

Chapter 341 - 341. Assassin

Bert was a soldier belonging to the faction of the Utra nation in the archipelago.

He had a family but working as a guard in island one hundred and sixty didn't pay him much, he struggled to provide cultivation resources to his children.

That's why he become an informer of the Hive when the chance came, that underground organization gave him generous bribes for his services.

Yet, the representatives of the continent were trying their best to suppress any organization that still aimed for the independence of the archipelago.

Of course, they wouldn't go easy on those that worked for the Hive.

Bert was careless and his identity as an informer was discovered, he was forced to make a deal to save his family, it was either that or months of torture.

'It didn't play out so bad, the continent has sent capable cultivators after all.'

Those were his thoughts when he gazed at the guards protecting him.

There were five guards, all in the peak of the second rank, their stern auras clearly showed how experienced they were.

"When will I be able to see my family?"

Bert spoke to the guards.

He was at the top of a building on island one hundred and fifty-eight, that habitation was the safe location where he was forced to stay after he double-crossed the Hive.

"Soon. The Lords have to eradicate the roots of the separatists in the various islands before it will be safe to leave. We are doing this for your protection Bert, the Hive isn't known for its mercy."

The leader of the guards answered him, Bert knew that his words were on point but he still missed his family, he couldn't help but become anxious about its situation as the days passed.

'I wouldn't be in this mess if I wasn't so weak, the captains in charge of each island make a lot of money, nurturing my children wouldn't be a problem at that point.'

Bert was just a simple soldier.

He was a native of the archipelago and he had managed to become a soldier only thanks to the help of his father who was at the service of some noble.

Time passed though.

His father died of old age and he had to sell most of his techniques to help his family with the various hurdles of the cultivation journey, the prices in the archipelago were high and he could barely afford the resources useful to him after saving for a long time, he needed to find a way to increase his earnings.

However, becoming a captain was hard: They were mostly rank 3 cultivators, the legal factions wanted a cultivator at the peak of the human ranks to handle the human matters.

Bert was busy dividing his little income between the various members of his family so he couldn't hope to enter in the third rank any time soon, he was still in the liquid stage of the second rank after all.

'The Hive paid me a lot but I was found out... Oh well, at least my family is safe now.'

Five guards at the peak of the second rank, a habitation at the top of a building owned by the representatives of the continent, a protective formation that blocked any teleportation ability, there was really nothing to worry about.

"Chill Bert, the Hive would need to send a rank 3 cultivator to assassinate you but you are just a minor character, it's not worth exposing such a resource for this matter."

The leader of the guards tried to reassure Bert when he saw his anxious expression.

He spoke the truth, only a large team or a rank 3 cultivator could surpass their defensive measures.

Yet, a large team would be too evident and a rank 3 cultivator would be overkill, he was quite sure that the Hive would just let go of this matter after some time.

Then, a loud knock resounded from the entrance door, the rhythm of the knocks was peculiar, it seemed some kind of code.

"Finally, these guys are always late! Captain, you should say a thing or two to the guards of the other shift."

One of the guards complained as he stood up and went to the entrance door.

"Identify yourself!"

He stopped in front of the door before shouting those words.

"Blue whale."

An answer came from the other side of the door, those words didn't make sense but the guard seemed satisfied by that reply.

As a safe location, precautions were needed.

The building owned by the representatives was the first one, the defensive formation the second one, the knocking and the verbal code the third, the guards inside the habitation were the last form of defense.

The soldier opened the door but his smile froze when he saw the dark figure covered in blood that waited for him on the other side.

He hurriedly tried to seal the habitation again as the defensive protocol ordered but the dark figure was faster, it had already cast a spell when the soldier became visible.

A shockwave hit the soldier's mind, his mental sphere crumbled under the pressure of that mental attack and he fell lifelessly on the floor, leaving the entrance door open.

The dark figure then became visible to the other cultivators in the room, its features were covered by the large hooded robe that it wore.

The leader of the guards was the first to react, he jumped toward the assassin with all his might.

Yet, before he could reach it, the assassin waved his hand and five spherical items were launched in his direction.

Then, the assassin half-closed the door, hiding behind it.

Five explosions resounded in the room, the entrance door trembled due to the shockwave generated after the blasts.

It then opened the door again to stare at the results of its attack.

The room was filled with fuming spikes and the cultivators inside were the same, their charred corpses had been stabbed by hundreds of spikes, they couldn't hope to survive to the Instabilities in that small environment.

Chapter 342 - 342. Dantians opening

The assassin was, of course, Noah.

He entered the room and released some black smoke from his hands.

The partial Demonic form consumed everything, in just a few seconds, every trace of his presence was destroyed, even the holes on the walls created by the spikes of the Instabilities were removed.

He then wielded a white saber and wrote the word "Hive" on the wall, that was a message for the representatives of the continent and a warning for all the informants that tried to double-cross the organization in the future.

Then, he left in a hurry.

He went for the second floor of the building and entered a simple-looking room, the sound of hurried steps resounded in the building as he closed the door behind him.

A few hundreds of Credits appeared in his hands and he hastily placed them on the floor, a large diagram lit up as soon as he did that.

Shouts and orders could be heard on the superior floors but Noah didn't care, he entered in the diagram and a strong pressure was applied on his sea of consciousness while the world in front of him transformed.

In just a few seconds, the room disappeared and a purple wall took its place.

"How did it go?"

Roy was standing right beside the teleportation matrix, he spoke as soon as he saw Noah's figure.

"The betrayer and seven guards are dead, I even left the message as requested by the mission."

Roy nodded when he heard Noah's report and smiled proudly before speaking again.

"So, what do you think about our connections with the legal factions?"

Noah lowered his hood as he reviewed the events of the mission.

As it turned out, that safe location wasn't as safe as the representatives of the continent thought.

The Hive had spies everywhere, years of undisturbed rule allowed it to plant moles in every facility of the archipelago.

A teleportation matrix had been inscribed during the construction of that building, the Hive knew that the representatives wanted to use it as a safe location so it had instructed some of its members to create the diagram.

Also, it was even aware of the codes needed to pass the security measures of the guards!

Noah had only to use the matrix placed in the headquarters of the Chasing demon sect, kill the two patrolling guards on the lower floors, and assassinate the cultivators in the protected room, it was virtually impossible to make any mistake thanks to the deep preparation of the Hive.

'The Hive really is the leading underground organization. It seems that its roots are spread all around the archipelago, I wonder what kind of influence they have on the legal factions.'

"You have corrupted soldiers everywhere, matrixes placed right in their homes, what can even stop you from conquering the archipelago?"

Noah asked as he stored the large robe in his space-ring, only a tight suit remained on his body.

Roy shook his head at Noah's question and patted his shoulder as he gestured to follow him.

"Even if it's a bit annoying at times, we are freer if we make the continent think that we are being suppressed. If we really where to take over the archipelago, we would have to face the full power of the continent and we can't hope to win

in the long-run. It's better to accumulate for the time being until we are strong enough to defend ourselves."

'They are using the representatives of the continent to protect themselves from the continent. It's no wonder that they prefer this situation, they can control the whole archipelago under the façade of the suppressed organization.'

Noah understood the meaning behind Roy's explanation but he had spent too much of his life hiding, he couldn't say that he liked the Hive's approach.

"How strong is the Chasing demon sect inside the Hive? Are we in the top five positions at least?"

Once he had assessed the power of the Hive, Noah wanted to understand how influential his sect was in that organization.

"Top three I'd say, just our Demon alone is enough to shake the very foundations of the archipelago after all."

Roy gave his usual honest answer, there was pride in his eyes when he mentioned the Chasing Demon.

Noah was silenced by that statement, he was glad that he didn't join one of the weak branches of the Hive, he wanted to have access to as many resources as possible.

The two of them reached the building where the missions were affixed and they directly went for the first floor.

"Use your horned face to activate the formation and use your thoughts to browse through the various items, you should find what you are looking for."

Noah followed Roy's instructions and placed his palm at the center of the formation on the surface of the desk, the tattoo appeared on his hand and reacted to the formation, sending information to Noah's mind.

A list of techniques, resources, and spells useful for rank 2 cultivators appeared in his mind, Noah had only to will it and the many items would be sorted according to his needs.

Under the envious gazes of the other disciples in the room, Noah quickly found what he was looking for.

'Rank 3 cultivation techniques of the darkness element! Finally! I have used the one given to me by Eccentric Thunder for all this time, damned Ultra country and its restrictions.'

Noah cursed in his mind as he read the descriptions of the techniques.

'Five of them. Two of them are generic cultivation techniques with no restrictions to the aptitude of the cultivator, I can just discard them, they would only slow my training speed.'

Two names disappeared from the list in his mind, leaving only three techniques.

'One is the improved version of my Dark vortex technique, it is an orthodox technique and I should become used to it quite quickly. The other two are the unorthodox ones.'

As an unorthodox sect, the Chasing demon sect obviously had unorthodox cultivation methods that could provide a quicker training speed.

Of course, those methods were accompanied by heavy requirements and by dangerous practices, that's why they were labeled as unorthodox.

'This one seems the fastest one, Bone marrow draining technique, it needs the bones of magical beasts and cultivators of the darkness element to be used but its effects should be amazing with such harsh requirements. However, where would I even find those bones while I'm here?'

Noah discarded that technique too, his attention went on the last name on the list.

'Dantian's opening.'

Chapter 343 - 343. Sect

'Dantian's opening, rank 3 cultivation technique, restricted to cultivators of the darkness element. The practitioner must pierce its low waist and dantian to create a connection between that center of power and the outside world.

Then, it can use any rank 2 cultivation technique to cultivate as if it was in the third rank. This practice puts the dantian under heavy stress so it's advised to take long periods of rest between each cultivation session.'

Noah read the description of the technique and became interested.

'It should be like the Three Form of the Ashura, it improves your preexisting technique, bringing it to the next rank. Yet, piercing my dantian seems dangerous.'

The centers of power were powerful but also frail.

They could contain a large amount of energy but they will need a lot of time to recover if they took some damage.

Noah clearly remembered how annoying it was to heal his mental sphere when he first created a Blood companion, he couldn't help but hesitate a bit when he saw the contents of that unorthodox technique.

'The improved version of the Dark vortex technique is the best choice if I'm looking for stability, the Bone marrow draining and the Dantian's opening are faster but also dangerous. Also, I don't have a way to stockpile beasts of the darkness element while I'm in the Coral archipelago so I'm left with two options.'

His mind considered the two cultivation techniques, Noah had simply to choose which one was the best for him.

'The main quality of my Yin body is the healing speed, I should be able to limit the aftereffects of the Dantian's opening with the liquid "Breath" around my heart...'

The more he thought, the more he became interested in the unorthodox technique.

It couldn't be helped, any cultivator would prefer a higher training speed over an average one, anyone would love to improve its strength as fast as it could.

Yet, there were always huge risks together with those advantages, Heaven and Earth were fair, they wouldn't just give away something more powerful for free.

'I'm a criminal, a lone cultivator, a devil, unorthodox techniques suit me the most.'

Noah reached his conclusion.

He valued his training speed over his safety and he was used to practicing unusual techniques.

The Forging of the Seven Hells, the Elemental forging method, the Body-inscription spell, those were all techniques that didn't belong to the orthodox world but that had helped him surpassing the limits of his social status.

He willed and the formation under his palm shone for a while before an old scroll appeared at its center.

Noah stored the scroll in his space-ring and nodded toward Roy, that latter patted his shoulder when he recognized the technique that he had chosen.

"Indeed, a true demon, be careful though, I'd hate to see you injured when you just become a disciple of the sect. Now, follow me, I'll explain the remaining aspects of this place."

Roy took Noah to walk through the whole sect, it took them an entire day to complete their tour.

Noah could see how the Chasing demon sect had many structures, it resembled a smaller version of the academy.

There were the residential areas in the external parts of the headquarters, they were divided by the rank of the disciples living there and had a density of "Breath" that matched their level.

Next to each residential area, there were the teleportation matrixes that were connected with the various islands, their position allowed the disciples to react quickly when an unexpected situation appeared on the surface.

The internal parts of the sect contained the caves of the elders in the heroic ranks together with the various facilities.

The Chasing demon sect had a building where anyone could buy information about the surface, an inventory where precious materials were stored, the building containing the various missions, a research area, and some training areas that offered a better environment compared to the caves.

What surprised Noah the most was that all those services didn't accept Credits as payment but only merit points.

'I guess this method forces everyone to actually work for the sect instead of just relying on their wealth.'

Noah approved that administration, it made the sect more efficient and removed the privileges that a rich person would have, forcing everyone to complete missions if they wanted to have access to the many resources.

Also, the missions themselves weren't only assassinations.

The killing of certain troublesome individuals was the main occupation of the sect but the actual assassination missions were few compared to the other ones.

Most of them concerned the gathering of information about certain topics, or the spying of some building, or even the bribing of some cultivator with an important position in a legal organization.

That, coupled with the merit point system, increased the knowledge and the influence of the sect over the archipelago with each passing day.

Knowledge to exploit the plans of the representatives of the continent, bribes and threats to make use of their structures and organizations, assassinations to remove the difficult individuals, these were the things that the disciples ended up doing to accumulate points.

There were other peculiar missions that required long undercover operations or trips to the continent but Roy explained that those types of works were mostly handled by the other branches of the Hive.

The center of the sect was entirely dedicated to the Chasing Demon, it was its private area, no one was allowed to enter it.

In the end, the tour ended and Roy accompanied Noah toward his cave.

"The sect doesn't force you to complete missions but you should do at least one of them every few months, I don't want to have my mother bugging me because of you."

Roy gave those last words to Noah before he left the residential area, Noah remained alone in front of the entrance of his cave.

The horned face appeared on his palm and the entrance opened, the purple walls moved to make a path for him.

After he entered, the cave sealed itself, leaving him immersed in the purple halo of the single room that was his new habitation.

Chapter 344 - 344. Burning

'It's quite simple but the density of "Breath" is not bad.'

Noah judged as he took the "Breath" blessing from his space-ring and placed it at the center of the cave.

'Now, let's see this new technique.'

He was eager to test the effects of his new cultivation technique, it had been too long since he upgraded the training of his dantian.

He sat over the blue mineral and the scroll describing the Dantian's opening technique appeared in his hands, Noah carefully studied it as he understood its contents.

'It doesn't seem too difficult, the only problem is the time needed for the dantian to recover after each training session.'

The Dantian's opening required for Noah to create a link between his dantian and the outside world in order to increase the quantity of "Breath" absorbed during the usage of the Dark vortex technique.

Also, he needed to slightly modify his rank 2 technique to welcome the new practice, the vortex had to have the dantian as its center instead of his hands, which meant that his skin would create some sort of obstruction.

'To sum it up, the larger the cut on my waist, the less obstruction the vortex will have. It is quite gory but I wasn't expecting anything less from an unorthodox technique.'

Hurt yourself to obtain greater advantages, Noah knew that kind of practice too well.

'Well, I should just try it out.'

He had memorized the technique and the "Breath" in the cave was so dense that the time in the outside world wouldn't impact his cultivation that much, he couldn't find a reason to delay his training.

A black saber appeared in his hand, Noah carefully pointed it at his low waist as he focused all his attention to the regenerative proprieties of his body.

Since he became a rank 3 mage, he was able to momentarily halt the innate healing of his Yin body, his control over his whole form had greatly improved when his sea of consciousness reached the last stage of the human ranks.

Then, he stabbed his abdomen, the sight of his own skin being cut didn't even make him blink, the Body-inscription spell had made him too used to that scene.

The saber pierced deeply until it reached a small organ that had a shining surface.

'The technique says that even a small hole is enough, I shouldn't take unnecessary risks.'

Noah reviewed the contents of the scroll one last time before he decisively put strength on the saber, the point of his weapon touched the surface of his dantian and pierced it easily.

Noah felt a burning pain coming from his waist, its intensity was similar to when he damaged his mental sphere.

He took his time, he stood still in that position until he became used to the painful sensation, only then did he dare to move his saber again.

He retracted his weapon slowly, the small hole on the surface of his dantian began to release "Breath", it naturally returned to the outside world without the restrictions of that center of power.

Noah acted quickly but not rashly, he traced a long line on his abdomen with his weapon, enlarging the wound.

Then, he directly stored the saber and joined his hands over his wound, his thumbs and middle fingers were inserted in the wound as he created the usual dark vortex.

Since his fingers were joint inside his flesh, the center of the vortex shifted and neared his dantian that was still releasing the "Breath" stored inside it.

At that moment, a great suction force was generated.

As soon as the center of the vortex met the dantian, its rotation speed increased drastically!

Large amounts of dense "Breath" of the darkness element were captured by the suction force and redirected directly inside the dantian through the hole on its surface.

Pain, incredible pain!

Noah furrowed his brows and gritted his teeth as the "Breath" entered his dantian and enlarged his form.

Yet, the hole on its surface was also affected by that process, Noah felt as if his waist was being torn apart by a burning blade as the hole stretched together with the rest of the organ.

However, Noah didn't stop.

He had never seen his dantian improving so quickly, he didn't want to stop so soon.

A few hours passed in that way, Noah had his eyes closed and every pore of his body released cold sweat as he endured the painful practice.

Then, his dantian began to show signs of instability as the hole on it became too large, forcing Noah to disperse the vortex and to stop his training.

The vortex disappeared and "Breath" started to leave his dantian again but Noah was prepared for that situation.

The membrane around his heart compressed itself, sending liquid "Breath" in his circulatory system.

Also, his mental energy enveloped his dantian, greatly slowing the speed at which the "Breath" returned to the outside world.

About half an hour had to pass before Noah was able to stabilize the condition of his body, the wound on his waist had healed almost immediately but his dantian had needed half of the liquid "Breath" inside the membrane to close the hole.

Only then Noah could relax and he slowly laid on the floor of the cave as he assessed his gains.

'This is at least ten times faster than the Dark vortex cultivation technique! However, my dantian needs a few days to completely recover before I'm able to cultivate again. All in all, I say that it's about five to six times faster.'

Noah calculated in his mind as he began to plan another training schedule that could accommodate his new cultivation technique.

'I should be able to do the Dantian's opening twice per week but I should limit myself to one for the time being, I would rather take things slowly with such a dangerous practice.'

His mind was in the third rank so maintaining his concentration while enduring the burning sensation didn't deplete all his mental energy, he was still able to think normally.

'I guess I should practice in the creation of strong wills for now, I don't have the materials to resume my forging and I don't really need any new weapon. I should just focus on becoming used to this new practice for now.'

In the purple halo of his room, Noah closed his eyes as his mind used his ambition to form strong and dense wills.

Chapter 345 - 345. Issue

Noah spent the following weeks in his cave.

There was no immediate need to complete another mission since he had succeeded in one assassination, which was considered the most important kind of mission.

He needed time to become used to his new cultivation technique but he also wanted to explore other aspects of his abilities.

He could cultivate only once per week and his sea of consciousness was enlarging autonomously due to the solid "Breath" inside it so he found himself with a lot of free time.

However, Noah wasn't the type of cultivator that would just laze around or rest because his centers of power were already improving, he quickly found something else that could fill his days.

Noah had no materials to practice in the Elemental forging method but he could improve the meaning that he injected in the "Breath" before inscribing an item.

The power of his creations depended on the level of the materials used and on the strength of the will that he managed to inject, he knew that there was a large room for improvement in the latter.

That's why he would often create a will and inject it inside a portion of the "Breath" inside his mental sphere, he would then evaluate the result only to disperse that "Breath" shortly after.

This type of training allowed him to slowly increase his ability in giving a meaning to his "Breath" so to have better effects when he later used it to forge items.

Other than that, he also began to study the diagrams in his possession, the form of his martial arts and the lines of his spells contained the meaning of Heaven and Earth, he wanted to see if he could make some progress in the creation of techniques.

However, studying diagrams was a slow and painful process, Noah was often forced to stop due to the aftereffects that hit his mental sphere as he isolated the various lines.

'I don't know why, but this feels wrong.'

He reached that conclusion after another line exploded in his mind, forcing him to stop studying.

The scroll describing the Blood drain spell was put back inside the space-ring as Noah laid on a mat to think about that matter.

He had decided to study the diagram of the Blood drain spell, he was a rank 3 mage now, he was barely able to endure the isolation of the lines of a rank 2 spell.

Also, the Blood drain spell was the spell that interested him the most: Not only did it match Noah's Demonic form, but it also contained part of the secrets behind the evolution process of the magical beasts!

Noah wanted to resume training his body but he knew that obtaining a rank 5 body-nourishing method anytime soon was simply impossible, the only other option was to create a nourishing method himself.

Yet, he continued to have the feeling that something was wrong with his approach.

'This is the standard procedure, every cultivator begins with the isolation of the lines of the diagrams. Then, when they are more skilled, they can attempt to create diagrams from their sheer understanding of the nature of the "Breath". I am limited by my inscription method, Heaven and Earth will never allow me to hear the "Breath" but I've managed to surpass that hurdle.'

Noah had created a martial art.

Its foundation came from the rank 0 Shadow step spell but Noah added "Breath" containing his will to obtain effects that matched a rank 4 martial art.

'This approach though limits myself to copying preexisting diagrams, I will never be able to create something from scratch this way. Also, I can only obtain simple effects while having limited uses of my Shadow sprint.'

Shadow sprint was the name that he gave to his martial art.

The Shadow sprint and the Three Forms of the Ashura were on the same level but they were worlds apart when it came to their complexity.

The Shadow sprint could only do one thing: Create a propulsion force that greatly increased the speed of the cultivator.

The Three Forms of the Ashura, instead, had various effects.

Not only it improved a preexisting martial art, but it also created four additional arms and weapons!

Then, there were the Three Forms, its complexity was simply on another level.

'Ivor's legacy doesn't even mention this issue, the previous practitioners of the Elemental forging method have only focused on inscribed items.'

Noah thought that but he knew that the truth was slightly different.

The previous practitioners of his inscription method could only focus on inscribed items because they died or injured themselves before they could attempt in the creation of techniques.

The Elemental forging method was dangerous, Noah was the last known practitioner after all.

'I believe that I'm in uncharted territory here.'

Noah sighed as he pondered about the issue.

To create a technique or a spell, one needed to understand the meaning behind the behavior of the "Breath" and reproduce it in the form of gestures or diagrams.

Yet, Noah was one of the individuals that could not hear the meaning of the "Breath", he was forced to use weaker or unorthodox inscription methods to overcome that hurdle.

'The Elemental forging method steals "Breath" from Heaven and Earth and uses the will of the practitioner to set a meaning to it. Then, it fuses that "Breath" with various materials to create weapons that carry the practitioner's meaning.'

Noah reviewed the details of his inscription method to find the reason behind his odd feeling.

'Following this concept, I should not use the lines of the diagrams created with the attunement method or similar practices. The logical procedure would be to create diagrams that carry my meaning, but that would be as if I was creating a different language that only I know how to speak. Also, this new language would need the backing of a strong power in order to have the same value as the one of Heaven and Earth.'

Noah continued to consider that new idea, no matter how impossible it looked, that seemed the real usage of his inscription method for the creation of techniques.

Chapter 346 - 346. Shy

'That would need a will powerful enough to create strong effects all by itself.'

Noah continued to think about the issue of creating techniques with his inscription method.

The Shadow sprint was a martial art that used both preexisting diagrams and personal meaning, each one of those elements alone wasn't enough to reach the level of the fourth rank.

Yet, Noah's conclusion was to use only the personal meaning!

'This isn't just a matter of strong wills, I would need for my sea of consciousness to dictate meanings that can match those of Heaven and Earth, this seems delusional.'

The "Breath" of Heaven and Earth carried their meaning which had no form.

Cultivators that created techniques and spells were able to write that meaning in the form of diagrams or inscriptions so that they could produce the wanted effects.

However, Noah was thinking about creating something completely from scratch, using his mind as the entity that generated such meanings.

'This is impossible, at least in my current state. I'm still a human, these are matters handled by entities or Gods, I can't hope to do something so amazing with my rank 3 sea of consciousness. I guess it's enough to have reached this conclusion for now.'

Noah ended his brainstorming and decided to put that issue in hold until his mind became stronger.

He then gave up on studying the diagrams of his spells, there was no need to waste time and risk his mental sphere if he was going to use another method in the future, he could just resume the isolation of the lines of the diagrams later on if he needed to do so.

His days became empty again, Noah would randomly practice in his martial arts as he waited to become used to his new cultivation technique.

A total of three months passed, Noah had never exited his cave in that period but he had succeeded in his objective.

He had become quite skilled in the Dantian's opening and he had ultimately decided to practice it only three times every two weeks.

The truth was that he could easily cultivate with that technique twice per week but he decided to go easy on his dantian: Not only the constant stress could be harmful, but it would also force Noah to stay locked in his cave for the whole time.

His dantian needed time to completely recover after each cultivation session and cultivating too often would put Noah in a state of constant healing.

Noah hadn't forgotten his position, he was a disciple of the Chasing demon sect and he was wanted by at least one big nation, he wanted to be ready to fight at any moment.

Three Dantian's openings in two weeks were the perfect compromise between a fast cultivation speed and a stable battle prowess.

The matter with his new cultivation technique was settled so he decided to exit his cave to complete some mission, Roy had warned him not to push the patience of Elder Iris after all.

The residential area for the cultivators in the second rank was quite far from the building containing the missions of the sect.

The disciples that weren't cultivating or busy in some mission would use the central space of the area to entertain themselves and engage in discussions accompanied by good food and drinks.

When Noah exited his cave, he was surprised to see a large table with fifteen or so cultivators happily sitting around it.

'So, they really gather here, I guess they prefer not to use the taverns on the surface too much.'

Roy had told him that, even if they had control of the archipelago, the representatives of the continent would still strike hard whenever they discovered traces of the Hive.

That's why it was safer to spend time in the sect rather than on the surface, there was no reason to risk being exposed just to have a drink under the sunlight.

The disciples on the table were silenced at the sight of Noah's cave opening, they were aware that a new disciple had joined their ranks but they had only seen him in the building with the missions, he had isolated himself right after he completed his assassination.

'There are even rank 1 cultivators, they should be outer disciples waiting to obtain access to the resources of the sect.'

Noah thought as he gazed at the group at the center of the residential area.

The strongest cultivator in the group was in the solid stage of the second rank but Noah had a rank 3 sea of consciousness, it was impossible for those disciples to stop his inspection.

Traces of envy and even arrogance could be seen on their expressions as they looked at Noah, it was obvious that they felt superior to that newcomer.

'I guess I should try a bit harder this time, I am their fellow disciple after all.'

Noah didn't care about their gazes, he could understand the reason behind their pride.

He had joined the sect because Roy had taken interest in his personality while most of the other disciples had to either pass a test or had some connection with the elders, Noah seemed privileged in their eyes.

Yet, he didn't want trouble as soon as he entered the sect and he also didn't want to isolate himself as usual so he thought about interacting with them a little.

His gaze was still on the disciples when he nodded before turning to leave in the direction of the mission's building.

"..."

The cultivators on the table sat speechless at that gesture and stared at his figure disappearing in the distance with wide eyes.

Normally speaking, a newcomer would pay its respects to the more experienced disciples and try to establish a peaceful relationship.

However, Noah had isolated himself for three months as soon as he completed his mission and, when he had finally come out of his seclusion, he just nodded.

"What's wrong with this guy?"

"Maybe he is shy."

"Shy? He stood still for five entire breaths before nodding!"

"I think that provoking him isn't the best approach."

"Do you think that we should invite him? Since when the older disciples have to take the first step?"

"We should still try to befriend him before the other factions do, he seems strong, we should try to make him join our team."

Chapter 347 - 347. Sea snakes tears

Noah was unaware of the conversation of the disciples in the residential area but he didn't care much about it.

He had always been a loner, with few exceptions when it came to people that managed to become important in his life.

Yet, Lily was dead, William served the Balvan family, June was in the Utra country, and he had left Nina to search for better cultivation resources, the few relationships that he managed to build seemed to always conflict with his ambition.

'Cultivation is a long and lonely journey, even the heirs of the large-size noble family will eventually exhaust the support that their family can give them.'

Those words resounded in Noah's mind as he went for the mission's building.

The image of the disciples happily feasting in the residential area was still on his mind, he could clearly see how the majority of them were still unaware of the true nature of the cultivation world.

It couldn't be helped, Noah had really seen too much, his many misadventures only empowered his natural cold demeanor.

'I guess there is no need to rush, I will just focus on accumulating merit points, I will eventually learn to know someone. I am a member of the sect after all, I will spend a lot of time here.'

Noah had always been used to exploit the various organizations that he came in contact with.

However, at that time, he was a proper disciple, he needed to work for the greater good of the sect.

'I would have completely avoided joining any organization if cultivation resources weren't so hard to obtain. Well, the Chasing demon sect has offered me good conditions in the end.'

He was satisfied with his current status.

The sect, as an underground organization, provided cover to his identity and it didn't hinder his progress in any way.

The only thing that Noah had to give in return was some mission every few months which didn't bother him at all.

The mission's building appeared in his eyes and he went directly for the first floor, where cultivators in the second rank were.

The usual envious gazes were shot at him but Noah didn't even look at the others in the room as he pressed his palm on the formation on the surface of the desk.

The list of resources suitable for the rank of his dantian appeared in his mind and he calmly sorted out those that were useful to him.

Earth pills and, their improved version, Yellow-Earth pills helped the dantian in the breakthroughs between the three stages of a rank but Noah's mental sphere was too strong, he didn't need any external help.

Curative and situational potions and pills were also useless, Noah had stashed far more of those medicines than needed, he wouldn't waste merit points for them.

There were rank 4 martial arts but their prices were exorbitant, Noah guessed that he had to spend months doing assassination missions only to gather the necessary points for one of them.

The spells listed on that floor were in the second rank at best, they couldn't increase Noah's battle prowess since he was already a rank 3 mage, using them would probably limit his power instead.

'I should wait for when I gain access to the next floor for the expensive purchases, now I should just stabilize my situation.'

He willed and a list of pills and potions remained in his mind.

'These should all have beneficial effects on the dantian, it's better to have them and pair them with my new cultivation technique.'

The Dantian's opening put his center of power under heavy stress.

It couldn't be helped, unorthodox techniques were famous for their fast results but they were also known for their unusual and dangerous practices.

The Forging of the Seven Hells had allowed Noah to obtain a rank 3 body without the help of a dantian but he had to risk his life every time he underwent the procedures.

In the same way, the Dantian's opening increased the speed at which his dantian improved because it directly poured "Breath" in its insides and it exploited the suction force of the preexisting cultivation technique to further increase the enlarging speed.

However, the price to pay was a wounded dantian.

Noah had chosen that technique over the improved Dark vortex because he preferred a fast cultivation over a safe and steady one and because he was confident in the healing capabilities of his body.

Yet, he couldn't help but worry about the long-term repercussions that his center of power might eventually suffer.

That's why Noah was looking for resources that specifically targeted the dantian.

'Heaven pill, Purple seaweed potion, Heat-refining pill... The sect sure has a good variety for even if doesn't match the academy.'

Noah read the descriptions of the many items and ultimately went for the most expensive ones, he wouldn't be stingy when it came to his centers of power.

'Sea snake's tears, this is the most expensive potion in the field. It says that it has great curative effects on the dantian and that it also helps in strengthening its walls. It should be perfect.'

Noah memorized the price and moved toward the pillar where the missions were affixed.

'I should avoid those that require the gathering of information, they are the longest and the less remunerative ones. I should aim for those that concern threats and bribes and do the assassination ones on if necessary.'

Noah didn't want to gather too much attention to himself.

He was always careful whenever he made a move but the assassination missions were the most valued ones in the sect, which meant that they had more repercussions on the archipelago.

Noah didn't want to become the target of some legal organization or end up in a trap.

Under the gaze of the other disciples, he registered for five missions that needed for him to threaten certain cultivators that had positions that the Hive could exploit.

Then he moved toward the matrixes that would teleport him on the island where his first target was.

Chapter 348 - 348. Daughter

On island one hundred and ninety-one, in a dark tavern illuminated only by the few candles sparsely placed in the hall.

An anxious middle-aged soldier was conversing with a hooded figure as they sat on a table in the back of the room.

"Please, you must understand! The captain is looking for moles like he has never done before! After the assassination on island one hundred and fifty-eight, every legal faction is keeping its attention on all of us! I can't give you the reports about the shipments of the next month."

The soldier pleaded the hooded figure, he looked pitiful and even scared when he said those words.

The hooded figure was, of course, Noah.

That was the last of his missions, it had taken him an entire day to complete the other four and he was now doing his best to convince the soldier in front of him to sell the information about the provisions that the continent sent to its representatives in the archipelago.

Noah released a bit of his aura, the soldier was only a rank 1 mage, he immediately stopped speaking when he felt the cold pressure enveloping him.

"P-please, I, I really can't."

However, the soldier continued to refuse even after that.

'The other four gave up as soon as they sensed the difference in power... It seems that I have to use another approach.'

Noah thought, deciding to change tactic.

He took a small sip from his jug and put a hand on the side of his head in a pensive gesture.

"Bill, right? You have a daughter named Cora if I'm not wrong."

Bill's expression froze after he heard Noah's words, his hands began to tremble as he sat silently, waiting for the hooded man to continue.

"You have always been happy to work with us, our cooperation allowed her to obtain a rank 1 cultivation technique and a rank 2 martial art. She should be in the liquid stage by now, am I right?"

Bill didn't move, Noah's words resounded in his mind and he was incapable to provide any answer.

However, Noah wanted him to understand the situation he was in.

Even more of his aura was released as he repeated his words in a slow but calm manner.

"Am I right?"

Bill was awakened by that question and timidly nodded, cold sweat traced shining lines on his face as it fell on the wooden table.

Noah sighed and shook his head, he purposely accentuated those gestures before he resumed to speak.

"They grow up so quickly and the expenses for the techniques can only increase as their level rises. I wonder what she will do when her dad disappears... We might find a job for her so that she can continue to cultivate but this really isn't something I suggest, I don't like to see promising kids ruined by lecherous old men."

Noah spoke slowly, he wanted to make sure that Bill understood the meaning behind his threat.

Bill suppressed an angered shout as he lowered his head.

"You Hive are evil, using my child like this..."

He spoke softly but Noah could clearly hear what he said.

Yet, he didn't care much, he knew that the soldier was right after all.

Noah had never used the name of the Chasing demon sect during his missions, it was always the Hive that was mentioned.

As an underground organization, the less it was revealed to the public the more mysterious and powerful it would appear.

Most normal citizens weren't even aware that there were different factions, they just labeled any criminal organization of the archipelago as Hive.

Noah silently waited for the man to decide, his cold pressure never left his target.

Then, Bill sighed and took a scroll from the sleeves of his robe and handed it to Noah.

Noah opened it and nodded before storing it inside his space-ring while handing a few thousand Credits to Bill.

"See? It was easy, let's not make it so difficult next time."

Noah spoke as he stood up and patted Bill's shoulder.

Then, he simply left the tavern, Bill's voice ordering more wine reached his ears as he returned to the streets.

'I'm finally done for today.'

Noah internally sighed as he moved toward the deeper and poorer parts of the island.

There, he entered an almost-broken wooden cabin where he placed a few hundred Credits on the floor.

A matrix appeared behind his feet and the pressure of the teleportation hit his mind, in a few seconds, he had returned to the now-familiar purple environment.

He was near the residential area of the disciples in the first rank of the dantian and some of them were silently cleaning the matrixes placed on the purple ground.

They noticed Noah's presence and immediately stood up to perform a polite bow.

They were youths in the gaseous stage, they were the outer disciples of the sect who would act as servants until their cultivation reached the liquid stage.

Noah nodded at them and moved toward the mission's building, the missions of that day would provide him with three hundred merit points, they were enough to buy a bottle of Sea snake's tears.

He quickly reached the first floor of the mission's building and went for the desk, the tattoo on his hand appeared to interact with the formation and confirm the outcome of the missions, the items that he had obtained that day were laid on the formation and disappeared during the process.

Behind him, on the pillar, the missions completed by Noah disappeared and new tablets replaced those empty spaces.

In a few seconds, a bottle containing an azure and dense liquid together with a few thousand Credits appeared on the desk and Noah promptly stored those items inside his space-ring.

The Credits expended for the activation of the matrixes and for the bribes during the missions were refunded by the sect, it would be unproductive to ask for the disciples to pay with their own money after all.

Noah didn't need to pick other missions so he simply returned to his residential area, he was eager to test the effect of the potion.

Yet, as he returned to his cave, he saw that five disciples were waiting right in front of its entrance.

Chapter 349 - 349. Chit-chats

A circular table was placed at the center of the residential area of the cultivators in the second rank.

Noah was sitting on a simple chair together with the five disciples that were waiting in front of his cave, they had invited him to join them for a talk and he didn't have a reason to refuse.

Noah strived for a peaceful environment where to cultivate, as a member of the sect, it seemed right to at least maintain friendly relationships with the other disciples.

Yet, as the minutes passed, he started to become impatient.

"Zach, right? Have a taste of this wine, I personally bought it on island forty-nine."

"Why don't you tell us more about yourself? I bet that your story must be amazing!"

"You sure are good looking! We should go together to the brothels on island ninety-nine, I bet that they will give us a discount if you were to come with us!"

The conversations of the disciples differed a lot from what Noah had expected.

'Did they invite me just to have a drink? Where are the prideful stares from before?'

Noah thought as he kept shaking his head every time someone asked him a question, he simply continued to take sips from his cup, waiting for the conversation to reach the important topics.

However, it seemed that their chit-chats had no end.

"The Chasing demon sect has really a shortage of female cultivators, we are forced to go on the surface every once in a while or we will go crazy!"

"The best wine is found in the islands number twenty and below but this one isn't bad at all!"

"Where do you come from? Are you a native of the archipelago? Did you come here from the continent?"

'Are these the normal conversations that cultivators have? Damn, I miss June's surprise attacks, they were easier to endure.'

Noah sighed as he remembered the silver-haired wild girl that only wanted to surpass him.

'She might have surpassed my cultivation level already thanks to the inheritance... Oh well, I have wasted a lot of time escaping after all.'

His mind began to wander as he reviewed the events in the Utra country, the words of the disciples around him became a soft background noise as he lost himself in his memories.

'I wonder what happened to Ivor... Now that I think about it, he was the person closest to me in the eyes of the Royals.'

Ivor was only interested in passing down his inscription method, his mind had been on the verge of falling apart for a long time, only his obsession allowed him to endure the waves of pain that his cracked mental sphere constantly radiated.

'He is either dead or imprisoned.'

That was the obvious conclusion that Noah reached.

He knew that investigations about his background had been made after his disappearance, he was entangled in too many obscure matters after all, the Royals wouldn't just let him go.

However, Noah didn't feel bad about him.

There was a tacit understanding between him and Ivor, the latter knew that Noah had many secrets and that he would eventually leave so he did his best to pass down his knowledge.

Noah, instead, knew that Ivor's life was hanging on a frail thread, only a soft blow was enough to take it away.

'He would have approved my actions, his inscription method is alive and I'm planning to surpass all my predecessors. I should have left more wine though.'

"Zach? Zach! Are you listening?"

Noah's thoughts were interrupted by those words, he returned to reality only to find out that the five disciples were staring at him with displeased gazes.

"No, I wasn't. Listen, why don't you just get to the point? I am busy."

He couldn't endure the chit-chats any longer and just gave voice to his thoughts.

The disciples were surprised by his rash words but they quickly recovered and wore stern expressions, the friendly smiles from before disappeared in less than an instant.

'That's more like it.'

Noah liked that behavior more, even if it was slightly threatening, it was honest.

"New disciples usually pay their respects to their seniors."

The strongest of the group spoke, his peak rank two cultivation level was radiated together with his words.

"Seniority is a matter of strength and no one on this table is stronger than me."

Noah arrogantly replied.

His dantian might have been weaker than that of the disciple but he was a rank 3 mage!

That difference in power could surpass any larger reserve of energy.

The disciple didn't like Noah's words and his eyes sharpened as he spoke to him in a calm voice.

"Oh, would you like to prove it? I, Perry Seaborn, challenge the new honorary disciple to a battle! Do you have the guts to accept the challenge?"

Perry's words made the other four disciples gasp in surprise as they moved their gazes toward Noah, eagerly waiting for his answer.

However, Noah directly refused.

"No."

It was a simple word but the atmosphere created by Perry's heroic challenge was disrupted with it.

'It was a waste of time.'

Noah internally shook his head as he stood up and moved to return to his cave.

"Wait! Don't you have any honor? First, you claim yourself as the strongest among us and then you refuse my challenge?"

Noah turned his head only to see that even Perry had stood up and was pointing his hand toward him.

Noah simply shrugged his shoulders at that reprimand as he explained his intentions.

"What's the point of fighting? Why would I fight only to prove my strength? Pride is for the orthodox sects, we fight for benefits."

The disciples listened to Noah's words and their eyes widened in understanding, they couldn't help but think that his mindset was that of a proper demon!

A tinge of shame appeared on Perry's face as he listened to his words, Noah was right, they were assassins and criminals, what kind of honor would they even have?

"The winner gets a three thousand merit points from the loser, is that ok with you?"

Perry changed tactic which worked as he hoped.

Noah became immediately interested in that offer and turned completely to face the man at the peak of the second rank.

"I accept your challenge then."

Chapter 350 - 350. Battle

The Chasing demon sect was filled by excited rumors in the following days.

Perry, the strongest disciple in the residential area of the rank 2 cultivators, had challenged Noah, the new honorary disciple of the sect.

The rumors, as per their nature, didn't tell the exact events that led Perry to issue the challenge.

"I heard that Zach was so disrespectful that he refused to even look at Perry!"

"No. I heard that Senior Perry was forced to challenge Zach because he wouldn't accept his honest pointers."

"I actually heard that Zach refused Perry's challenge until he offered him merit points. I even heard that Zach accused Perry of being more suitable for the orthodox sects."

'Words run faster than light, how did I even end in this situation.'

Noah thought as he heard the many voices coming from the stages around him.

He was in one of the training areas of the sect, the purple terrain was filled by inscriptions and many seats were placed all around the battle area.

Only seventy percent of the seats were filled, the audience was mostly made of rank 1 and 2 cultivators with only a few rank 3 disciples that had connections with Perry.

Of course, Noah was unaware of Perry's title as the strongest disciple in the second rank and didn't also know about his connections with the rank 3 cultivators that were on the stages.

Perry was on the other side of the arena, his tight gray robe coupled with his burly body gave him a heroic aura, a few women in the audience found themselves unable to move their gazes away from him.

Noah, on the other hand, seemed incredibly plain.

He wore his usual black suit and his short but messy hair conflicted with his cold expression.

Also, his body was slender rather than bulgy and he was shorter than Perry, if looks could decide the outcome of a battle, Noah would have lost already.

However, some spectators didn't have the same thoughts as the rest of the audience.

Noah didn't radiate any kind of aura, not even a whiff of his cultivation level could be discerned by the inspections of the cultivators in the second rank.

Those in the third rank, instead, stared at him with surprised expressions and even with traces of interest, they seemed to have picked up some clues about Noah's power.

Roy walked from behind Noah and neared his mouth to his ear as he whispered a few words.

"The rules of the sect are laxer when it comes to official challenges but try to go easy on him, he is a promising disciple."

After those warnings, Roy moved toward the stages, bows were performed by the cultivators that he passed by.

'As I suspected, he knows about my unusual situation.'

Noah thought.

He knew that Roy was stronger than him so there was a high chance that he had understood his power.

Also, he had made Noah stop on the first floor of the mission's building, meaning that he knew that he was still a rank 2 cultivator.

'Even Elder Iris has laid her eyes on me, it was impossible to hide this information after all.'

The information Noah was thinking about was, of course, his rank 3 sea of consciousness!

He had initially hoped to hide that quality until he became rank 3 cultivator but he had met cultivators far stronger than him as soon as he entered the sect, he simply couldn't hide his power from them.

However, Noah soon accepted that outcome, he was a proper member of the sect, the information about his power could only be divulged to other disciples but never to outsiders.

'Let's see, how should I approach this?'

Noah began to think about the imminent battle.

He was completely confident in his capability to defeat Perry but he had to limit himself in the battle.

That wasn't a fight to the death after all, it was only a simple spar to decide who was the stronger between the two of them.

'The Demonic form is an absolute no, it's better to not use the Demonic swords either. The Mental tremor is another no, Perry's sea of consciousness would just shatter under that spell. Warp and martial arts then.'

Noah set the fighting style in his mind and begun to walk toward Perry.

The audience was silenced by that gesture and they raised their concentration, waiting for the battle to begin.

Perry didn't waste time, as soon as he saw Noah's near him, he did the same, wielding a short sword as he jumped at the man in front of him.

Two white sabers appeared in Noah's hands and four additional arms materialized as he prepared himself for the imminent clash.

Then, the six sabers met the short sword.

Noah found himself forced to use three weapons to defend from the explosive power behind the sword, it seemed that Perry's body had the strength of a giant as he slashed vertically.

However, even if he was sent back, Noah managed to defend and his other sabers were able to land on Perry's body.

The first clash ended quickly, Noah was pushed back for a few meters but he was unharmed.

Perry, instead, remained still in his position as he stared at the three cuts on his robe.

The skin behind the robe showed some light wounds, a few drops of blood came out of them before the regenerative proprieties of his body healed them.

'Strange. His body is clearly oriented toward strength and defense but he uses such an unsuitable weapon, maybe his martial art will be different.'

Noah analyzed the clash and found something amiss in Perry's fighting style.

"Shall we get serious?"

Perry asked with a smile but Noah only answered with a shrug of his shoulders.

Perry then charged again, his massive body resembled a horned bull pouncing at Noah as he stretched the short sword right in front of him.

The tip of the sword began to shine with a brown light and his body accelerated, releasing a gray smoke due to the friction force with the air.

Staring at the incoming horned fuming figure, Noah knew that he had to dodge.