

Chapter 381 - 381. Comparisons

Noah eyed the eight cultivators that had been appointed of attacking the Bone dragon.

His role had been to focus on defending the team in the second trial, his status as a rank 3 cultivator in the gaseous stage didn't suit the attacking role, especially against a peak rank 4 creature.

The eight attackers were the cultivators with the highest cultivation level in the group, a few of them were in the solid stage of the third rank while the others were at the peak of the liquid stage, Noah simply couldn't compare to them unless he used the complete Demonic form.

'Such a difference in power, the heroic ranks are incredible.'

As always, Noah deeply analyzed his battle to learn as much as he could from his enemies or to discover flaws in his combat style.

'When entering the liquid stage of the second rank, a cultivator becomes able to wound rank 4 creatures but that only when considering beasts in the lower tier of the rank.'

The comparison between the power level of the magical beasts and the cultivators was clear in his mind, the academy had taught him quite a lot in that field.

Generally speaking, a cultivator became able to safely face a rank 4 beast in the lower tier only when it entered the third rank.

There were exceptions like Noah who could single-handedly kill rank 4 creatures when they were in the second rank but they were considered special cases.

Also, their battles would always involve a large amount of risk, they were forced to go all out in those situations.

After that tier, the difference in power between beasts and cultivators would increase, cultivators had their centers of power which made them naturally stronger than magical beasts but the latter were advancing inside the fourth rank, any breakthrough in the heroic ranks gave far more power than those in the human ones.

'A rank 4 beast in the middle tier can match a cultivator in the liquid stage of the third rank while it can only be safely killed by a group of said cultivators or by someone at the peak of the rank.'

A creature in the middle tier of the fourth rank was halfway through its journey in the first heroic rank, only exceptional cultivators in the liquid stage could face it alone.

'As for those at the peak of the rank, only heroic cultivators can face them without any danger.'

Noah stopped reviewing the situation after that conclusion.

David's team was formed by twenty rank 3 cultivators and four of them were in the solid stage.

Resorting to slowly exhausting the peak rank 4 creature was an excellent choice because it fully expressed the power of the numerical advantage of the cultivators while keeping them safe.

Peak rank 3 cultivators could hurt a peak rank 4 creature but that was it, it was as if a rank 2 cultivator in the liquid stage wanted to kill a rank 4 creature in the lower tier.

Of course, these comparisons were made only considering the stage in which the dantian of the cultivators was, exceptions like Noah had a battle prowess that surpassed their level, allowing them to face strongest foes while being weaker.

"Rest, the next test has taken many lives already."

David ordered before taking a simple mat from his space-ring where he sat.

He looked quite pale, being in the attacking group had depleted a large quantity of his energy, he needed at least a few hours to completely recover.

'The next trial is the endurance one, I wonder how the rank 2 mages here will handle it.'

Noah thought as he sat on the ground, he calmly focused on refilling his dantian as he looked toward the weaker mages.

The third trial required for the cultivators to have a sturdy mental sphere, only rank 3 mages could hope to attempt in surpassing it.

'Well, David has more experience than me in this dimension, if he says nothing about the rank 2 mages then he must have his reasons.'

Noah's conjecture was right.

After they had recovered, David led his team through the deeper passages of the labyrinth that had become available after the second trial was passed, only to stop in front of a massive dark-gray metal door.

Some sort of pressure seemed to come out of the door, the cultivators in the team couldn't help but become stiff when they felt it.

The rank 2 mages were worse off but David promptly took seven pills from his space-ring, handing them to the weak mages who immediately swallowed them.

Their expressions relaxed after the pills became effective, Noah guessed that it was some sort of drug that protected the mental sphere or that could momentarily boost its power.

'Is it worth to risk an injury for a trial that doesn't give rewards?'

Noah couldn't help but internally shake his head at that sight.

Drugs that improved a center of power for a short amount of time usually had severe backlashes or conditions to be met, Noah was fine with endangering his centers of power if that permanently increased his strength but he would never do it for a momentary effect.

Yet, he ultimately put those thoughts in the back of his mind, everyone had different values after all.

David raised the token in front of the door after he saw that everyone was ready, red flames came out of the door as soon as a fissure was created.

On the other side, Noah could see a small room completely covered in flames, the shining red color illuminated his face and tried to affect his mental sphere.

'The effect is similar to the Sulfur domain but these flames seem far more harmful.'

Noah was aware of the contents of the third trial, he had read too many reports about it.

That's why he could instantly make a comparison with the azure flame in one of the training facilities of the academy, the red flames only seemed to release a sharper pressure than the blue ones.

Noah gave another look at the rank 2 mages and relaxed when he saw that they seemed able to endure the pressure released by the room on fire.

Then, David's team entered the room, the massive metal door closed behind them when the last cultivator crossed the entrance.

Chapter 382 - 382. Burning room

The red flames didn't affect the body, their heat targeted only the mental sphere.

David's team was sitting on the burning floor, the flesh and clothes of the cultivators were unaffected by the fire but their expressions showed the struggle that they were going through to resist the pressure on their seas of consciousness.

Noah, like the strongest in his group, was a bit better off.

The speed at which his mental sphere enlarged had increased by a large margin after he bought the fourth Kesier rune, he had resumed training at a higher speed after he secluded himself for the breakthrough in the third rank.

Those months coupled with the three years of training using the "Breath" in his mind put him in a better position compared to the other cultivators in his team, only David and the others in the solid stage of the third rank had a mental sphere that could compare to his.

Also, the third trial didn't target the level of the sea of consciousness but its sturdiness, Noah couldn't have asked for a more suitable test.

'Worthy of the trial that has taken the higher number of lives, no wonder it has taken so much for the exploration teams to cross this point.'

Noah thought after he peeked at the situation of his companions.

The third trial required for the cultivators to endure the heat of the flames for an entire day, many unprepared teams in the past had died inside it.

Even though there were many possible roads inside the labyrinth, the third trial would always feature the same test, more than twenty-five rooms similar to that one had been discovered in the many explorations already and the organizations were sure that the labyrinth had more of them.

Also, it was possible to escape the separate dimension only after passing that test, countless lives had been lost in the attempt to leave the Inheritance ground.

The Chasing demon sect, though, was one of the leading organizations of the archipelago, their resources and information were unmatched.

The sect learnt soon enough the contents of the third trial, the first team that passed the test belonged to one of the underground organizations and, even though it could continue in the exploration, it had decided to escape from the dimension to pass down the information about the test.

That information saved many lives, those of the cultivators belonging to the underground organizations at least.

The cultivators that had passed the information were heavily rewarded, the numbers of lives lost in the third trial had already reached a high number and their services allowed the Hive to preserve a lot of lives.

After all, with the resources held by the underground organizations, even rank 2 mages became able to pass the test.

Hours passed inside the burning room.

The heat of the flames exerted a dense pressure on the mental spheres of the cultivators which attempted to corrode their walls.

The heat could be fought using the mental energy inside the sea of consciousness but doing that would only tire the cultivators faster.

The best approach was to rely on the sturdiness of the mental sphere to repel the corroding force and use the mental energy only when the walls seemed about to give in.

The mental energy would remain around the sphere while the walls recovered and it would be dispersed when they were ready to defend again against the heat, that approach allowed the cultivators to spare a lot of the energy contained in their minds.

Also, they could use drugs that applied a layer of protection around the sea of consciousness, easily allowing them to pass the trial.

The production of those types of drugs had increased a lot in the last two years and the price of those medicines had skyrocketed, any weak mage that wanted to attempt in the exploration of the separate dimension had to purchase them.

Noah didn't bother buying any of those drugs, his mental sphere was strong and he already had a stash of pills that could help him surpass the test if an unexpected situation appeared.

Yet, nothing out of the ordinary happened.

Twenty-four hours passed and the flames retracted, the black surface of the room became visible to the exhausted cultivators of David's team.

David turned to inspect his team, they all had pale expressions and the weaker among them also had blood flowing out from their facial orifices, they seemed in deep need of rest.

He was pleasantly surprised though when he saw that Noah was in his same situation, his eye bags and pale complexion couldn't hide his fatigue but he was far better off than his companions.

All in all, only Noah and the four cultivators in the solid stage could move without endangering the integrity of their mental sphere, the other fifteen needed to rest.

Inscriptions lit up on the surface of the room, they gathered in front of David and a token appeared mid-air when the light vanished.

David stored the token and the walls at the end of the room moved as soon as he did that, a passage was created which seemed to lead to deeper parts of the labyrinth.

At the same time, more inscriptions lit up under the other cultivators, tokens began to appear in front of them, signaling the possibility to exit the separate dimension.

"Everything went as planned till now, we are nearing the eighth trial quite quickly, good job everyone!"

David tried to raise everyone's morale before ordering them to rest when what seemed the peal of a bell resonated from a place far in the distance.

The cultivators in the room could understand that the peal came from far away but they were able to hear it clearly, it was as if the dimension itself was trying to convey that sound to the cultivators inside it.

At once, the expressions of the cultivators in the room turned ugly, they all knew what that sound meant, it had been heard only seven times before that moment.

And now, it was heard for the eighth time.

Noah's eyes sharpened at that peal, the reports that he studied made him immediately understand what had happened even if it was his first time hearing that sound.

'The eighth trial has been passed.'

Chapter 383 - 383. Decision

Each peal signaled the passing of a trial and meant that its rewards had been given.

David's group didn't know whose team had succeeded in the eighth trial but they were sure of one thing: Those rewards were now gone, they would have to pass the ninth trial to obtaining anything!

The cultivators in the group became dejected, they had just passed the third trial and endured a great deal of pain just to discover that their exploration had become longer.

It's not that they didn't have confidence in defeating the trials, they were a group formed by twenty rank 3 cultivators after all, they could deal with any threat that the separate dimension placed on their way.

Yet, they had just returned to the Inheritance ground and they were fairly confident in succeeding in the eighth trial, finding out that surpassing it wouldn't reward them was a heavy blow to their morale.

David put a pensive expression when he heard the peal, his mind seemed to evaluate something as he sat in silence.

Noah wasn't particularly disappointed with the event, it was his first time entering the dimension so he hadn't invested anything yet, his position was different from the others in his group who had already attempted in the eighth trial and were confident in their chances to surpass it.

That's why he was able to focus more on his surroundings and could partially guess what David was thinking.

'He is wondering if we should exit the dimension now.'

Noah could understand those thoughts because that approach was the safest one.

The team could simply give up on this exploration, regroup in the sect, and wait for reports about the ninth trial before attempting on a new exploration.

That would allow them to prepare for the new test without advancing blindly, it would give them a great advantage and reduce the risks that accompanied an unknown trial.

The separate dimension blocked all types of communication with the outside world, powerful items were needed to send messages outside the inheritance ground but they would need a cultivator in the heroic ranks to activate them.

Yet, said cultivators couldn't enter the dimension, leaving only the teams that explored it as a source of information.

'With all the information that we have, it's obvious that this separate dimension targets cultivators at the peak of the human ranks. Also, it allows us to form a fairly large team which further ease its difficulty, the real danger here is the unknown.'

Noah reviewed the known information about the Inheritance ground in his mind.

Twenty rank 3 cultivators could easily handle the trials, even a lower number of warriors could manage to pass each of them.

Yet, the real threats were the different scenarios of the tests.

Generally speaking, only the second trial could have been faced without any preparation, any organized team would have quickly set up a battle formation and dealt with the peak rank 4 dragon.

Yet, the first and third one were more complex, they required meticulous planning and certain drugs to be passed safely.

'The next trials also need a certain degree of preparation, but the teams have become variegated after more than two years of preparation. Our group is ready for any unexpected situation even if our battle prowess isn't the best that the sect could offer.'

Noah continued to evaluate the situation.

After eight trials, the teams from the more powerful organization had begun to modify their composition to cover the various types of difficulties of the separate dimension.

It was normal to think that they could hope to pass the ninth test since they were ready to complete those that came before.

'However, being prepared for the new trial won't assure the rewards. This same situation could happen due to the time wasted to gather information.'

Exploring the separate dimension wasn't a fast process, especially if one wanted to pursue the safe approach.

The time spent to reach the ninth trial from the beginning summed with that used to gather information and reorganize will amount to a few months, which was enough for another team to succeed in the ninth test.

"Let's keep going, David. The way I see it, now we are on equal ground with the strongest teams, we also have a chance."

One of the solid stage cultivators spoke to David when he saw that the latter was still deep in his thoughts.

"I agree. Every team is now equally unprepared, this works to our advantage since we have a team ready for any situation."

Another solid stage cultivator spoke, she shared the view of the previous one.

David sighed when he heard that, the truth was that he was of a similar opinion but he had to think about the entirety of his team, he couldn't just base his decisions on the strongest cultivators.

He turned toward the others behind him before opening his mouth to speak.

"You all know that the eighth trial has been passed so it might seem as if all your efforts have been for nothing. Yet, this might work in our favor: We are

already at a good point and the composition of our team can face many unexpected situations apart from being prepared for the next tests."

David took a brief pause to make sure that the cultivators in his team evaluated his words carefully.

"Continuing to explore now will involve a higher danger than you expected but it's also our best chance to seize the rewards of the ninth test. I and the others in the solid stage need a rank 4 cultivation technique to prepare for the heroic ranks so we are willing to risk our lives but you still have time, I don't want to force you in this journey."

David continued, his words carried good intentions toward his fellow members of the sect, the expressions of many brightened up when they heard his caring tone.

Noah wasn't sure if David's performance was an act of some sort or if he was really worried about the well-being of the members of his team but he decided to remain silent, he wanted to continue the exploration after all.

It was with silent nods that David's team decided to continue its journey in the separate dimension before it focused on recovering from the injuries of the recent test.

Chapter 384 - 384. Advance

It took an entire week for David's team to recover.

Most of the injuries on the mental spheres of the weaker cultivators were already healed after three days but David wanted to make sure that everyone was at its peak form before resuming in the exploration.

They would wander in the dark at some point, David couldn't afford to lose any of his companions if he hoped to pass the ninth trial.

Yet, he still chose to increase the speed at which they moved.

The best way to spare time was to run through the passages of the labyrinth and to spend a few hours to recover in front of the next test.

The layout of the labyrinth was almost completely mapped, it wasn't a problem to diminish the time needed to reach each trial.

The fourth trial was in a dark area of the labyrinth, no token was required for its activation, the cultivators simply had to step on a large dark square.

Darkness couldn't affect a cultivator's sight, especially when they had a rank 4 body.

However, the walls of the square seemed to affect the vision of the cultivators, coupled with the inability to use mental energy to scan their surroundings, it was as if they were deprived of that sense.

Of course, David's team was prepared for that.

David took out orbs that emitted a bright light from his space-ring, the features of the dark square were immediately illuminated by the five orbs that levitated in the air after he put some "Breath" in them.

That light allowed his team to see the Black dragons surrounding it and to avoid the incoming flame spears that had been launched.

The difficulty of the fourth trial was in its scarce visibility but that was countered by David's orbs, leaving the twenty or so dragons in the lower tier of the fourth rank in plain sight.

David's team quickly took care of the dragons, the test was fairly easy after the cultivators regained the ability to see.

Some of them were still hit by the powerful attacks of the creatures, those spears were fast and had high piercing properties after all.

The injuries were quite superficial though, everyone was relatively fine.

'To think that I would see again a Flame dragon and fight it, time surely has passed.'

Those thoughts hit Noah's mind when he saw the last Flame dragon vanish right in front of his eyes.

Flame dragons were the most common kind of dragons, their scales were black and they could change the shape of the flames that they created due to their innate ability.

Yet, what made Noah so emotional was that the dragons he had just fought belonged to the same kind as the one that had attacked Balvan mansion in his childhood!

Noah clearly remembered, he was just a newborn in his mother's embrace when one of those magnificent beasts attacked.

The void inside him was filled with an endless ambition that day, the image of Thomas' back as he fought the dragon in the air was still engraved in his mind.

Twenty-seven years had passed and he was now able to fight them, even an aloof character like Noah couldn't help but feel something.

"Are you ok?"

David noticed that peculiar behavior when he saw that Noah was staring at the floor where the Flame dragon had disappeared.

Noah simply nodded at that question and turned to join his resting companions, his cold gaze was hidden behind his hood.

'These were just bottom tier beasts, Thomas is a heroic cultivator, I'm still a child in his eyes.'

With that last thought, Noah suppressed again his emotions, he couldn't allow himself to be distracted in that place.

The fifth trial featured a floorless area, the aim of the test was to cross the void below them and reach the passage on the other side.

Flying wasn't a problem, David had personally chosen a rank 3 cultivator of the wind element with a spell that could carry all twenty of them.

Yet, dragons would randomly peek from the cavities in the walls at the sides of the area and launch lightning bolts aimed at the cultivators flying at its center.

A large number of lightning bolts were launched, nineteen cultivators did their best to fend off the incoming attacks in order to protect the wind mage.

David's group struggled a bit, lightning attacks had innate piercing properties and they were able to destroy everything on their path.

It took the full effort of all nineteen cultivators to safely reach the other side, they found themselves exhausted and without any energy left but they had succeeded in passing the fifth trial!

Some discord, though, began to appear on the expression of the weaker cultivators when they saw that Noah wasn't as tired as the others.

The other cultivators had long noticed that Noah wasn't using spells, he simply relied on his martial art and on his inscribed sabers to fight.

That wasn't a problem when that behavior was enough to safely pass the trials but the fifth one had almost completely exhausted them, they were annoyed to see that he wasn't doing his best to help them.

'Ignorance is a bliss...'

Noah thought as he avoided those angry gazes and focused on refilling his dantian.

The truth was that he had informed David about the dangers involved when he used spells and the Mental tremor couldn't affect magical beasts too much.

'As long as David is ok with that, the others won't dare to complain.'

He didn't care that the others thought that he was a dead weight, he knew that his moment would eventually come, he was doing his best to avoid injuring his companions after all.

Then, it was time for the sixth trial.

That test forced the cultivators in a harsh battle between the two kinds of dragons that they had met in the previous two tests.

Forty or so Flame dragons and Flash dragons attacked David's team in a wide area with some pits on the floor.

The pits only showed the void below the labyrinth, falling inside them would probably lead to death.

Also, a few rank 4 specimens in the middle tier were leading the dragons' assault, it wasn't a reckless charge like in the first trial.

The battle was harsh, many cultivators were injured and a lot of energy was expended.

Yet, David and the other three cultivators in the solid stage took care of the vanguard and slaughtered their way inside the enemy lines, beheading the dragons in charge of the battle formation.

It took almost an hour but, in the end, David's team succeeded in defeating all the dragons and passing the sixth trial.

Chapter 385 - 385. Voice

More than one month had passed since Noah entered the Inheritance ground.

David's team needed to rest after each trial which wasn't a simple matter of hours.

The centers of power of the cultivators in the team needed time to be refilled and their mental spheres were under heavy pressure due to the walls of the labyrinth, they couldn't just rush through the trials.

Yet, the hurried feeling caused by the passing of the eighth trial from one of the exploration's teams forced them to accelerate their pace, they wanted to be proper contenders for the rewards of the ninth test.

The seventh trial put them against a horde composed of many kinds of dragons.

David's team was forced to fight its way across a large area of the labyrinth, the cultivators in the group had to change their battle tactic according to the kind of dragon they were facing, a fixed battle formation would only fall in front of the might of the different types of attacks coming at it.

Yet, they managed to win even though some of them suffered heavy injuries.

Resting and healing took them two weeks, some injuries were severe, it took time to heal them before they were ready for the eighth trial.

Then, they moved toward what seemed the deepest part of the labyrinth, where the next test was held.

Noah could personally witness the reason why the cultivator that occupied his position previously was slow in the activation of its token.

The walls in the square of the eighth trial were black, they radiated a pressure so heavy that the mental processes of the cultivators inside it were affected.

Noah found himself thinking at a slower pace as he fought against another peak rank 4 beast, the responses of his body were slow due to that peculiar environment, the claws of the Earth dragon managed to scratch his body many times before it died.

Earth dragons had a powerful body and a seemingly endless resilience, their dark-yellow scales had an innate weakening effect toward the attacks that landed on them.

David had to buy a large number of precious elixirs to boost the vitality of the cultivators in his group, even Noah who had a body that emphasized regeneration was forced to drink it.

It couldn't be helped, the Earth dragon was too strong and the pressure radiated from the walls slowed their movements, every team needed an external help if they hoped to succeed.

Nevertheless, David's team was already experienced with that trial, they were prepared to pass it at that time.

In the end, the Earth dragon was killed but the cultivators had to deal with the aftereffects of the elixirs.

Pale complexions and tired expressions could be seen in the square where the eighth trial was held, their bodies seemed devoid of any energy, it was obvious that a long period of rest was needed.

'We have finally reached a turning point!'

Noah felt extremely tired but he was still eager to approach the ninth test, that feeling was shared with his companions, they had just crossed the point where they had escaped during the last exploration, heated gazes could be seen under their ill bodies.

It took them some weeks to dispel the aftereffects of the elixirs and recover from the trial, David made an inspirational speech before advancing in one of the passages connected with the square.

"The pressure coming from the walls of the labyrinth is increasing and the trials are becoming harder to pass, I believe we have reached the last part of this separate dimension."

David had a tired expression but his body had recovered, only a dense battle intent was radiated as he spoke.

"I don't know what we will face in the next trial nor where it is, yet, our team is ready for any situation, we just have to calmly analyze the environment before engaging in risky measures. Don't hesitate to activate your token if you feel that your life is in danger."

Those words were the last ones spoken after the eighth trial was passed, David's group advanced silently through the dark walls that made the deepest part of the labyrinth.

That structure was huge but they had spent more than two months inside it, they were fairly sure that the trials were coming to an end.

'I hope there won't be another test faculty after this one, there is only so much that a cultivator in the human ranks can sustain.'

Noah evaluated in his mind, the separate dimension was accessible only by cultivators in the human ranks, it was obvious that its difficulty had to be tuned according to that restriction.

Yet, the fact that teams were allowed made the harshness of the trials somewhat accessible even to weak cultivators, David's team was an example of how even rank 2 mages could help in each trial.

Then, as they marched through the various passages of the labyrinth, a big door appeared in their vision.

Noah didn't take part in the first explorations but David did, he knew that every trial that they came across counted as the next one.

The labyrinth was huge and filled with test rooms, its deeper parts became accessible only after a test was passed.

That indicated the difficulty of the trials, it had been already attempted to pass more low-level trials in one exploration but it was soon discovered that they weren't summed, tests of a higher difficulty were needed to progress in the labyrinth.

"Be ready for anything and good luck!"

David spoke again before raising his token toward the door, a metallic sound resounded in the area before the door began to move.

A dark room appeared in the cultivators' view, it resembled the fourth trial due to the dark environment but the amount of danger radiated from its insides forced them to wear stern expression.

David's team was extremely excited, that was the ninth test after all, surpassing it would give them rewards!

As the last cultivator in the team entered the dark area, the door closed behind their backs.

David acted quickly, he took a few shining orbs from his space-ring and injected his "Breath" inside them to activate those items.

The orbs illuminated the area, the floor of the room became visible, as well as the more than one hundred rank 4 dragons staring at them with hungry eyes.

"Don't fear the depths."

An aged voice resounded in the room, David's team could only be slightly surprised by that before their attention went back on the dragons, they had begun to move as soon as the phrase ended.

Chapter 386 - 386. Panic

Panic!

That was the first emotion that the cultivators felt.

The more than one hundred dragons were coming at them, they were all of a different kind, they resembled a scaled tide ready to engulf them.

Yet, David's team was composed of experienced cultivators, they didn't pass the test just thanks to their preparations.

"Hold your ground!"

David yelled as he cast a defensive spell, the cultivators behind him did the same, water walls, vortexes, lightning nets, and golems appeared between them and the dragons.

That situation was different from the first trial, there weren't only Sea dragons in the incoming tide, there was no point in trying not to hurt them during the defenses.

However, there were more than one hundred rank 4 beasts, that number alone was enough to make even a heroic rank cultivator falter.

The layer of spells was broken almost immediately, it couldn't halt the dragons' advance by even a second.

Seeing the drooling maws of the nearing beasts, there was only one thought that remained in the cultivators' minds.

'Retreat!'

The ninth trial seemed unreasonably hard, the cultivators could only form teams made of twenty persons, that difference in number alone made the trial impossible to pass!

Tokens began to appear in the cultivators' hands, they started to pour "Breath" in them to activate the escape mechanism.

Noah wasn't an exception, he took his token even before the rest of his team, his instincts as a lone cultivator kicked in as soon as he saw the tide of dragons reaching for him.

Yet, to the surprise of everyone in the area, nothing happened.

According to the reports, injecting even a small quantity of "Breath" in the tokens was enough to activate the teleportation ability inscribed in them, many cultivators that had escaped the Inheritance ground praised how quickly they were teleported outside thanks to said tokens.

However, the tokens didn't work which caused another wave of panic to sweep the cultivators.

A dragon's head was severed when it reached the panicked team but the beast following it managed to stab its fangs on one cultivator, ripping off its arm in the process.

Another dragon died under the joint assault of the calmest cultivators but those behind it thrashed their bodies on the left side of the group, a trail of blood was left on the dark floor as three cultivators died in an instant.

'F.u.c.k, calm down! There must be a way!'

Noah's situation wasn't that better.

Black smoke came out of his figure which prevented the faster dragons to focus him, the amount of danger radiated from his figure was enough to make the beast prefer the others in his group.

He couldn't care less about the cultivators around him, his life was in danger, it wasn't the time to hold himself back.

There was nowhere to retreat, the door behind them had completely disappeared in the darkness after it closed, only a black wall could be seen behind their back.

Also, Noah's spell forced them to avoid being near him, he was managing to scare the dragons away but the same could be said for the cultivators in his team.

'Think, think! The creator of the Inheritance ground couldn't have set this place up only to kill a bunch of cultivators in the human ranks!'

Noah's mind worked at full speed to find a way out of that situation.

The tokens didn't work and the door that led back to the labyrinth had disappeared, there didn't seem to be a way out of that trial.

Then, Noah remembered the aged voice and the contents of its phrase when the door closed.

'Don't fear the depths... Does it want us to advance?'

Only darkness could be seen behind the huge tide of dragons, there wasn't any insurance that advancing was the right move.

Yet, there wasn't any other option!

He could defend from the dragons' assault for some time if he was to enter the complete Demonic form but the energy contained inside his centers of power would only be quickly depleted.

There was also no hope in killing all the dragons, they were simply too many, even twenty rank 3 cultivators could do nothing in that situation.

Noah's conclusion was shared by the remaining cultivators, they weren't stupid after all, the only clue about that trial was the aged voice which resounded when they crossed the door.

David and the three solid stage cultivators charged ahead, their spells created wonders as they slaughtered their way across the dragons' tide.

Noah followed them, he ran between the empty spaces left after their attacks and the black smoke exuded from his body made the dragons unwilling to come close to him.

Of course, his spell also stopped any other cultivator from following him, the black gas left a trail which corroded anything that came in contact with it, Noah's companions weren't an exception.

Under normal circumstances, Noah's tattoo would stop him from harming his fellow disciples but his life was at risk, its restrictions were laxer when death was right behind the corner.

The other cultivators were forced to open a way by themselves but the dragons were too numerous, Noah stopped paying attention to them when the first dying cry resounded behind him.

However, even David's group of strong cultivators began to face some problems, there were simply too many beasts, others would constantly block their path no matter how many were killed.

'These are real dragons!'

That realization hit Noah's mind when he saw the corpses accumulating on the dark ground, the dangerous situation didn't allow him to pay attention to that detail until now.

Yet, he was forced to focus on his surroundings when he sensed that four dragons had disregarded the danger radiated from the black smoke coming out of his body and pounced at him.

Those were all rank 4 beasts in the lower tier, Noah could kill them rather quickly but the situation didn't allow him to waste time.

The world seemed to slow down in his eyes, his sabers appeared in his hands and two pairs of additional arms were created on his torso.

Even the sounds of the battle seemed to stop as he swung his blades, a swift but soft movement was performed as he put all his focus on that attack.

Veins bulged and turned black, Noah seemed to push his body to its limit to perform that blow.

'Third Form: Void!'

Chapter 387 - 387. Void

Noah had obtained his rank 4 martial art when he entered the academy.

Generally speaking, a rank 4 martial art was able to express the power of the heroic ranks when completely mastered.

Yet, the body and the dantian of the cultivator performing it had to be at a decent level for it to express its full power.

The Three Forms of the Ashura was composed of three powerful attacks and basic movements that added two pairs of additional arms on the cultivator's torso.

The First Form, endless assault, multiplied the cultivator's attacks, making him able to fight when outnumbered.

The Second Form, fusion, concentrated all the blades into one to perform a powerful but slow attack, it had been Noah's strongest blow until a few months ago.

When he entered the third rank, his centers of power had reached the level needed to perform the Third Form.

'Void'

Noah shouted in his mind as his concentration reached its peak.

The black veins on his body bulged and pulsated to no end, his muscles stretched to their limits, it seemed as if his limbs were going to break due to the pressure applied on them because of that attack.

Veins exploded as his arms completed the required gesture, he had memorized that form long ago but he had always been too weak to use it.

In the slowed world reflected in Noah's eyes, four shadows shot out from his sabers.

Noah heaved a tired sigh as he resumed to run, the injuries caused by his body surpassing its limits healed in a few seconds thanks to the liquid "Breath" in his circulatory system.

One of the four dragons that had attacked was in front of him but Noah simply marched toward it as if it had stopped being a threat.

When Noah reached it, the dragon's body divided in half, allowing him to run right in the middle of the two halves.

The other three dragons were the same, they were still in the process of pouncing at him when their bodies were suddenly halved, their eyes radiated the surprise that they felt when they realized that they were dead.

An unlockable attack that fused the ethereal aspect of the First Form and the power of the Second Form, the Third Form was the apex of Noah's martial art.

'I should probably enter the complete Demonic form if I want to use this attack repeatedly, the pressure on my body is simply too much.'

Noah evaluated as he continued to run inside the dragons' tide, more and more dragons were starting to disregard the dangerous feeling radiated from his black smoke and were turning their heads toward the hooded figure chasing after the four powerful humans in the lead.

David and his group of solid stage cultivators were wreaking havoc at some distance from Noah, the dragons had tried to encircle them but they were too strong, just one of their spells was enough to repel six to seven dragons at the same time!

Noah chased them, they were naturally creating an escape route for him and were the strongest in his team, he would have better chances to survive with them.

Yet, at some point, they disappeared.

'Where did they go?'

Noah was confused, they were right in front of him for the whole time but now he couldn't see them.

Also, the dark area still maintained the features of the other parts of the labyrinth, the mental energy of the cultivators was suppressed and their sight was starting to be affected since they were leaving the place where the shining orbs were levitating, Noah had betted everything on following David and his group!

'F.u.c.k!'

More smoke came out of his body as he cursed in his mind, his hooded figure was slowly replaced by a fiendish one that had horns and a tail.

Noah was going all out!

The tide of dragons turned to the remaining cultivators in the area, four of them had suddenly disappeared while many had already died, only about seven rank 3 cultivators remained in the dark area.

Noah felt many hungry gazes staring at him, he was the one that had marched deeper in the darkness after all, he was surrounded by dragons!

The dragons didn't care about their well-being, there was only an endless hunger in their minds.

They pounced through the black cloud formed by Noah's spell, uncaring that their scales were being devoured by the smoke.

Noah, on the other hand, was extremely calm.

He had survived in hopeless situations already without being that strong, his mind was working at full speed to analyze the ninth trial and to find a way out of that place.

'David and the others have disappeared after they reached that point, maybe the depths are right there.'

The only real clue about the test was the aged voice that had resounded after the door closed behind their backs, Noah believed that to be the vital information about the trial.

'I can warp near there and run but it doesn't hurt to make a short stop before.'

Noah's eyes sharpened as he swept the battlefield, he inspected every dragon that entered his field of view.

Then, when a few dragons managed to surpass the black smoke and near him, black flames enveloped his body, making him disappear in an instant.

A fiendish figure reappeared in another part of the battlefield, the dragons there roared when they discovered the unwanted guest but there was nothing they could do, they found themselves severed in half before they were even able to finish their battle cry.

Only one of them had its head severed, which then immediately disappeared along with the rest of its body.

Then, black flames covered again the fiendish figure, making him disappear from that place.

Noah reappeared where David and his group had disappeared, the dragons there had already marched toward the remaining humans in the area, they didn't expect for someone to suddenly appear behind their backs.

Yet, Noah didn't exploit that surprise effect, his attention was on his surroundings, he was trying to find clues about David's disappearance.

Countless roars resounded as attacks were launched against him, the dragons felt challenged when Noah had appeared behind them.

Then, Noah noticed that the floor ended at some point and that only the endless darkness of the depths of the separate dimension remained.

The attacks were almost about to reach him when he gathered his determination and jumped off what seemed a cliff, his figure disappeared in the void below the ninth trial.

Chapter 388 - 388. Seabed

Noah descended slowly.

Two pairs of wings flapped behind his back and small black circles appeared under his feet as he balanced himself to fly.

Endless darkness surrounded him, Noah wasn't able to see anything, he only knew that he was descending.

'No trace of dragons behind me, it seems that they were restricted to the area above.'

Noah thought as he inspected his surroundings, his mental energy was suppressed and his eyes couldn't help him, he could only rely on his instincts.

'This place should be an area below the labyrinth... Wait, don't tell me that we could have just jumped off the bridge and skip the trials!'

That realization hit Noah's mind as he continued to descend.

The darkness below the labyrinth was a common sight in the trials, many of them featured pits connected to that area.

'This is so strange. Why the ninth trial forced us to escape? Why did the other tests emphasize teamwork? What is the damned aim of the creator of this separate dimension?'

There was only confusion in his mind.

The dimension seemed to test the teamwork of a group under many different situations, it didn't make sense to just put an impossible trial at the end.

Humans had reasons behind their action, one wouldn't create a separate dimension just to play with some human cultivators.

'At least I hope so.'

Noah suppressed his question when he reached that point, he couldn't understand every human being, maybe the creator of the dimension was just a sadistic watching the trials with a cup of wine in his hands.

Noah continued to descend, he guessed that he had already fallen for a few kilometers but there had yet to be a change in the environment.

It was only after another couple of kilometers that a sandy ground appeared in his view.

The sand shone with soft azure light, illuminating the environment at the bottom of the void.

'This resembles the seabed, how strange.'

Noah didn't understand his situation nor the place where he was.

His escape token didn't work, he was separated by his teammates and he didn't even know if he had passed the ninth trial, there had been no peal after all.

Yet, he was happy that he had finally found a foothold, there were things he needed to do before he resumed in his exploration.

Noah landed on the sand and inspected his surroundings, there seemed to be nothing except for a few rocky constructions in the distance.

'Just normal sand.'

Noah concluded after he inspected the terrain, he decided to find a place to rest before nearing the rocky constructions.

A small hill appeared in his view, there seemed to be a cave of some sort on its surface which Noah didn't hesitate to explore.

He had used all his strongest attacks together, the Demonic form and the Warp spell expended a lot of mental energy and the Third Form pushed his body to its limits, even the liquid "Breath" in the membrane around his heart had to be refilled.

However, when he entered the cave, he was surprised to find a chained dragon surrounded by inscriptions.

The dragon seemed to be sleeping but there was a detail that surprised Noah even more: It was a Sea dragon identical to those on the bridge!

'What does this mean?'

Noah neared the creature with caution, the inscriptions seemed focused on restraining it but there were other effects that Noah couldn't understand.

'They seem to scan it but for what reason?'

The dragon woke up when he sensed the new presence in his prison, his hungry eyes stared at Noah but it didn't seem willing to fight.

'It's the first time that I see a beast so docile.'

There were carriages carried by magical beasts but they were suppressed by inscribed chains or similar.

The dragon, instead, seemed to have completely given up on escaping, even its instinct as a magical beast was destroyed.

'For how long were you here?'

Noah couldn't imagine the amount of time it spent chained like that, it wasn't malnourished after all, it had simply given up.

Then, he just walked to the bottom of the cave, the dragon was restrained and Noah had no intention of interfering with inscriptions that he didn't understand, it was simply better to rest and to prepare for the incoming exploration.

His eyes shone when he inspected the contents of his space-ring, a headless dragon was laying in an empty area, its blood flowed on the floor, tainting some of the items in the distance.

Noah quickly took out the corpse and placed a large barrel under its neck, then, he proceeded in gathering the blood spilled on the floor inside his space-ring.

It was at that time that he noticed a small old scroll in a corner.

'That isn't mine.'

Noah always kept the space inside his rings quite organized, he wanted to be always ready for battle after all.

That's why he could immediately see that the scroll wasn't something that belonged to him.

The shock he felt when he took it and unfolded it couldn't be expressed by simple words.

That was because the scroll depicted the diagram of a spell up to the fifth rank!

'When? What!?'

Noah was even more confused, that spell had appeared out of nowhere directly inside his space-ring and without him even noticing!

'Don't tell me, this is the reward of the ninth trial! Why there wasn't any peal then?'

Even more doubts assailed his mind but he faced them with renewed happiness.

The spell was of the wind element but its sheer value would allow him to exchange it for basically anything in the human ranks, he could also hope to obtain something in the heroic ranks from the sect.

'Amazing! I believe that the dimension has given something of equal value to all the cultivators that have passed the ninth trial. The creator must be filthy rich!'

Noah's determination in reaching the end of the dimension increased, there seemed to be simply too much wealth inside it!

His eyes went on the dragon's corpse which was slowly filling the bucket with its blood, as he willed, the bat and panther half-transparent figures inside his mental sphere crumbled, leaving no traces of their existence.

Chapter 389 - 389. Imagination

Noah undressed his upper clothes to allow the blood of the previous Blood companions to be expelled.

The tattoos slowly vanished as the black blood abandoned Noah's body, only the deep cuts that made the pictures of the beasts remained for a few seconds before the healing proprieties of his body closed the wounds, leaving no traces of them.

Echo and Shadow were completely dead!

Shadow hadn't been of much use to Noah since his power was too high when he created it but Echo had played an important role in his adventures, it had stayed with him since he escaped Eccentric Thunder's Inheritance ground.

Yet, power came before everything, Noah didn't think twice to destroy its figure inside his mental sphere, he had to make space for a new beast.

A white saber appeared in his hands and he proceeded to stab the chest of the dragon to rip off its heart, Noah didn't use the Demonic swords because he was afraid that their innate corrosive properties would damage the core of the beast.

As for the dragon, what Noah had killed and successfully stored was an Abyssal dragon.

It was a kind of dragon that relied mostly on its body to fight and that had an innately strong defense due to the sturdy scales all over its body.

It was also quite big for its kind, nine meters long and a muscular body with a pair of wings and four huge legs, it was slow but its frame made up for that weakness.

Abyssal dragons would usually live in dark places where their vision was obstructed, that's why their defenses were so good: They had to protect themselves against beings able to see in those environments.

There were strongest kinds of dragons among the tide in the ninth trial but that was the only one of the darkness element that Noah had managed to find.

Also, it had large wings and was at the peak of the lower tier of the fourth rank, Noah wouldn't be too picky when he found such a good match for his needs.

'I'm not used to creating wills that enhance defense but it would be a waste to imbue it with other meanings.'

Noah thought as he held the dragon's heart in one hand while he drew a few sketches on the sandy terrain.

He was a rank 3 mage, it took him only a few attempts to draw a figure of the dragon that met the standards required by the Body-inscription spell.

Then, he closed his eyes to focus on the world inside his mental sphere.

Noah dispersed the solid "Breath" stored for the activation of the Shadow Sprint, his sea of consciousness seemed extremely empty, only the three Kesier runes and the non-refined solid "Breath" remained together with his half-transparent figure.

'Defense, defense.'

He repeated that word in his mind, sorting through the various memories that could help him in creating a strong will.

His first thought led him back inside the Royal Inheritance where he fought the rank 4 Cloud eagle, his level was too low at the time, his sabers couldn't even scratch the surface of its skin.

'Too shallow.'

Noah immediately disregarded that memory, the level of the beast was simply too high, it wasn't a matter of good defense.

It took a while but Noah eventually found a method to create the meaning that he needed.

His imagination played one of its first creations, a saber that flew undisputed in the skies, cutting through everything on its path.

Then, the saber changed its route and went upward, trying to reach for the space outside the world.

Yet, it was met with a seemingly endless wall that covered the entirety of the planet.

The wall seemed to have metallic properties and it was formed by countless black scales placed on top of each other.

No matter how many times the saber tried to pierce it, it wasn't able to even dent the first scale that it met.

Noah interrupted his dream at that moment and imbued those emotions in the solid "Breath" inside his mind.

The chunks of black crystals were immersed in the sea below them and came out in the form of a dense scaled shield.

The shield radiated the helplessness created due to its impenetrability, Noah had a cold expression when he looked at it.

That was because he had used the feelings that he felt toward the restrictions that the world applied on lone cultivators, no matter how strong one became, there would always be stronger powers ready to suppress it.

The strongest of all was Heaven and Earth which was represented by the wall around the planet in Noah's imagination.

'Such a good result from something that I hate so much, it seems that all my training in the creation of wills wasn't useless.'

Noah felt a deep hatred for any restriction that the world tried to apply to him.

He used that strong emotion to create a fantasy that reflected how he felt in his most helpless moments.

He felt like that saber, alone in the vastity of the sky, trying to break through an impenetrable wall.

His mood was about to turn sour but then he remembered where he was and what he was attempting to do.

'I can finally use this spell again.'

Noah quickly imbued the "Breath" just refined in the blood contained in the barrel and the heart in his hand.

Then, he proceeded to draw the figure of the Abyssal dragon on his chest and ate its heart when he was done.

The new tattoo seemed to become alive as its temperature rose but Noah had already closed his eyes, his complete focus was on the huge half-transparent figure of the dragon inside his sea of consciousness.

Noah was a bit surprised by its frame.

'It's at least three times bigger than my previous companions, I guess I can't compare the wills of rank 3 creatures with rank 4 ones.'

He concluded as he quickly acted to suppress the beast.

The three Kesier runes hummed and the connection created between Noah and the dragon thanks to the Elemental forging method further restrained its movements.

Two ethereal sabers appeared in his hands, Noah directly flew toward the restrained beast to suppress it.

The battle was long, the dragon didn't have a chance to win inside Noah's sea of consciousness but it still fought with all it had, its pride as a rank 4 beast wasn't something to underestimate.

Yet, its figure eventually crumbled, falling on the sea below it and reappearing near the center of the sphere.

The rank 4 dragon had been successfully tamed!

Noah waited for his form to return to its peak before exiting the cave where he rested.

He had refilled his mental sphere with "Breath" already refined for the usage of his martial art and the Sea dragon restrained inside the cave wasn't of any use to him, he simply cleaned the place before leaving.

The internal pressure caused by his new Blood companion was powerful but Noah was able to endure it, he simply had to disperse the useless "Breath" inside his mind to avoid incurring in the familiar headache.

He didn't know which route would lead him to the end of the Inheritance ground nor how far it was but staying in one place was pointless: The escape token didn't work, he could only hope to exit the dimension by exploring further.

'Those rocky buildings are the only change in the environment, they should have some clue about this place.'

Noah began to walk toward the structures that he saw in the distance, his mental energy was still restricted but his vision wasn't, the azure light radiated by the sand allowed him to use the senses of his body to their full potential.

Along the road, Noah found other hills with caves on their surface.

He was surprised to discover that there was a living dragon caged in each cave, their kinds matched those in the trials, Noah was beginning to understand the reason behind the inscriptions around their cages.

'They should be used to create the fake dragons in the labyrinth. If this hypothesis is true, then the creator of the dimension was an expert in formations and also an inscription master. This world is filled with monsters.'

Noah concluded in his mind.

According to his idea, the creator of the dimension was able to cage a large number of different dragons, create a system that kept them alive, and also set up a network that copied their forms on the building above him.

'Hypothetically speaking, this expert would be able to create an endless number of fake dragons by copying the features of an imprisoned one... This is too unreal, how many restrictions would be applied to a technique like that?'

Heaven and Earth were fair, a technique that could endlessly create copies of restrained dragons seemed simply too strong!

'Who is this person? Eccentric Thunder was a monster but his dimension only had rank 3 beasts at best, this place is on a completely different level.'

Noah knew that the answers to his many doubts could only be found at the end of the Inheritance ground, that's why he only quickly examined each cave that he found before continuing with his exploration.

It was only after a few hours of exploration that he found other humans.

Noah stopped his tracks, there were two rank 3 cultivators, a man and a woman, in front of him.

Their facial features were out in the open and their robes had the emblem of the Empire sewed on them.

'Legal organizations!'

Noah was still wearing his hood as he had that thought, he was part of the Chasing demon sect after all, his organization was still illegal on the surface.

The two cultivators also noticed Noah, they turned to look at him, showing displeased expressions when they saw his clothes.

"Unorthodox sc.u.m."

The man exclaimed as he spat on the ground to further show his disgust toward the members of the Hive.

'Of course the first people I met would be unfriendly, it would be strange otherwise.'

Noah cursed his bad luck and continued on his way, he would rather preserve his energies in that dangerous environment.

"Hey you, where are you going?"

The woman spoke but Noah ignored her, his gaze was fixed on the structures in the distance.

"Hmph!"

A loud snort resounded in the area as the woman vanished from her spot and reappeared in front of Noah, what seemed half-transparent wings were on her back as she landed in front of him.

'A movement-type spell, this might be troublesome.'

Noah evaluated as part of his attention went on the man who ran to place himself behind him, Noah found himself surrounded in a few seconds.

"Listen carefully, there is no grudge between each other so just give us the rewards of the ninth trial and we will let you go."

"If you don't..."

The man behind Noah released his pressure as he continued the woman's words.

'Right, the rewards.'

Noah's eyes shone as he remembered that detail, he had been too focused on the exploration and on the creation of the new Blood companion that he

had totally forgotten that each of the cultivators he encountered in that place would have the rewards of the ninth trial with them.

'I've been too focused on finding the end of the dimension that I didn't consider the other gains available here... I've become too soft.'

Noah suppressed his laugh as he focused on his enemies, they were two rank 3 cultivators in the gaseous stage, both rank 3 mages.

Yet, their mental spheres were weaker than Noah's, he could make out most of their strength with a simple inspection.

"I might be a bit rusty at this."

Noah spoke before a shockwave resounded when he stomped the ground twice, in an instant, he appeared in front of the woman with his sabers aimed to her head.

The two of them were rank 3 cultivators, they couldn't be taken by surprise that easily.

The woman reacted quickly, a dense layer made of air appeared in front of her, ready to block Noah's assault.

At the same time, the man shot in his direction, fire came out of his hammer as he directed its trajectory toward Noah's head.

Everything seemed to happen slowly in their eyes but not even a second had passed since Noah attacked.

Noah's black sabers clashed with the spell, they weren't able to pierce the wall made of air but the woman didn't show a happy expression, her eyes sharpened when she saw that Noah didn't even use his martial art in that attack!

"Greg-"

She tried to warn the man about the possible trap but it was too late, Greg was already too close to Noah to stop his descending blow.

It was at that moment that Noah's clothes were torn apart and the sharp fangs of a dragon stabbed themselves on Greg's waist, stopping his attack and injuring him.