the scenery.

"Hey, don't just stand there, we need to use the matrix!"

Noah's train of thoughts was interrupted by the rough voice of a bald man dressed in an eye-catching yellow robe similar to the one that the elderly woman was wearing.

Only then he realized that there was a line of cultivators near the matrixes, anxiously waiting for their turn.

Noah stepped off the formation and left the crowd in front of them, he wanted to analyze the situation before going to the market.

'They should belong to different organizations, there seem to be three of them in total. I suppose there is one for each faction.'

He could see that there were two other types of cultivators that handled the formations, they wore azure and white robes that were of a similar quality of the yellow ones.

'They sure don't try to hide their wealth, I guess those matrixes lead to islands belonging to the Utra nation and the Empire. Well, I'll stick with yellow.'

Noah appointed that discovery in his mind and began to walk through the streets of the city that expanded itself on the island.

'This should be some kind of residential area where cultivators of any faction can live. The division between the big countries should be limited to the many businesses that fill the archipelago.'

The city was mostly composed of habitations available for rent, banners with any kind of writing and price could be seen fixed on top of some building.

Some of them had symbols of a faction next to the prices while others explicitly prevented to cultivators of different countries from renting the houses, the majority of them though were open to everyone.

'The shops here cover only a small part of the market, there is nothing that catches my attention.'

Island one hundred and seventy only had shops that were useless to Noah.

They were mostly taverns or restaurants, with a few stores specialized in refined clothes that had some inscription on them.

Seeing that he couldn't find anything worthy of his time, Noah returned to the shore where the matrixes were placed.

"Destination?"

The bald man with a yellow robe smiled seeing that he had returned to the matrix of his faction, his clients were divided between the other two organizations after all.

"I heard that there is a market on island one hundred and thirty-two, is that true?"

The man nodded before giving a quick explanation.

"Yes, that market is a neutral area, the merchants from each faction place their stands there. It's seven hundred Credits for the transport."

Noah had the money already in his hands when the man confirmed the elderly woman's words.

The same process happened, Noah stepped on the matrix and the man used some of his Credits to activate it.

The scenery changed again, the buildings disappeared only to be replaced by fancy shops that had large banners on their front.

There seemed to be even more people on that island, crowds could be seen staring with greedy eyes at the items inside some of the stores while the wealthiest ones were casually walking along what looked like soldiers.

'So, there are soldiers in the archipelago, I was starting to doubt about their existence.'

Island one hundred and seventy didn't have any guard, the only cultivators that seemed to have any kind of authority were those that handled the teleportation matrixes.

There though, Noah saw how some cultivator was escorted by groups of stern-looking guards.

The people that saw them coming would just move away from their path and stare at them in envy.

'Stick with yellow and avoid those guys, I shouldn't expose myself before having a clear picture of the archipelago.'

It was with those thoughts that left the matrix, nearing a store that had a flashy map as its banner.

Chapter 329 - 329. Underground world

The store seemed quite wealthy from the outside and Noah could confirm that sensation as soon as he entered it.

"Welcome."

A middle-aged woman raised her head at the sound of the main door opening but she quickly lost interest when she saw Noah's figure.

It couldn't be helped, Noah had just come out from a long journey and only rested on Cody's ship, there was some dirt all over his body and he smelled due to the sweat that had accumulated over the flight.

To put it simply, he didn't look like someone that could afford the items in the store.

'She must think that I'm some kind of poor customer that entered just out of curiosity. I can't blame her.'

Noah understood the meaning behind her actions and agreed with her judgment, he really needed a bath.

Yet, that didn't stop him, he limited himself to look through the many shelves to see if he could find what he needed.

The store was only a one-story building, the items that it sold were all in exposition with their prices written next to their descriptions.

'Oh? They even sell information.'

Noah was surprised to see that some shelves were empty but a price was still attached to it.

Their tags indicated a certain topic or organization of the archipelago and there were even tiers to how detailed that information was.

Of course, the price increased according to the number of details requested.

'I bet that there is a lot going on in secret, no one can accumulate all this information without having connections with the underground world.'

Noah concluded in his mind as he continued to inspect the items.

Maps and information of any kind appeared in his eyes but he was still unsatisfied, everything seemed too generic and there wasn't anything that offered a complete overview of the archipelago.

In the end, he gave up and neared the desk where the woman was after releasing a loud sigh.

"Could you please help me with my request?"

Noah performed a polite bow before asking that question.

The woman raised her head again and stared at Noah for a while before nodding.

"I need a detailed map of the archipelago. The map must feature information about the matrixes' network and the political situation of each island. It would be perfect if it also described the role of each island."

Noah casually spoke those words but the woman opened her eyes in surprise.

Apart from the intel about the organizations, the maps were the main business of the shop and Noah was basically asking for their best product!

"I don't know if you can afford something like that."

The woman didn't refuse him right away but she politely questioned Noah's financial situation.

"Name a price."

Noah didn't mind it, he simply replied to her in his usual aloof attitude.

"Fifteen thousand Credits."

Noah waved his hand and that sum appeared on the desk right over the sheets that she was reading.

The sight of the pile of crystals surprised the woman who immediately stood up and bowed toward Noah.

"Every request of our customer shall be granted!"

The drastic change of attitude made Noah roll his eyes but he remained silent, he would have done the same if he was in her situation.

The woman bent under the desk and seemed to activate some kind of inscription since a pale light illuminated the floor for a few instants.

When she stood up, an azure scroll was in her hands which she handed to Noah.

"This is the most updated map of the archipelago of our store. You can modify the information through your mental energy if it becomes outdated or you can come here and we will update it for you."

Noah unfolded the scroll and swept it with his mental energy.

A blueprint of the archipelago appeared inside his sea of consciousness, information about each of its islands revealed itself as soon as Noah focused on them.

The information included the faction that controlled them, their purpose, and the matrixes placed there together with the route needed to reach them.

As he willed, the teleportation network illuminated itself on the blueprint, Noah could clearly understand the many connections between each formation.

"Does it satisfy you?"

The woman asked when she saw that Noah closed the scroll to store it in his space-ring.

"Yes but I wonder if you could do something else for me."

The woman smiled at his words before being stunned by the sudden drop in the temperature of the store.

Noah was staring at her with a cold expression, his eyes shone with a bright blue light as he used his mental energy to express his seriousness.

"How much does it cost to stop the information about my purchase from going into your records?"

A store that sold information would surely record Noah's arrival, he didn't want to expose himself so easily.

The woman gulped, the gaze fixed on her was limiting the activity of her mind, her mental sphere was restricted under the pressure of who she had initially thought was a beggar.

"Three thousand Credits and the store will forget that you even entered."

She didn't falter, her words were steady, she seemed trained for that kind of situation.

Noah nodded and retracted his aura, covering himself again in layers of mental energy before taking out the requested sum.

The woman took the money and smiled, her expression was different though: The warmth from before was gone, replaced by a stern and cold attitude.

"I hope that the store has satisfied you, feel free to use it whenever you need."

Noah gave one last look at the woman before leaving the building, his mind replayed the events in the shop as he moved toward a matrix.

'She was trained to handle matters of the underground world! It seems that I've misjudged the situation of the archipelago, I wouldn't be surprised if all the stores had connections with the Hive. The continent has sent representatives after the situation in the islands was going out of hand, which means that most of its former inhabitants were all willing to become independent already! I don't know if I can use this to my advantage though.'

Noah took a matrix that led to one of the residential islands belonging to the Papral nation.

The map purchased in the store was very detailed, Noah had just to think and the islands on the blueprint inside his mind that satisfied his needs would illuminate themselves.

It took less than an instant for him to pick an island and decide a route, the prices for the teleportation corresponded to those indicated by the map which made Noah even more satisfied with his purchase.

As for why he left the market area without inspecting other stores, it was because the woman's attitude had raised his wariness about the archipelago.

'I don't know how much of the archipelago the Hive controls but it doesn't feel like the representatives of the continent have done much progress in suppressing it... I can't move freely if I don't have confidence in my strength.'

Wandering in unknown territories was something that Noah had done many times already.

However, he had never been in a place where the political situation was so vague.

'Why there isn't any soldier patrolling the islands? What is the actual role of the representatives of the continent? What is the role of the Hive? How much control does it have over the many organizations?'

Doubts filled Noah's mind, there were too many questions that he couldn't answer.

'Since I can't find answers, I'll just focus on increasing my strength before making a move.'

That was Noah's solution.

His dantian was already nearing the solid stage, it wouldn't take much for the breakthrough to arrive.

Being in the solid stage would place Noah at the peak of the second rank, making him virtually unbeatable by other rank 2 cultivators thanks to his rank 3 sea of consciousness.

Noah left the formation as soon as the scenery changed, the many tall buildings were the sign of a place built for habitation purposes.

He hurriedly crossed the streets of the city, this island was smaller than island one hundred and thirty-two, it had fewer buildings but they featured better rooms.

A banner then attracted his attention.

'Three hundred Credits per week, open to everyone, average density for rank 2 cultivators. This one will do.'

Noah knocked on the main door of the building and a middle-aged man wearing luxurious clothes welcomed him.

They quickly found an agreement, Noah simply handed three thousand Credits to him and left for his room.

The density of "Breath" was quite low for his needs but the "Breath" blessing stored in his space-ring made up for it.

'This is simply too useful, I bet that the Royals will cough blood if they knew that my cultivation is going smoothly thanks to them.'

Noah couldn't help but smile when he felt the density of "Breath" in the room increase as soon as his mineral was placed on the floor.

Cultivators had two big obstacles in their pursuit of power: techniques and resources!

Techniques were the basic requirement to cultivate but the training speed was dictated by the resources in your possession!

If Noah didn't have the "Breath" blessing with him, his progress would have been far slower, a normal environment could satisfy only rank 1 cultivators after all.

'I wonder when this stone will become useless to me. I should still be fine during the solid stage but I don't know about the third rank. Well, I still don't have a cultivation technique for that so there is no point in worrying now.'

Noah suppressed his thoughts and closed his eyes to focus on his cultivation, he had planned to leave the room only after his dantian entered and stabilized itself in the solid stage.

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Two months passed quickly.

Noah was used to training diligently so he never felt the need to go out of his room during that period.

His body and mind were on a higher rank so his dantian had improved quickly, the breakthrough that Noah was waiting for arrived only one month and a half after he secluded himself.

His dantian had reached its limits, signaling that it was time to change the state of the "Breath" inside it.

The shining black liquid inside his dantian was compressed under the pressure of his mental energy, Noah saw how the walls of his dantian couldn't fight against the steady control that he had on the process.

In just a few hours, the entirety of the liquid "Breath" was turned into a small black crystal, Noah had easily entered into the solid stage, the last stage of the second rank!

The other two weeks were spent enlarging his reserves of solid "Breath", the "Breath" blessing had begun to struggle to provide the necessary density but Noah didn't have a better solution at that moment, he was simply glad that he could cultivate at a decent speed.

He still had two weeks left before his rent expired but he had yet to decide what to do in the archipelago.

Noah found himself inspecting the map of the archipelago many times, looking for opportunities that suited him.

However, the months spent in seclusion had made most of the events described in the map outdated.

'It seems that I have to return to the store.'

Noah left the room and used the matrixes needed to return to island one hundred and thirty-two.

'Now that I think about it, this store doesn't even have a name, no wonder it's so shady.'

The same woman from the last time greeted him with a wide smile, the place was empty again so he could speak freely.

Another five hundred Credits were expended to update the map, Noah couldn't help but think that his finances were shortening far quicker than he had planned.

Yet, that purchase wasn't fruitless.

An event that attracted his attention appeared in one of the islands controlled by the Papral nation.

'Entrance tests of the Flowing river sect, two days from now on island eighty-six. This seems interesting!'

The chance that Noah was waiting for had finally arrived!