

Chapter 331 - 331. Mental seed

On the morning of two days later, on island eighty-six.

A large pavilion was placed in a remote location, outside the city of the island, near the shore.

The purple light radiated by the exoskeleton of the coral gave a mesmerizing appearance to the scenery and lines of youths could be seen waiting for their chance to enter the building.

'There are mostly kids who have just grown a dantian but there is some experienced cultivator. I wonder if the sect will leave a few spots for people like me.'

Noah was in line, waiting for his turn to enter the pavilion.

That building was the place where the first test of the Flowing river sect would occur, the rumors of the crowd around him spoke about some kind of examination that would identify the attitude of the applicants.

'My attitude shouldn't be a problem, I don't think that someone more diligent than me exists. The only problem is my past, I don't know if they will accept me once they make some investigation.'

Noah could clearly hear the many voices of the youths in line and was already pondering about the events that would follow the entrance test.

It couldn't be helped, Noah was confident in his ability, it was impossible to find another cultivator that matched his achievements at such a young age.

Noah wasn't even twenty-four but he was already a rank 3 mage and a rank 2 cultivator in the solid stage!

His body had also entered in the heroic ranks a long time ago, such feats were unthinkable when considering his age.

'The Flowing river sect in the archipelago is just a branch of the sect in the continent, it's the perfect opportunity to reach the Papral nation.'

Noah had bought information about the sect as soon as he learned about the entrance test, it was needless to say that it had cost him quite a sum.

Knowledge was precious, specific information about certain organizations would be pricier than maps.

Yet, using that service had confirmed Noah's hopes, leading him to participate in the entrance test.

The line moved quickly, twenty persons would enter the pavilion each time and exit it in ten minutes.

Considering that there were only a few hundred applicants, Noah's turn came quite soon.

The green curtains of the pavilion opened, allowing Noah and nineteen youths inside.

Noah was the oldest of the group, the others were all rank 1 cultivators in the gaseous stage, basically newbies of the cultivation journey.

"This is just the first skimming of the entrance test, we will test your personality and judge if you are a suitable cultivator for our sect."

An elderly man spoke in a calm tone from the other side of the pavilion.

He had a long white beard and white hair combed in a simple bun.

His robe was azure and simple, there wasn't any type of embroidery on it.

Two middle-aged cultivators stood by his side, a man and a woman who dressed in a similar robe, they seriously stared at the batch of applicants that had crossed the curtains.

'They are all rank 3 cultivators but the old one seems stronger.'

Noah judged quickly before lowering his head, he didn't want to attract their attention that soon.

"We will give you a Mental seed, it's a peculiar type of plant that feeds on mental waves. All you need to do is put it between your eyebrows and let it feed on your thoughts. The plant will flourish in a shape that reflects your attitude, we will then judge it and decide if you can have access to the second test."

The elderly cultivator continued his explanation and waved his sleeve as soon as it finished.

Twenty white seeds flew in the air and landed in twenty different spots over a large mat.

"Take position and begin!"

The woman next to him gave the order, the applicants didn't waste time and chose a random seed as they sat on the mat.

'What an interesting plant, the world is really variegated.'

Noah inspected the seed as he sat in a cross-legged position.

He couldn't find anything strange with the seed, it actually seemed lifeless at his inspection.

Then, he neared it to his face and a small change occurred.

The seed began to emit a suction force that tried to affect his mental sphere.

Of course, it was just a seed, even someone that had still to become a rank 1 mage could oppose that suction force, yet, Noah was still surprised by that behavior.

'It sensed my mind! Maybe I should have studied plants too back in the academy.'

The test of his attitude in the Royal academy had given him only average results in alchemy, making him ignore the course about the magical plants of the world.

Noah then stopped wasting time and placed the seed between his eyebrows.

He didn't resist the suction force, the seed was only so big, those few strands of mental energy that it began to absorb could be refilled in just a few seconds by his mental sphere.

In a few minutes, the seed sprouted, Noah felt that a kind of connection had been created between him and the plant, attaching it to his skin as it continued to grow.

Red branches slowly formed, followed by what seemed a black bud.

The growth continued until the plant reached its limits and the seed detached itself from Noah's face and fell on the mat.

Only then did Noah open his eyes to stare at the result of the process.

He saw a tangle of red branches covered in thorns, they seemed to have been covered in fresh blood for how similar their colors were.

In the middle of that tangle, a black rose had flourished, its exact shape was hidden by the darkness of its color, the light inside the pavilion wasn't able to completely illuminate it.

Noah inspected it and thought that it was extremely beautiful but a halo of sadness seemed to surround its entire form.

Chapter 332 - 332. Red armor, black heart

Noah stared at his plant for some time before raising his head to inspect the other applicants.

They had their eyes closed, their plants were still growing in various shapes and there wasn't any similarity between the twenty of them.

'Mine has grown quickly because my mental waves are stronger than theirs, I wonder what kind of judgment I will receive.'

Noah had realized that the characteristics of his plant were outside of his understanding, he didn't know if he had succeeded in the test.

More minutes passed and the plants of the other applicants slowly completed their growth and separated themselves from their faces, the youths had tired expressions, that process wasn't easy to withstand with their weak minds.

The three cultivators of the Flowing river sect began to inspect the plants as soon as the last seed fell on the mat, they would nod or shake their heads while giving a brief explanation to each applicant.

"The branches are too soft, you lack determination."

"This bud isn't fully flourished, you are still too immature."

"Your plant lacks shine, you are too average."

"Straight and sturdy, you have passed!"

Most of the comments from the three cultivators were negative, it was obvious that only a minority of the applicants would reach the second stage of the entrance test.

Then, Noah's turn came.

The old cultivator was his examiner and he abruptly stopped his tracks when his gaze met Noah's plant.

"A bloodied armor and a black heart."

He mumbled those words after a few rounds of inspection, they were spoken softly, Noah could only hear them because of his powerful mind.

The cultivator then raised his head to look at Noah, his mental energy tried to probe his cultivation level but he couldn't make out the exact power of the young man in front of him.

It was needless to say that he was extremely surprised by that event.

Noah had the appearance of an eighteen years old man, his aging had stopped since his body and dantian had improved too quickly, it would resume only if he remained at that level for many years.

Yet, that young-looking man was able to hide part of his power from the probing of a rank 3 cultivator, such a feat was generally considered impossible for a rank 2 cultivator.

"You are too used on being alone, your branches are strong and sturdy but they reject anyone that comes close to you. Your heart is dark, it was born in the darkness of your armor, it has severed any need for light and can only feed on more darkness."

The elder sighed before putting Noah's plant in his space-ring and shaking his head.

"I can see that you are a rare talent by the shine of your plant but I know that you will never manage to become part of the sect. I'm sorry, we can't accept you."

Noah was a bit surprised by the long explanation.

He knew that the test would have revealed his personality but he didn't think that it would be so accurate!

Also, that final judgment had stated that he had failed the entrance test, the sect wasn't willing to accept someone like him.

'I guess there is nothing I can do about it, this is just how I am.'

Noah sighed before standing up and bowing to the elder.

The latter nodded at that gesture and watched as Noah neared the curtains of the pavilion to exit the test area.

"Will you remain in the archipelago for the time being?"

He asked that question before Noah crossed the curtains.

"Maybe."

Noah gave that vague answer and left the area.

He had bet on the Flowing river sect to return to the continent but he had failed in the first test, he needed to reorganize his thoughts and find another opportunity that could lead to the same result.

'I should just cultivate for a few days before going back to island one hundred and thirty-two. I still have to explore the market and maybe something new will appear after I update the map.'

It was with those thoughts that he left the crowded area and walked toward the matrixes to return to his rented room.

Meanwhile, the entrance test of the Flowing river sect continued and ended in about an hour.

Only a few applicants had succeeded and they were given instructions about the second phase of the test before being dismissed.

"Good work today, we found some promising youths. Rest now, I have some matters to attend."

The old cultivator instructed his two followers and left the area, calmly walking toward the city at the center of the island.

At some point, he entered a simple-looking tavern that had a horn as its banner.

He crossed the hall and sat on the table at the bottom of the tavern, the other cultivators there moved their gazes away when they sensed a trace of his cultivation level.

A waitress brought him a jug of wine and he took small sips from it as he waited in silence.

"Dwight, I hope the selections of your sect went well."

A hooded figure sat in front of him after saying those words.

"Roy, I told you many times to start speaking only after you've sat. The governors are looking for you people like crazy these days, island one hundred and sixty has been hit hard by the last investigation."

Dwight complained but Roy didn't seem to care, he simply released a small laugh before replying to him.

"So, did you find anything interesting?"

"Only the usual, naive kids with some talent and a strong sense of justice, you know what my sect looks for in a cultivator. Yet, I might have found a candidate for your Chasing demon sect."

Roy released a surprised sound at those words and gave a space-ring to Dwight, waiting for him to continue speaking.

Dwight inspected the contents of the ring and nodded in satisfaction before taking out an item from his storage device.

Noah's plant appeared on the desk of the tavern and Roy didn't hesitate to inspect it with great interest.

#### Chapter 333 - 333. Decoy

Noah was unaware of the conversation between Dwight and Roy, he didn't know that an organization had already become interested in him.



He didn't have another plan, the map of the archipelago had other interesting opportunities but they were all handled by the factions of the Utra nation and the Shandal Empire, he didn't want to expose himself to them.

Since there was nothing he could do at the moment, he chose to explore the market on island one hundred and thirty-two.

He planned to cultivate and sell his useless items while periodically checking the map store, he was sure that another opportunity would arrive if he waited long enough.

The island had various stores, they covered most of the cultivation's fields.

Inscribed items, magical beasts' corpses, techniques and spells, potions and pills, every kind of resource useful in the cultivation journey could be found there.

However, for someone like Noah who had lived in the capital of the Utra nation, the variety of goods was lacking.

The inscribed items were mostly in the first rank, those in the second one were considered masterpieces and sold at exorbitant prices, Noah didn't want to waste money in something unnecessary;

The magical beasts' corpses were somewhat satisfying but those in the heroic ranks and in a good state came from the archipelago, Noah could only find rotten and decomposed corpses when he looked for creatures of the darkness element;

The techniques and spells were in the second rank at best while martial arts and body-nourishing methods only reached the third one, they were also heavily overpriced, Noah found himself unable to purchase anything that could interest him;

As for potion and pills, Noah limited himself to the purchase of a few reagents for the breakthrough of his dantian, there was a chance of failure in the process so it was better to have more than one of them.

The rest of his trip to the market was spent selling his useless items and sorting his space-rings.

Noah didn't want to concentrate all his wealth in one ring but he also didn't want to have too many of them.

When his trip was over, he had only two rings who had two hundred cubic meters of space each.

Inside of them, his weapons, scrolls, items, and materials were orderly organized according to their purpose.

'I got rid of all the useless drugs, materials, and weapons, only those that could link my identity to Noah Balvan are still in my rings. I've managed to gain a few thousand Credits today but my finances will just decrease if I continue to travel through the islands and purchase information without any kind of income.'

Noah thought as he moved to the now-familiar map store.

Using the matrixes and purchasing information was expensive, even after selling all his useless items, Noah's finances only amounted to one hundred and twenty thousand Credits.

'I guess I can't help it, I'll just have to find an occupation if I become too short on money.'

He had already thought of using his capabilities as a hunter and inscription master to make a living but he preferred to leave that option for last: Those two professions would inevitably expose something about himself, he would rather join an organization and use it as a cover.

The usual greetings of the middle-aged woman welcomed him as soon as he stepped in the store, Noah simply nodded before inspecting the shelves.

He was just passing by, only a few days had passed since he updated the map, there was no point in doing it again so soon.

Yet, a tag on an empty shelf attracted his attention, making him stop in place.

The empty shelves held information about different topics and the one in front of Noah had a familiar name written on its tag.

'Hooded devil.'

Noah read the tag in his mind while keeping an expressionless face.

Two thousand Credits then appeared in his hand and he carefully laid them inside the shelf without retracting his arm.

The crystals disappeared and the shelf lit up, a stream of information ran from his hand to his mind in a few instants.

Noah had paid for the most detailed report, he would pay any price to know how far the investigation about him had gone.

'The Hooded devil, a cultivator that has joined the Odrea nation in its battles against the Shandal Empire. Darkness element, cultivation level unclear. Witnesses have confirmed that he has survived the ambush of a rank 3 cultivator and that he can perform inscriptions. Possible identity: Noah Balvan, criminal of the Utra nation. The Elbas family has issued an arrest warrant and some of his abilities match those of the Hooded devil. Further information about Noah Balvan is to be found in the Utra nation. Current location: Odrea nation.'

As the pieces of information entered his mind, Noah was first surprised by how fast a connection with his real identity had been made.

Yet, toward the end of it, he became confused.

'Current location? What does it mean?'

"How outdated are these reports?"

He immediately asked the woman as he retracted his arm.

"These have come yesterday, they shouldn't be more than one month old."

The woman replied with an interested expression but Noah just nodded at her answer and left the building to return to his habitation.

'Don't tell me that they are still covering me!'

That was the only explanation that he could come up with.

His escape plan only needed for the Odrea country to open the formation so that he could pretend to escape toward the depth of the continent, he didn't ask for anything more.

Nina's face appeared in his mind, followed by those of the cultivators with whom he had shared two years of his life.

'Those guys, this wasn't necessary.'

He could imagine what they had done.

Placing a blue soldier with a black hood in a monthly battle that followed Noah's departure would have been enough to fool the Empire, the decoy didn't have to fight after all, its figure would be enough to give Noah more time to escape.

#### Chapter 334 - 334. Gratitude

Noah could understand what the Odrea nation had done but he couldn't figure out why.

'Do they expect me to help them in the future? Yet, they couldn't possibly know that I would have had access to this information.'

His mind was confused, knowing that the Odra nation was protecting him made him feel strange.

'Are they simply doing this out of goodwill?'

That possibility left him even more confused.

He was used to people trying to exploit him but pure kindness was something that he had experienced too few times in his second life.

'If it really is kindness, what would I do?'

Going back to the Odra nation, fight together with it, managing to free it from the clutches of the Empire, those were the things that a righteous person would do.

Yet, the Empire had a God, good and evil didn't matter in front of such an entity.

It's not that Noah didn't want to help that country, he had been treated well there and those pieces of information had given birth to a tinge of gratitude toward it.

However, the reality of things was that he was only a rank 2 cultivator on the run, he couldn't do anything even if he wanted to.

Once again, the feeling of being powerless assaulted him before Noah dispersed it with a renewed determination.

'If I ever am to reach the divine ranks, I will surely pay back this favor.'

His mother, William, and now the Odra country, those that had become close to Noah did their best to give him more time to develop and he had still done nothing to repay them.

He had simply continued to escape as he pursued power, without ever getting rid of the powerlessness that he felt.

'One day...'

He sighed as he put those thoughts in the back of his mind.

Those matters were still far away from his reach, he was only a rank 2 cultivator after all.

The shape of the building where his habitation was appeared in his sight, an urge to cultivate made him accelerate his steps as he walked toward the main door.

However, when the token needed to open that door appeared in his hand, a voice resounded from behind him.

"Are you Zach, the one that has taken part in the entrance test of the Flowing river sect?"

Noah turned only to see a simple looking man that stared at him with a stern face.

"Who is asking?"

He asked.

Noah wasn't in a good mood, the recent discovery had put some pressure on him and he wanted to improve his strength in the shortest amount of time.

"A friend was captivated by your performance in the entrance test, he would like to meet you."

The man answered.

'Performance in the test? Is he talking about my personality?'

Noah had failed the first test, the one with the Mental seed, so he didn't understand how someone could have taken interest in him nor how it did gain access to that information.

Seeing that Noah was hesitant, the man continued to speak.

"You wanted to enter a sect, right? This friend can make it happen, he is in a sect too."

Noah stared at the man for a while before nodding and gesturing to lead the way.

'He is just a rank 2 cultivator, not really a threat.'

The reason why he was so confident was that the man in front of him was clearly weaker than him, he could just escape if the situation became too dangerous.

Also, he didn't have anything planned, he was just waiting for some opportunity to appear.

'He knows my name and the fact that I wanted to join the Flowing river sect... It's still early to jump to conclusions but there is a high chance that he has connections with the Hive.'

The entrance test had happened only a few days ago and Noah didn't give his name during it, it wasn't required.

That meant that the organization behind the man was either aware of all the new arrivals in the archipelago or had investigated about Noah in the days after the test.

It was obvious that the first organization that came to his mind was the Hive.

Noah followed the man for a few minutes until he stopped in front of a poor-looking tavern.

"I can't go further. You need to enter alone if you want to meet my friend."

The man spoke those last words before turning and leaving the small street where they were.

"How will I recognize it?"

Noah asked but the man didn't turn, in a few seconds, he left his line of sight, disappearing behind a corner.

'The chances of the Hive being behind this have suddenly increased.'

He thought as he opened the door of the tavern and crossed its entrance.

Noah had been interested in that secret organization since he heard about it, there was no reason for him to refuse that chance.

The tavern was dark and most of the cultivators inside it were either drunk or sonorously sleeping on their respective tables.

The smell of strong wine and puke filled the dusty room but Noah didn't mind it too much, his attention was focused on the search of the friend mentioned by the man from before.

A soft light came from one of the tables at the end of the room.

The source of the light was a peculiar plant with bright red branches that were filled with sharp thorns.

The branches entangled themselves around a dark core, the insides of the tangle of branches were too dark for anyone to make out the actual shape of what they contained.

Noah recognized the plant that he had created during the entrance test and understood how that organization became aware of his existence.

'The Flowing river sect has connections with the underground world! Well, maybe it's the opposite.'

A hooded figure stared attentively at the plant, some of its facial features were revealed by the soft light of the branches but Noah couldn't understand if it was a man or a woman.



He decisively walked toward that table and sat in front of the cultivator, his eyes tried to probe its cultivation level but to no avail.

Silence followed at that moment, Noah wasn't going to be the first to speak.

Then, the figure opened its mouth to speak, its voice seemed to belong to a middle-aged man with a healthy constitution.

"Don't you find it beautiful?"

Chapter 335 - 335. Honorary disciple

Noah didn't answer the hooded man's question.

His gaze was fixed on his figure, he was trying to understand his cultivation level but he could only pick up some clues.

'I know that he isn't in the heroic ranks but I can't define his actual power. His mind is stronger than mine.'

That conclusion was enough to make him realize that he was dealing with some sort of important figure.

'Rank 3 cultivator, either in the liquid or solid stage. He is far stronger than me.'

The previous conclusion led to this one.

Noah knew that he was a special case, the possibility of a cultivator having a sea of consciousness stronger than its dantian was an extremely rare event.

That's why he could safely assume that, since the man in front of him had a mind stronger than his, then his dantian must have been at a far greater level.

A rank 3 mage with a rank 3 dantian at that level could be considered at the peak of the human ranks, thus someone important.

"Joining an orthodox sect with this personality of yours won't be easy, those old fogies use the Mental seeds as the first test from before I was born."

The man spoke again.

"You know, they are actually more permissive back in the continent. Well, they go easy on the young and immature ones at least."

Noah continued to listen, the man seemed to speak with no reserves and would often touch or test some parts of Noah's plant.

"Look at this, there are so many branches! This means that your nature is basically defined and there is no hope of shaping it. I'm afraid that even the sects in the continent would refuse you."

The man shook his head after those words, he was probably trying to emphasize his expression but the hood that covered his face made that gesture pointless.

'Is he trying to say that he is from the Papral nation?'

Noah wondered.

His mind had been unaffected by his speech, he was only focused on understanding the meaning behind his words.

"You are lucky though, I might just know a sect that won't care about this and will probably treat it as a positive quality."

"Which sect?"

Noah finally interrupted the man to ask that question.

"So you do speak! Wonderful, I was afraid you might have been mute. As for which sect I'm talking about, that would be mine."

The man's voice turned grave toward the end of the phrase, he seemed to have stopped joking around.

"You came looking for me just because of my personality?"

Noah asked.

He could understand that every organization needed henchmen and that his personality seemed to be suitable for that role, yet, he couldn't help but wonder if that single requirement was enough to earn a private meeting.

'Maybe they gather all the members in this way and I'm not a special case.'

That possibility hit Noah's mind.

If his assumption was right, he was in front of an organization of the underground world, private meetings would be the best way to ensure the secrecy of its recruitment.

"Yes and no. We have many cells laid around the archipelago and we don't lack pawns that have no relevance in its political network. Your personality fits the requirements to enter our organization but it also tells me that you could do well in another role."

The man continued to explain calmly, he didn't seem to care that he was giving that much information to Noah.

"What role is that?"

Noah asked with interest, joining an organization was part of his plan since he arrived in the archipelago, it would spare him a lot of money and time entering one in that way.

As for the issue concerning the legality of said organization, he couldn't care less.

The man didn't immediately answer, he first grabbed some branches with both his hands and separated them from the tangle, the thorns of the plant couldn't hurt him, they had grown feeding on mental energy after all, they could be considered sturdy only in relation to similar plants.

He then inserted his hand in the dark core and picked up the black rose at its center.

Noah could see how, even when out in the open, the edges of the rose were blurry, the light didn't seem to be able to completely illuminate it.

"This is your core, you can see how it can't merge with the world illuminated by the sun. To use its full potential, you must immerse it in the thickest darkness."

The man spoke again and he reinserted the rose back in the tangle, using his sleeves to prevent any light from entering its insides.

The rose disappeared right in front of Noah's eyes, he couldn't see it anymore, it seemed as if it had really merged with the darkness.

"The role."

Noah reminded him of his question.

It would be a lie to say that he didn't have some kind of enlightenment from the man's speech but he was still able to put it on hold until the meeting was finished.

He wouldn't allow himself to be distracted in front of such a mysterious man.

The hooded figure released a small laugh before taking away the hood from his head.

Strands of long gray hair were laid on his shoulders as his facial features were revealed.

He was a middle-aged man, he was extremely thin and his edges were sharp due to the lack of fat under his skin.

However, what attracted Noah's interest the most was his shining red eyes.

His skin tensed as he opened his mouth, Noah could see the tremble of his throat as he began to speak.

"I'm Roy, I handle the recruitment of my Chasing demon sect and one of my sources has shown me your case. I could just find you a job as a henchman but I think that your talent would be wasted in that way. That's why I came to offer you the position of honorary disciple, would you like to hear more about it?"

Roy smiled toward the end of its phrase, his smiling expression was quite scary due to his features but Noah could feel the good intentions behind his proposal.

#### Chapter 336 - 336. Oath

"Do you always recruit disciples in this way?"

Even though he could feel the good-will behind Roy's words, Noah still had too many doubts.

"It has happened previously, I simply can't contain myself when I find someone interesting."

Roy continued to smile as he answered Noah.

"I have too many questions, I can't just give you an answer right away."

Noah expressed his concerns but Roy didn't seem discouraged, he simply nodded and began to speak again.

"The Chasing demon sect was one of the unorthodox sects of the Papral nation, we have been expelled a few hundred years ago due to an edict of the Council and forced to set ourselves here. Oh, in case you were wondering, we are one of the branches of the Hive, the leading underground organization of the archipelago."

Noah's eyes widened after that statement.

'Is this man for real? Did he just tell me such secretive information right away?'

According to Cody's words, the word Hive was a taboo, anything related to it would unleash the full power of the representatives of the continent.

Yet, in that poor-looking tavern, Noah had made contact with such a wanted organization.

'Is he so sure that I will join the sect? Maybe, he has the confidence of capturing me in case I wanted to escape.'

Noah's thoughts inevitably reached that conclusion.

In Roy's eyes, he was only a talented cultivator with a peculiar personality, his identity of Noah Balvan and Hooded devil was kept hidden by the Odra country.

'They don't know my actual power and this gives me a chance to escape. Yet, I don't think I'll find a better chance.'

Now that he knew that he could escape, Noah began to evaluate the position of honorary disciple.

"What would I gain from joining your sect? Which limitations would I have? What kind of role would I play in the organization?"

Noah stormed Roy with questions, since the latter was so open in his answers, he would first solve his doubts before making his decision.

"Well, you would gain resources in relation to your merits; The limitations are quite obvious, you are not to betray the sect and you must swear to serve it. In return, we will swear to treat you properly; as for the role, my sect mainly handles the assassinations of certain troublesome individuals from the continent."

'Assassinations, that might actually fit me.'

Noah thought after Roy gave another series of honest answers.

Noah had the Mental tremor spell and the Warp spell, silently killing someone and escape wouldn't be a problem.

"What about my freedom? I won't accept a deal that limits my growth."

That was Noah's biggest concern.

He had always been forced to escape from any organization that had taken interest in him because they would have ultimately forced him to stop his cultivation, they cared more about maintaining their hierarchy than nurturing worthy members.

Roy shrugged his shoulders at that question.

"We are an unorthodox sect, all our members are hotheads with lofty ambitions. I won't deny that there are internal struggles for the important positions but the sect itself won't intervene on those matters. It will be up to you and the other disciples to handle them."

Noah listened attentively, he still wasn't satisfied with that answer.

"So, can you assure me that the sect won't hinder my growth in any way?"

Roy nodded at that question.

"The sect is built upon the strength of its members, you will fall if you are weak and you will climb if you are powerful, that's an iron rule in the world of unorthodox cultivators. This part is actually mentioned in the oath that we will swear together."

The last insurance cleared Noah of any doubt.

He knew far too well the limits of lone cultivators.

He had long stopped training his body and he was enlarging his mental sphere with his methods, those were the restrictions applied on those that lacked techniques.

Simply speaking, everyone needed a backer in the cultivation world.

"I agree to become an honorary disciple, I would just like to inspect the contents of the oath beforehand."

Noah couldn't find anything wrong with Roy's conditions so he ultimately agreed to join the Chasing demon sect.

Roy took out a tablet from his space-ring, it was old and many intricate inscriptions could be seen over its surface.

"Touch it and you will know the rules."

Noah didn't hesitate, his hand went on the tablet and a stream of information entered his mind.

'Protect the sect, serve the sect, bring glory on the sect, and swear on your name... That might be a problem.'

At the requirement of using his real name, Noah hesitated a bit.

Then, he saw that Roy had taken out a seal with a horned head depicted on its surface.

"This is an inscribed item, it allows me to swear on account of the whole sect."

Roy explained when he saw Noah's confused expression.

He then pressed the seal on the tablet and spoke solemn words.

"The Chasing demon sect welcomes you as a member and promises to protect and nurture you, may the dantian of those that betray you explode. In the name of Roy red-eyes, appointed elder of the human matters."

'To think that he would swear before me.'

Noah smiled internally at that sight but maintained a solemn expression on the outside.



Both his hands went on the tablet as he began to chant the required words for the agreement.

"I swear to protect and serve the Chasing demon sect and to bring glory to its name. If I ever was to betray it, my dantian will explode. In the name of Noah Balvan, bastard of the Balvan family."

Roy's eyes widened when he heard that name but it was too late, the tablet shone and two black marks shot out of it.

One mark went on the sigil, which brightened up for a few seconds before returning to its normal state.

The other one went on Noah's arm, where it transformed into a tattoo similar to the horned head on the sigil.

From that moment on, Noah was a disciple of the Chasing demon sect!

#### Chapter 337 - 337. Headquarters

Roy was speechless, Noah's name still resounded in his mind as he continued to stare at the young man in front of him.

Noah's actions weren't enough for a cultivator in the heroic ranks to take notice of him but those in the human ranks that handled the various reports from the continent knew him far too well.

It couldn't be helped, Noah had created a lot of ruckus with his escape from the Utra nation, having a criminal on the run was a stain on the reputation of the Elbas family, which was the face of the country.

After his escape, information about Noah's features and abilities became widely spread but the Royals had tried to keep that knowledge inside their area of influence.

The three big nations of the continents were publicly enemies after all, it would have been impossible for the Royals to seek the cooperation of the Empire just to capture a criminal in the human ranks.

Yet, the events in the Odrea country had caused some leaks.

The Shandal Empire became interested in the inscription master that hid inside the formation and started its investigation.

Then, during Noah's last monthly battle, when he revealed his abilities, a connection between the Hooded devil and Noah Balvan was made, causing the investigations to reach the informants inside the Utra nation.

In just a few months, Noah's abilities became known to anyone willing to pay for them, only his facial features remained a knowledge exclusive to the Utra nation.

Roy, as a member of the underground world of the archipelago and as an elder handling the matters in the human ranks, had to be aware of such information.

That's why Noah's name surprised him, the reports clearly said that he was still in the Odrea nation, fighting in the monthly battles against the Empire.

"Are you that Noah Balvan? The criminal of the Utra nation?"

Noah was inspecting the tattoo created after the oath when Roy asked that question.

"Even if I was, you can't divulge this information now, am I right?"

Noah said without raising his gaze from his arm.

"That is right."

Roy answered helplessly.

"And you can't inform the other interested parties, like the legal organizations and the Hive, that I'm not in the Odrea nation, right?"

"As a disciple of the Chasing demon sect, your identity is protected."

Roy answered again Noah's question.

Only then did Noah raise his gaze to nod toward the red-eyed man, he showed a shameless smile as he confirmed his suggestion.

"Yes, I am that Noah Balvan."

Roy stared at Noah for a while before sighing and massaging his temples and he continued to sit.

Noah calmly waited for him to recover, he didn't trick anyone this time, the other party simply lacked the necessary information to determine his real identity.

'The cover of the Odrea country is revealing itself more beneficial than I thought.'

Those thoughts hit Noah's mind as he stared at Roy.

He didn't know if the Chasing demon sect would have approached him if they had suspected his identity but he was sure that the meeting would have had a different atmosphere in that case.

His gratitude toward the Odrea country increased again before he was forced to put those thoughts in the back of his mind since Roy finally interrupted his silence.

"HAHAHA! To think that we were forming a team to hunt you down after you came out of the defensive formation. Come, come! We need to go to the headquarters and stop the mission."

Roy had exploded in a loud laugh before he said those words, he then stood up and gestured to Noah to follow him.

'Well, that was unexpected.'

Noah was surprised by Roy's reaction but he didn't mind it too much, cultivators had peculiar personalities, he had learnt it a long time ago.

He stood up and followed Roy, they went toward one corner of the tavern where the latter placed a few hundred Credits on the floor.

A formation lit up as soon as the crystals touched the floor, symbols and runes seemed to appear out of nowhere as they created a complex diagram that encircled Noah and Roy.

"Did you manage to set up teleportation matrixes under the representatives of the continent's nose?"

Noah asked.

He didn't sense the formation until it was activated but, when it did, he understood the purpose of its diagram.

"Hmph, we were on the archipelago long before the representatives arrived. We are the one that set the teleportation network, the continent has just taken control of the matrixes that we couldn't hide."

Roy snorted as he explained the situation to Noah.

The light radiated from the formation reached its peak and Noah felt an incredible pressure on his mental sphere.

He was forced to close his eyes during the process to defend against the force pressing on his mind.

The teleportation lasted only a few seconds, when Noah opened his eyes, a purple world appeared in front of him.

The color was similar to the halo on the shores of each island but that place was an underground location, the sky was covered by a metallic purple ceiling.

'Where is this place?'

Noah wondered.

He was sure that he was still in the Coral archipelago, the purple halo was the proof that he was somewhere near the exoskeleton of the dead pack of magical beasts.

Yet, what he saw gave him no further hints, he could only understand that he was somewhere under the level of the sea.

"Let's go, we need to reach the central area of the sect. This zone is reserved for the caves of the elders."

Roy spoke to him and began to walk in a certain direction, Noah didn't dare to remain behind and followed him as he continued to inspect the environment.

'The density of "Breath" here is far higher than that in my rented room. I wonder where is this place, I have never seen anything similar in my map.'

Since his map and his gaze couldn't make him understand his location, Noah simply decided to ask.

"Where is this place?"

Roy didn't seem surprised by his question and gave a quick answer as he continued to walk.

"These are the insides of the exoskeleton of the Purple corals."

Chapter 338 - 338. Elder Iris

'The insides of the exoskeleton!?'

Noah shouted in his mind when he registered Roy's words.

The Coral archipelago was formed on top of the exoskeleton, it made it a safe location for humans since the purple radiance prevented the attacks of the many magical beasts of the sea.

He would have never thought that the headquarters of the Chasing demon sects were built inside such a precious material.

'That's why the purple halo is so intense and the density of "Breath" is so high. There is nothing that blocks the radiance and the absence of other lifeforms maintains the concentration of the "Breath" at high levels. I wonder how they managed to keep this location hidden to the representatives of the continent.'

Noah pondered as he continued to walk, he was now sure that his sect had to be quite important for it to maintain control over such a privileged location.

"How did you hide this place from the continent?"

In the end, Noah couldn't contain his curiosity and simply asked the man that seemed not to care about the information that he gave him.

"We didn't completely hide it. Before the continent became anxious about the possibility of the archipelago becoming independent, the excavations of the insides of the exoskeleton spanned for the entirety of its body. When the representative came, we were forced to make ninety percent of the tunnels collapse, we would rather destroy this place than hand it to the continent. Of course, we managed to save some areas and hide them behind the collapse."

'Quite ruthless, I like it.'

Noah approved that action, a victory was profitable only if the winner could plunder the resources left by the defeated, it was just a waste of money otherwise.

Roy and Noah left the large residential area and entered one of the many tunnels that filled its edges, Noah would often touch the metallic purple walls to try to understand the level of the material.

'It's far stronger than a simple rank 4 material, I don't think I can even make a dent on it. The Purple corals should have died when they were in the fifth rank or above.'

Noah thought as he wondered how the sect had managed to dig those tunnels, piercing a rank 5 material wasn't easy, a cultivator in the heroic ranks was needed to create passages in that place.

Roy noticed his interest in the exoskeleton and became curious, ultimately probing the young man behind him.

"Are you interested in magical beasts?"

Noah returned to reality when he heard that question, he stayed silent for a while before deciding to speak honestly.

"As a matter of fact, it's my specialization. I was wondering about the level of the corals, they should have been in the fifth rank or above when they died but I can't be more precise, my cultivation level prevents me from investigating further."

Roy released a surprised gasp at Noah's explanation.

The reports about Noah Balvan mentioned that he was knowledgeable in the field of the magical beasts but the exact value of that information wasn't set since it depended on the social environment from which it was taken.

For example, any cultivator would appear as the most knowledgeable human in the world in the eyes of a commoner.

Like that, the fact that the reports about Noah mentioned that he was educated about magical beasts didn't mean much since that information was

paired with his young age, there was a limit to how experienced a twenty-three years old cultivator could be.

Yet, Noah had received the best education of the Ultra nation, his mind was strong and allowed him to memorize many pieces of information, and the Bloodline inheritance had left him with a peculiar instinct that further improved his understanding when it came to matters related to magical beasts.

"Our experts think that the Purple corals have died during the hibernation for the breakthrough to the sixth rank, they have misjudged the amount of "Breath" needed for the evolution of their body apparently."

Roy explained, the exoskeleton had been studied for hundreds of years by then, those details could be easily obtained by an elder of an underground organization.

"Oh, I was really inaccurate."

Noah nodded at his explanation and moved his gaze back on the metallic material, no matter how much he looked, he wasn't able to reach a similar conclusion.

'My level is too low, I still can't be accurate when the heroic ranks are concerned.'

He sighed internally as he moved his gaze toward the end of the tunnel, another large area could be seen there.

Roy had paid attention to Noah's reactions, he saw how he seemed disappointed by his wrong judgment.

'Is he really unsatisfied? He has managed to pinpoint the rank of the coral in a few minutes but he isn't proud of it?'

Roy wondered in his mind, the young man behind him was indeed unusual.



The tunnel then ended and the two of them entered the large underground room that followed it.

"Let me do the talk now and don't mind too much what she says."

Roy warned Noah before he stopped to a seemingly normal location and lightly knocked on the purple ground.

"Reporting to Elder Iris, we need to modify the mission about Noah Balvan."

The floor trembled after his words were spoken and the terrain transformed into the entrance of a cave.

Roy wore a solemn expression and entered it, gesturing to Noah to follow him.

The cave was simple, with not much furniture, a middle-aged woman with white hair could be seen sitting on the floor surrounded by sheets.

"What's the matter, Roy? I thought that you were ready to send some disciples on the continent to ambush the kid when he went out of the Odra nation. Our contacts with the Utra nation are willing to pay a large sum for his head."

Elder Iris spoke without raising her head, her voice sounded aged, it didn't match her appearance.

"Something happened, there is no need to send the team. Noah Balvan is here by my side."

Roy's answer made Elder Iris raise her head, Noah felt naked under her probing gaze.

'Heroic ranks!'

Noah's mind gave that warning but there was nothing he could do, he couldn't even struggle in front of such a power.

"Good, he is worth even more alive. Take care of it and make sure that our contacts receive him."

Elder Iris performed a slight smile when she spoke but her expression froze when the tattoo of a horned head appeared on her hand and began to shine.

Noah's tattoo did the same, it moved on the back of its hand and began to shine with a similar light.

It was with furrowed brows that Elder Iris began to stare Roy, her irritation was easily discerned by her expression.

#### Chapter 339 - 339. Twelve Demons

Noah stared at the shining tattoo on the back of his hand, it had moved autonomously which led him to shot a questioning look toward Roy.

Roy lowered his head and answered his gaze in a soft voice.

"It has simply sensed the ill intentions of another member of the sect, it's like a warning. Don't worry though, you can keep it hidden somewhere under your skin with your mental energy."

Noah nodded at his explanation and his focus moved on the tattoo, his mental energy entered the image of the horned head and forced it to hide under his skin, even its radiance disappeared once Noah chose to cover it.

"Roy?"

An irritated voice resounded in the cave, Roy staggered when Elder Iris reminded him of her presence.

"W-well, he is a talented cultivator, I guessed that it was better to have him as a disciple instead of wasting resources to capture him."

Roy gave a quick lie but his tone betrayed him, it was obvious that he felt guilty about the matter.

"You enrolled him without even asking his name, am I right?"

Elder Iris saw right through his lie, she sighed when she saw that Roy lowered his head in embarrassment.

"You are too reckless, we are a secret organization, we need to be careful whenever we make a move."

She shook her head as she reprimanded Roy, she seemed to have already given up on the matter.

"Well, he is part of our sect now, put him to work. And you..."

Elder Iris interrupted her words to point a hand toward Noah.

"You are never to reveal your name in public and, if you ever get caught, you need to erase every connection with the sect, Roy can tell you our story if you are interested. Also, try not to cause any mess, we are powerful in the archipelago but we need to maintain the image of a suppressed organization so that we can fool the continent."

She gave those obvious orders at which Noah politely bowed, she was a cultivator in the heroic ranks and an elder of his sect, he needed to behave properly.

Elder Iris seemed satisfied by his gesture and waved her hand to dismiss the two of them, her gaze went back on the sheets around her as soon as she did that.

Roy patted Noah's shoulder and signaled him to exit the cave, the floor closed behind them when they returned to the surface of the underground area.

"Uff, this is settled. My mother might seem strict but she really cares about the members of the sect, that's one of the reasons why she oversees these matters. You don't have to worry about possible injustices."

'Mother!?'

Roy's words stunned Noah.

'Elder Iris is actually Roy's mother? They seem to have the same age! Maybe that's why Roy can act so freely in the archipelago.'

Noah pondered about that but he ultimately put those thoughts in the back of his mind, such information didn't affect him after all.

"What did she mean by our story? Weren't you simply exiled by the Papral nation?"

Noah decided to ask about the story of the Chasing demon sect, he was now an honorary disciple, it wouldn't hurt to know more about its past.

"Mh, yes, that's the short version. Let's move toward the next area, I'll explain as we walk."

Roy picked a direction and began to walk, Noah followed closely behind as he memorized the path that they were taking.

"I've already told you about the Council and the exile of the unorthodox sects but you don't know the specifics about these events."

Roy paused a bit as he sorted his thoughts before speaking again.

"The Council is the organization in control of the Papral nation, it's formed by the patriarchs of each orthodox sect and it handles the topics that concern the entirety of the country. Each sect is independent but it has a duty toward the nation, that's why the Council is needed to create a joint front against the other powerful countries."

'The Utra nation has the Royal family and the nobles helping them; The Empire has its God and the entirety of its population as its army; The political situation of the Papral nation is similar to the Utra nation but its central power is composed of the strongest cultivators of each sect. Now I have a general understanding of the three big nations.'

Noah sorted those pieces of information in his mind as he listened to Roy, he had always been a lone cultivator so he valued a lot that kind of knowledge.

"However, this only covers the orthodox sects. Back in the days, there were twelve unorthodox sects that thrived in the nation and that managed to repel the attacks of the Council thanks to the twelve Demons."

"Demons?"

Noah couldn't help but voice his confusion when Roy's story reached that point.

He made a slight smile as he nodded toward Noah before he resumed to speak.

"Demon is just a word with which the orthodox sects label anyone that opposes their rule. The unorthodox sects on the Papral nation have taken pride in that appellation and have created the twelve demon sects, giving to their strongest cultivator the title of Demon!"

'The power of these twelve Demons must have been incredible for them to defend against the leading organization of the country.'

Noah's thoughts reached that conclusion as he became even more interested in the story.

Roy sighed, a trace of sadness appeared in his face.

"Yet, no matter how prideful they were, unorthodox cultivators would always prioritize profits. The Ravaging demon sect betrayed the alliance and the Council managed to inflict heavy damages to the other demon sects, forcing them to escape. The Charming Demon and the Devouring Demon died that day and the eleven demon sects dispersed in the continent. Our sect managed to reach the archipelago where we slowly rebuilt our ranks under the leadership of the Chasing Demon but we lost contact with most of the

other unorthodox sects. They are probably hiding like us, waiting for the moment when they are strong enough to strike back."

Chapter 340 - 340. First mission

"So, you want to return to the Papral nation one day."

Noah spoke when he saw that Roy's story ended.

Roy shook his head as a bitter smile appeared on his face.

"We still have our Demon but we are alone and far away from our home. Dreams are beautiful but often unachievable, we would need to conquer the archipelago before thinking about defeating the Council."

Roy replied, even if he usually acted by instinct and seemingly without thinking, he knew the difference in power between a single sect and the entirety of a big nation too well.

The two continued to walk for a few minutes in silence, Noah had no other questions, he was just eager to see where they were going.

Then, they reached what seemed to be a building dug inside the purple walls of the exoskeleton, it was four-story tall and its entrance was made of a simple but large passage.

"We work in a similar way to other organizations, you complete missions to obtain merit points that you can exchange for resources. As an honorary disciple, your first mission will grant you anything you want in the human ranks. What do you need right now?"

"Rank 3 cultivation technique of the darkness element."

Noah answered immediately, he knew exactly what he needed the most.

His body was at the peak of the lower tier of the fourth rank, only a rank 5 body nourishing method could increase its level.

His mind was in the third rank and he lacked the fourth Kesier rune but the solid "Breath" inside his sea of consciousness was constantly enlarging his sphere, the rune wasn't his priority.

His dantian, instead, had just entered the solid stage of the second rank, his cultivation technique was also in the second rank which meant that it could only allow him to reach the beginning of the third rank, Noah would be forced to stop cultivating after that.

'I can reach the peak of the second rank and use the reagent to become a rank 3 cultivator but then my reserves would be shallow, William had advised me to never advance unless I have a cultivation technique suitable for that rank.'

William's teachings still remained in his mind after all those years.

Noah had received a better education in the academy and deepened his understanding about the cultivation journey but William had been his first Master, he trusted his words more than those of his professors.

"That is not a problem. You can come here after you complete your first mission and request for it. Your tattoo works like a token, it will register your achievements and merit points. Come, I'll show you how to use it."

Roy spoke and led Noah into the building.

The ground floor was a large room filled with youths wearing black robes that inspected a large pillar placed at its center.

At the end of the room, a desk that had a simple diagram on its surface was dug inside the wall.

The students saw Roy and stopped their activities to politely bow to him, Noah could see how the pillar had many tablets affixed on it.

'Those should be the missions for the disciples in the first rank, they are more than I expected.'

Noah thought as he stared at the around eighty youth bowing toward the man next to him.

"Keep going."

Roy ordered with a nod and moved toward the stairs placed next to the desk, Noah felt envious gazes shot on his back as he followed him.

'It seems that Roy is quite important. Well, his mother is an elder in the heroic ranks after all.'

Noah didn't mind the stares and continued to inspect his surroundings, the building was dug inside the exoskeleton which made him further wonder about the actual strength of the Chasing demon sect.

'To excavate so precisely a quasi-rank 6 material means that the sect has a cultivator with a similar power. Was it the so-called Demon? Was it an elder?'

The world in the heroic ranks was still a mystery in Noah's mind but that didn't stop him from speculating about the actual power of his sect.

The first floor was identical to the ground one, just slightly smaller.

Thirty or so cultivators noticed their arrival and bowed toward Roy while keeping their focus on Noah.

"The ground floor is for rank 1 cultivators, the first one for those in the second rank, the second one for the third rank, and the third one is limited to those in the heroic ranks. I'll pick a mission for you this time, I'll properly introduce all the features of the sect after you complete it."

Roy waved his hand to dismiss the bows as he spoke to Noah, the cultivators in the room created a path toward the pillar as Roy neared it.



He picked a tablet rather quickly and he turned to hand it to Noah while pointing at it.

"Touch it with your horned face."

Noah didn't hesitate and followed his instructions.

He easily manipulated the tattoo under his skin and moved it to his palm as he touched the tablet.

A stream of information entered his mind, Noah understood the contents of the mission in just a few instants.

'Assassination of a soldier living on island one hundred and fifty-eight, rank 2 cultivator, escorted by guards of the Utra nation.'

The face of the soldier appeared in his mind as well as the escape routes in the area.

'This is quite detailed, it even explains the reason for the assassination.'

Apparently, Noah's target had once been a spy of the Hive.

Then, he double-crossed them and sold information to the representatives of the continent.

Undergrounds organizations gave a lot of importance to how they were perceived, they couldn't allow anyone to trick them and live, the citizens had to be aware of the consequences for the betrayal.

Noah nodded after reading the contents of the mission, it seemed quite straightforward and also easy, killing a rank 2 cultivator wasn't hard with his current level.

Only one doubt remained in his mind since that part wasn't specified in the tablet.

"Can I kill the guards too?"

