

Chapter 391 - 391. Chase

Noah's new Blood companion was a rank 4 beast at the peak of the lower tier, it was fully capable of injuring rank 3 cultivators with its body alone.

Also, one of the strongest features of the Body-inscription spell was the speed at which the Blood companion was released by the cultivator's body, it was really easy to be caught by surprise if the opponent wasn't aware of that ability.

Greg saw the enormous reptilian head trying to crush his body, the gaseous "Breath" inside his dantian and the liquid one inside his body were depleted at a fast pace as he tried to block the dragon's fangs.

Then, his mental energy was expended and a huge ape made of flames appeared behind his back.

The fire ape wielded a pair of hammers that it didn't hesitate to smash on the dragon's head.

A loud impact resounded in the area, the hammers crashed on the companion's head, breaking a few scales in the process.

However, to Greg's surprise, the dragon had still more than half of its head intact and, even worse, the missing parts destroyed in the attacks were already reforming!

Greg was a mighty rank 3 cultivator in the gaseous stage, he had fought many rank 4 beasts in his life and had survived the trials in the separate dimension, he knew exactly the power behind his spells.

Yet, a spell that should have destroyed any rank 4 beast's head and even take a big chunk of its neck with it wasn't able to do much against that black dragon!

Abyssal dragons were specialized in defense but those scales seemed to surpass the actual level of the beast, putting its power directly in the middle tier of the fourth rank!

Greg's surprised gaze went on the hooded figure in front of him but he soon discovered that he had disappeared, only some tongues of black flames were still lingering in front of the shield deployed by his teammate.

The woman seemed to stare at him, yet, she wasn't looking at his figure but at a place behind him.

That was because Noah had warped right behind Greg and was already attacking him with his most powerful attack!

Noah's veins turned black and black smoke came out of his six sabers as he performed a slash so fast that even those with a rank 4 body would find hard to follow with their eyes.

Greg's survival instincts kicked in, the fire ape placed itself in a protective stance to block the incoming attack only to be severed by the six invisible slashes that reached it.

Noah's attack didn't stop there, it reached Greg's back and inflicted six deep wounds on it, cutting through a spell had greatly reduced its power.

Greg was about to cast another spell when a fuming head covered his upper body, he could only see the gaseous insides of the dragon before the corrosive smoke exuded by its figure attacked his skin.

Muffled screams resounded from inside the dragon's body, its fuming fangs closed on Greg's already injured waist, severing his body in half and leaving his lifeless legs on the azure sand.

The woman watched the scene with wide eyes, everything had happened too quickly, one mistake was all it took for the hooded figure to kill her companion, Greg was defeated after only three attacks!

Screams continued to sound from the dragon's body, the vitality of a rank 3 cultivator was incredible but his injuries were too severe, only half of his body remained after all.

Noah landed on the dragon's head, the dragon then softly lowered its neck to allow him a comfortable descent on the ground.

Noah stepped off the dragon slowly, he seemed to take his time and he didn't even deign the woman of his attention.

Then, the screams ended and Noah raised his hand toward the dragon's mouth.

The beast opened its maws and three half corroded rings fell directly in Noah's hands which he quickly stored inside his pants.

The woman watched the scene and she quickly made up her mind: She had to escape!

It wasn't a matter of strength, she was quite sure that she was a match for the hooded man.

Yet, she was outnumbered and he had killed her companion, a battle against him, while she was still in the Inheritance ground, wasn't the best option.

"We will meet again!"

She shouted before the wings behind her back flapped and made her disappear from that place, Noah saw how she was running in the distance, toward the rocky structures.

Black flames covered his figure, he wasn't going to give up on a free reward!

Noah reappeared on a spot in front of the escaping woman, her eyes widened when she saw the dragon coming out of his body and charging at her with all its might.

She quickly changed direction, cutting diagonally as she tried to use the maneuverability of her spell to her advantage.

It was at that moment, though, that shockwaves resounded in the area, she turned only to see that Noah was repeatedly using his martial art to chase her.

She sighed in relief when she saw that Noah was slower than her, he was using a martial art after all, it couldn't compare to the speed produced by a spell.

Yet, she suddenly felt as if her mental sphere was going to break, she was forced to stop her escape to focus on stabilizing her sea of consciousness.

The walls of her mind trembled to no end, it took her a while to stabilize her condition.

That time was enough for Noah to reach her position and to perform the Third Form together with the partial Demonic form.

The woman reacted quickly, her complexion was pale due to the mental energy expended to defend against the Mental tremor spell but her life was in danger!

Twenty or so needles were launched from her hands, they clashed with Noah's attacks.

Noah's slashes were fast but the needles weren't any slower, they pierced each other, expending some of their power.

Six deep cuts appeared on the woman's torso, her robe was soon tainted by the blood flowing out of her wounds.

Noah wasn't better off, a few needles surpassed his defenses and were about to stab his body when a scaled tail enveloped his figure.

The woman saw the tail and was reminded of the dragon that accompanied the hooded man but it was too late, darkness filled her vision as a reptilian head closed itself around her head from behind her back.

The last image she saw was the fuming fangs of the dragon stabbing her neck, ripping off her head from her shoulders.

Chapter 392 - 392. Exchanges

The headless woman's body fell lifelessly on the ground, a bit of sand was raised in the process.

Noah quickly inspected her body, taking the storage devices that he found in the process before releasing some smoke from his hand to remove any trace of the battle.

Greg's lower body was somewhere behind him, Noah didn't have time to clean the battlefield since he had to chase the woman but he also couldn't bother to go back to do so.

His priority now was to find a place where to rest before resuming in his exploration, more enemies could approach him any time.

He stored the space-rings together with Greg's ones and was about to search for one of the many hills placed along the way when he felt four pairs of eyes on him.

He quickly turned toward the source of the stares, his Blood companion was still out in the open so it was pointless to hide it at that moment.

Yet, Noah quickly relaxed when he saw four familiar figures staring at him in the distance.

"Zach, is that you?"

David's voice resounded in the sandy area, Noah waved his hand toward him before greeting him in a plain tone.

"Captain, I knew you were down here."

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Sometime later, in a cave where a peak rank 4 Bone dragon was restrained.

Noah, David, and the other three solid stage cultivators from the Chasing demon sect were speaking as they looked at a simple drawing on the ground.

The drawing depicted the known area below the ninth trial, the five cultivators had put together the events they went through after they flew through the darkness between the labyrinth and the seabed.

A dragon was quietly guarding the entrance of the cave, its tail was connected to Noah's n.a.k.e.d back as he stared at the map.

"We took care of a group of survivors that we found along the way, they were strong but injured, their fall didn't go too well apparently."

David explained with a smile on his face, the cultivators in the cave had undressed the clothes that covered their faces, they were in a relatively safe area now.

"Ehm, Zach? What exactly is that? Some sort of puppet?"

Cora, one of the two females in their group, asked while pointing toward the dragon.

"Sort of. It's thanks to it that I managed to survive the assault of those two cultivators from the Empire, I think I will call it Heilong."

Noah vaguely answered, he wanted to make them understand that his Blood companion was strong while still hiding its real power.

David's group had found Noah due to the chaos created as he fought, they were aware of some of the details of his battle and he didn't find any reason to hide his strength.

Also, he had seen how David and the other three had uncaringly abandoned the other members of his group, he wanted to appear somewhat valuable in their eyes.

"No wonder, no wonder. Let me tell you, defeating two rank 3 cultivators is a really impressive feat for someone who has just reached the gaseous stage, you have my respect."

Helga commented on Noah's explanation, her words seemed honest.

"Well, why don't we place the loot in the middle and divide it according to our needs? We all belong to the thieves' faction after all."

Nate, the other man in the solid stage, proposed.

However, Noah shook his head as he revealed a smirk.

"No way. You have a total of seven rewards from the ninth trial divided between the four of you while I have three of them on my person alone, dividing them would be as if I was giving away one of them."

Nate's smile froze after Noah's answer, he thought he could trick him using the faction as an excuse but Noah had immediately seen through his façade.

"Nate, give up, let's just exchange them."

David continued to smile as he patted Nate's shoulder, the latter could only cough a few times as he nodded wearing an awkward smile.

"Then, I guess it's up to me to start. I have a water spell and a lightning spell, both of them up to the fifth rank. Helga, do you want the lightning one?"

Nate spoke, explaining the spells in his possession.

David's aptitude was fire, Nate and Cora's one was wind, and Helga was of the lightning element.

"You know I received a spell of the earth element from the ninth trial. It doesn't match your element and its value it's also lower, what do you really want?"

Helga spoke, expressing her doubts.

The lightning element was rarer than the earth one, it was normal for spells of the former to be more expensive.

"I wouldn't mind losing a few thousand Credits if you were to put some nice words to that apprentice of yours. She thinks I'm some kind of scoundrel that wastes his time in the brothels on the surface."

"But that's exactly who you are!"

Cora complained when she heard Nate's request, she shook her head when she understood that Nate was willing to lose tens of thousands of Credits over a woman.

"Deal."

However, Helga didn't hesitate to accept Nate's offer, a scroll appeared in her hands which she quickly handed to him.

Nate revealed a happy expression and did the same, the exchange was completed.

"Do you have anything related to the darkness element?"

That time, it was Noah the one who spoke.

David sighed, he knew about Noah's aptitude, but the other three were extremely surprised.

They were mighty rank 3 cultivators, they couldn't care less about the matters between weaker cultivators.

That's why they weren't aware of his battle against Perry nor of its specifics.

"I have a spell of the darkness element, its power is up to the fifth rank. I thought I was the lucky one when I found it in the ring of those from the Papral nation but, apparently, this luck is yours to take."

Cora spoke, her eyes were sharp as she stared Noah.

Chapter 393 - 393. Resuming the exploration

"I have a spell of the wind element, one of the fire element, and one of the water element, all three of them up to the fifth rank. Just choose which one you want."

Noah answered plainly, he wasn't aware of Cora's aptitude but he still chose to reveal his belongings.

He had already inspected the belongings of the two cultivators of the Shandal Empire that he had killed, he found those two spells along with a huge amount of resources.

Those two cultivators were both in the third rank, their belongings didn't stop to potions and pills needed to pass the trials, Noah had also found a huge number of Credits, some techniques and spells, and even a few inscribed weapons.

He could have been considered rich before but now his finances and resources had tripled!

Of course, the spells, techniques, and weapons had to be sold since he had no use for them but Noah was still considering if it would be better to just exchange them for merit points once he went back to the sect.

He was still stuck in the Inheritance ground after all, there was no point in planning his action for when he went back already.

"That won't do."

However, Cora shook her head as she refused Noah's offer.

"Darkness and light are the rarest elements, just by giving the spell in my possession to the sect, I would almost obtain enough merit points to purchase two spells of the wind element of similar power. You need to make a better offer if you want my spell."

Cora's reply made Noah fall deep in thought.

He was aware of the rarity of his element, the prices for techniques and spells that suited him could only increase as his level rose.

'Her words make sense, why would she accept a random spell of her element when she can just pick one up from the missions' building? Well, I don't know if the third floor has something so powerful but there should be ways to have access to heroic-level spells.'

Noah's attention went on the insides of his space-rings, he analyzed the spells rewarded in the ninth trial and he tried to evaluate their power.

Spells could be strong or weak, battle-related or not, these qualities influenced their values and prices in the market.

Noah didn't have a meter of comparison with spells of an element different from his but one thing was clear: The spells in his possession that came from the separate dimension were all battle-related and seemed quite powerful!

'This means that there is a high chance that the darkness spell in Cora's rings is also powerful and useful in battle.'

After a few minutes of silence, Noah opened his mouth to make another offer.

"I'll give you the wind and water element, you won't find a better offer in the archipelago."

"Why not the fire one instead of the water one?"

Cora didn't seem moved by Noah's generous offer and promptly asked to change the contents of the second spell.

Yet, Noah only smiled at that question.

"David has a fire aptitude, I'll gain more from giving the fire one to him rather than to you. Mind you, this is my last offer, I can just purchase your spell once we go back in the sect but you would have lost the favorable price that I'm making."

Noah gave her an ultimatum, he wouldn't just give up on free money after all.

Noah had fought with David and he was also his captain, it was normal for him to know about his aptitude.

Cora stared Noah in the eyes and sighed when she saw that he didn't seem to care about not obtaining the spell now.

"Deal."

She took out a long scroll from her space-ring and handed it to Noah, he, on the other hand, handed her the scrolls containing the wind and water spells.

Noah didn't even look at his new spell, he simply stored it before turning to look at David.

"What do you offer for this?"

He asked as he unfolded the scroll containing the fire spell to him.

David wore a complex smile as he went through the contents of the scroll and sighed, taking out a folded scroll too.

"I have only this earth spell up to the fifth rank to offer, the other one in my possession matches my element so I won't give it away."

"Deal."

Noah didn't hesitate to accept the exchange, spells of the earth element were more valuable than those of the fire one.

The round of exchanges was concluded, everyone ended up with two spells except for Helga who had one and Cora who had three.

Cora seemed the one who had the biggest gains but, in truth, it was David the one who had benefitted the most by those exchanges.

He had obtained two spells that matched his element, it was a great advantage considering that they were still in the separate dimension.

As for Cora's remaining spell, she didn't speak about it so the others didn't ask, there was no point in probing her belongings if she had no intentions to trade them.

The fact that they were still in the Inheritance ground also played an important role in making the cultivators in the cave willingly to trade their spells so easily.

Each one of them could have pushed for better prices but their priority was to find a way out of the dimension, the best way to improve their chances was to increase their battle prowess as much as they could before resuming in the exploration.

David and his group stayed inside the cave and in its surroundings for a couple of weeks, they spent that time learning their new spells and thinking of a way to add them to their battle styles.

Noah did the same, his days though were spent mostly outside the cave where he also trained in flying with Heilong's wings.

Dragon's wings were far more suited than bat's wings for flight and Noah's ability had increased a lot during the years when he relied on Echo.

A bit more than two weeks passed before they decided to resume in their exploration, their destination was the rocky structures in the distance.

Chapter 394 - 394. Core

David's group had no more reasons to wait.

They had learnt their new spells and they had also tested them in private, they were at peak form too, it was time to continue in the exploration.

The azure sand illuminated the environment, the rocky structures in the distance were the only stark change in the scenery, they were the only element that seemed to contrast with the seabed and the many hills placed along the way.

That's why they became the only possible destination in the cultivators' minds, they would just think of something else if even those structures led to a dead end.

The group of five moved slowly, they didn't talk much but they spent time exploring the caves on the surface of the hills that they passed.

Every cave seemed to have a dragon restrained inside it, its kind and aspect always matched those in the trials of the labyrinth.

Noah's hypothesis seemed accurate, even the others in his team were amazed when they learnt about it.

"No matter its restriction, a technique like that would be the best defense mechanism of every place."

David commented when he heard Noah's theory.

His words were on point, the ability to endlessly replicate restrained magical beasts was amazing.

After all, what if a mansion had the protection of an endless number of rank 4 creatures?

Who would have the power needed to break its defenses?

Also, how many losses would such invaders suffer during the process?

"It would be wonderful if we could get our hands on the theory behind these formations, our sect would likely become undisputed on the archipelago thanks to them. We would also be able to lay those formations all around the islands and finally isolate ourselves from the continent!"

David continued to evaluate the power behind that technique.

The creator of the separate dimension was able to set up trials that took almost three years to be passed with the joint effort of the strongest organizations of the archipelago, using the theory behind that technique to defend against the control of the continent seemed the chance that the Hive had been waiting for centuries!

Yet, his enthusiasm was suppressed shortly after, David knew nothing about inscription methods and he wasn't sure if Noah's theory was correct, he could only focus on the dimension for now.

The others were the same, they weren't knowledgeable in inscription methods nor did they have any interest in them, they would just pass down such a technique to the sect if they ever were to obtain it.

The group's march was usually silent, their senses were spread toward their surroundings, wary that other cultivators would discover them.

Truth to be told, the five of them were eager to find small groups of survivors from the ninth test, anyone on the seabed would have the rewards of the trial,

their instincts as thieves would kick in as soon as they found a defenseless prey.

Yet, there seemed to be no more lone survivors there, they only met groups of cultivators that had a similar number of members.

Those encounters had been quite tense, the two groups would just stare at each other for a long time, probing the power of their opponents.

It was normal for any survivor on the seabed to have the same thoughts, who wouldn't want more valuable spells after all?

Noah heaved sighs of relief when he saw that the auras of the four solid stage cultivators in his team were able to prevent any battle from happening.

He was only a rank 3 cultivator in the gaseous stage, even though he was strong for his level and his battle prowess had recently increased by a lot, he would still have a tough time against liquid and solid stage cultivators.

The teams met along the way were mostly made of such cultivators, Noah preferred to avoid a battle with such strong opponents.

It wasn't a matter of fear, Noah was aware that he was weaker than solid stage cultivators but he was confident in surviving their assault at least.

The problem was in the reaction that his companions would have to a possible battle: He had seen how they acted in the ninth trial, Noah bet that he would be left behind without a second thought if the situation was to become too dire.

Luckily for him, everyone seemed to prefer going on their way rather than engage in battles.

"Seems as if all the small groups have been already taken care of. Only those with a strength similar to us remain."

Helga commented when they crossed another team wearing clothes similar to theirs.

They probably belonged to underground organizations like them but there didn't seem to be any friendly feeling coming from their behavior.

There seemed to be only one thing in the minds of those that had reached the seabed: Finding the end of the separate dimension!

Almost all the groups there were moving toward the rocky structures, they all had a similar idea about the layout of the dimension.

Soon, the features of the rocky buildings became clear.

They seemed to be some sort of uneven portals that opened a path inside short mountain ranges.

Each mountain range had a different portal but they were all linked to a huge mountain in the distance.

David's group inspected the structure, it seemed that to explore its insides, it was necessary to enter one of the portals.

Groups of cultivators could be seen in the distance, a few of them crossed the entrance of the portals closest to them before they sealed themselves, it seemed that each passage could accommodate only one group.

David and the others exchanged glances before nearing the portal closest to them.

It was without any hesitation that they crossed its entrance, the rocks of the walls behind them spread to completely block their way back, they quickly understood that it was too late to turn back.

Yet, that had never been their intention!

Cautious gazes went toward the insides of the mountain range.

An underground building unfolded in front of their eyes, pillars and straight walls made from the azure sand illuminated the way deeper in the mountain.

Inscriptions filled the entirety of the surface of the building, their quantity was something that Noah had never seen in his whole life!

The underground building seemed the core of the whole dimension!

Chapter 395 - 395. Arena

The light coming from the inscriptions, coupled with the azure halo radiated by the sandy material of the building, illuminated the figures of the five cultivators in David's group.

There didn't seem to be any immediate danger, the large corridor inside the mountain range was filled with an eerie silence, it appeared completely deserted.

A series of glances were exchanged by the five cultivators as they silently decided to explore deeper, everything inside that place was telling them that the end of the Inheritance ground was near.

Yet, a problem immediately occurred.

"I feel watched."

"Me too."

"Same here."

Helga's feeling was shared by the others, the light coming from the inscriptions around them seemed to inspect their bodies and it even passed undisturbed inside their centers of power.

Though, there wasn't any harmful intention behind that light and messing up with the inscription of the separate dimension didn't seem like a good idea so they just ignored that issue after some time.

'These inscriptions are similar to those restricting the dragons inside the hills, they seem far more complex though and I can't shake off the sensation that we are looking at them from their insides.'

Noah thought as he continued to follow his teammates.

He was the only one in the group who had some knowledge in the inscriptions' field, he could understand more than his companions even if his inscription method diverged from most usual practices.

'I have a bad feeling about this...'

According to his theory, the purpose behind those inscriptions was to replicate the beings restrained inside them.

Since there were now cultivators in their insides, there was a high chance that their next enemy would be a human!

The illuminated corridor was straight and seemingly endless, David's group carefully marched in its insides for more than a week before the first change occurred.

Right between two tall pillars placed at the sides of the passage, the entrance of a large area became visible.

"We should still be at some distance from the central mountain. Careful, this should be another trial."

David warned as the five of them entered the large area and prepared themselves for a battle.

The area was a large room with a wide formation on both floor and ceiling, it completely resembled a battle arena.

Then, the sandy walls of the entrance behind them began to enlarge, not even a few seconds had passed but the way back to the corridor had been sealed!

The cultivators weren't scared nor disappointed, they were ready for the incoming battle but there were no enemies there.

Their gazes went on the walls of the room, they felt confused since there seemed to be no way out of that place.

Noah went to inspect the formations, they resembled those that filled the dimension but with a few more complex elements.

In the end, he gave up on trying to understand their purpose, not only were formations different from his method, but those in the arena were also at a high level.

"Nothing?"

David asked when he saw Noah raising his gaze from the formations and he sighed when he saw that Noah shook his head to answer him.

"What do we do now?"

Nate asked David, it was clear to everyone that the latter was the leader of the group.

"Let's wait for a bit. We'll try to force this place open if nothing happens."

David spoke, ordering them to take the safe approach.

Messing up with the inscriptions of a dimension that could remain hidden from the eyes of heroic cultivators wasn't a good idea, David would keep that option only as a last resort.

Another period of training occurred, Noah and the others resumed testing their new spells and adding them to their combat style.

They were all rank 3 mages after all, learning the diagram of spells up to the fifth rank hadn't been a taxing process.

Yet, it always took time to become proficient with every new technique, Noah would always throw himself into a pack of magical beasts whenever he obtained a new technique.

With the absence of magical beasts though, he could only visualize his improved fighting style in his mind for now.

One thing that improved quickly though was his flying ability.

Heilong's wings were bigger and stronger than Echo's ones, allowing him to fly at a higher speed and without the need of the Shadow step spell to remain in the air.

Yet, they lacked maneuverability, an aspect that Noah could only compensate with experience and other techniques.

'I'll think about improving my flight when I exit this damned place... We have been stuck in this area for one month already!'

Noah thought as he softly landed on the ground, the wings behind his back retracted inside his n.a.k.e.d back where the large tattoo of a dragon was.

The other four in his group had long become used to his training routine and couldn't help but be surprised when they saw the many uses that his Blood companion was capable of.

"Maybe I should have asked for this puppet instead."

Cora commented as she watched Noah reuniting with them, she believed that her gains in the exchange had been great but the young-looking man in front of him seemed to have things more valuable than powerful spells.

"Limited to the darkness element, sorry."

Noah shrugged his shoulders as he casually lied, the Body-inscription spell was one of his strongest abilities as well as his first spell, he wouldn't give it to others so easily.

The cultivators in David's group weren't tired, they were still in the Inheritance ground so they limited themselves when they trained.

Noah wasn't an exception, flying consumed virtually no energy and he only used his new spell three to four times each day.

Their priority was to be ready for any kind of trial that the dimension placed in front of them, they didn't know the reason behind that waiting but they didn't dare to train till exhaustion in that situation.

Then, before Noah could wear something to cover his upper body, the formations on the floor and the ceiling lit up.

Light gathered at the center of the arena and human figures formed as the light slowly dissipated.

In a few seconds, five cultivators appeared in front of them!

Chapter 396 - 396. Ice

The cultivators that had just appeared didn't look completely real, their features were covered with inscriptions and they all wore expressionless faces.

David's group immediately stood up, they had wielded their weapons as soon as the formations lit up.

The inscribed cultivators wore the golden armors of the Royal army of the Utra nation, Noah and his group had spotted them along the way but they went on different paths and entered a different portal.

"It seems that this technique can even copy cultivators."

David judged as his eyes were filled with greed, the possibility of obtaining the copying technique from the separate dimension seemed to become more real with every new trial.

'I guess I was right.'

Noah thought as he inspected the inscribed cultivators, three of them were in the solid stage while two of them were in the liquid one, it was pointless to say that they were all in the third rank!

Also, the mental waves that they radiated belonged to rank 3 mages, they couldn't be underestimated.

'I wonder if a copy of ourselves has appeared in front of another group, that should be the purpose behind the inscriptions in the corridor after all.'

Noah guessed again, he felt a bit bothered to be used in that way especially considering that he had so many secrets.

However, his thoughts were interrupted since the five inscribed cultivators recklessly charged at them.

"One each, winners help those in need!"

David gave simple orders as he shot toward a woman that seemed the strongest in the enemy team.

The others in his group did the same with Nate and Noah charging toward the liquid stage cultivators.

Explosions resounded in the arena as the battle began, spells and attacks were launched as soon as the two sides clashed.

Noah was completely focused on the liquid stage inscribed man in front of him, spears made of ice shot in his direction as shockwaves resounded from under his feet.

Noah managed to dodge the spell thanks to the speed generated from the Shadow sprint and immediately used his strongest attack.

Time seemed to slow down in his eyes and black veins bulged all over his body as six fast slashes were launched.

The Third Form of the Ashura fused the most powerful aspects of the other two Forms, it had the destructive power of the Second Form and the ethereal aspect of the First one.

Noah was at about ten meters of distance from the inscribed man but six extremely fast slashes still cut through the air and managed to reach his enemy!

However, he was against a liquid stage cultivator.

The Third Form was fast and powerful, it could be said that it was a perfect attack method, yet, it was still only a martial art.

A layer of ice covered the man's chest and six deep marks appeared on it but the skin under that protection remained untouched!

The Third Form had been blocked!

'I used the weakest version of the Third Form but I didn't expect it to be blocked so easily.'

Noah evaluated in his mind but was forced to summon his Blood companion since his enemy had cast another barrage of ice spears at the moment when Noah's attack was blocked.

Heilong appeared in front of Noah, its huge scaled body completely covered Noah's figure as it endured the enemy's spell.

The spears stabbed its body, the reinforced scales couldn't stop such a powerful spell.

Ice spread on Heilong's body from where the spears were stabbed but Noah quickly controlled his companion and the frozen parts together with the spears were cut off from its body.

Blood companions could immediately recreate their missing parts using the "Breath" of the cultivator linked to them but they couldn't properly heal, they weren't living beings after all.

Noah had decided to cut away the damaged parts to accelerate the reconstruction of its body, he needed a defensive method against the piercing ability of those spears.

'Let's try with three.'

Noah thought and the world in his eyes slowed again.

Heilong was absorbed in his body and three fast slashes cut the air toward the inscribed man.

The power behind the Third Form would increase according to how concentrated Noah's attacks were.

Its weaker version was when Noah used his six arms to attack, those arms contained the many ethereal copies of the First Form and could project his slashes in the distance thanks to that.

The strongest was, of course, when Noah focused his everything in one slash: The First and Second form would be used to their peak at that moment, creating a seemingly unstoppable attack.

Of course, such a move would put his body under heavy stress, Noah preferred to use its weaker version since he had other powerful abilities available.

Three powerful slashes crashed on the layer of ice that the inscribed man had created as soon as he saw that an attack was nearing him.

Deep marks appeared on the ice and white shards shot in every direction due to the collision.

Yet, the man behind it was completely unharmed.

'This won't do.'

The veins on Noah's arms healed as Heilong appeared again to block the third barrage of ice spears, the man was always using the protection of the ice layer to cast more spells.

Also, the number of spears was increasing, it seemed that the shards of his previous spells could be used to increase the power of his attacks.

'I don't know if this will work against non-living beings but the dragons in the labyrinth were extremely lifelike, that should apply to cultivators too.'

Noah focused and his mental energy was expended.

Three ghostly claws appeared in front of him which flew through Heilong's body as they reached for the inscribed man.

Another layer of ice appeared, the man used his reliable defensive spell to block the incoming attack.

Yet, those claws were not material, they passed unobstructed through the ice shield and stabbed themselves in the man's chest.

No wound appeared on his flesh, the man didn't seem to have suffered any kind of damage.

However, a few drops of blood came out of his mouth and traced straight dark lines on his jaw as they fell on the floor, Noah's eyes shone when he saw that his new spell was effective!

Chapter 397 - 397. Layers

'Ghostly claws spell, power up to the fifth rank, limited to the darkness element. The caster launches several ethereal claws that can pass through any kind of matter and inflict a limited amount of damage.'

The description of the spell ran through Noah's mind as he saw the lines of blood coming out of the inscribed cultivator's mouth.

Noah's new spell wasn't spectacularly powerful but it was extremely troublesome to deal with.

First of all, the claws were ethereal, they could pass through any kind of defense or material, specific methods were needed to defend against them but they were hard to find and consumed a large amount of mental energy.

His Mental tremor spell was the same, both the mental shockwave and the ethereal claws were mainly made of mental energy, it was obvious that only a defensive method mainly composed of mental energy could block them.

Also, the claws didn't necessarily have a straight trajectory, Noah could control them at will and avoid eventual defenses that his enemies deployed.

In that situation, the Ghostly claws were only slightly affected by the ice layer and maintained most of their power when they hit the internal organs of the cultivator.

'This spell is a proper long-range attack that I've always lacked. Its consumption is even quite low considering that it is a spell of the darkness element.'

Noah quickly evaluated the effects that his new spell had in an actual battle.

Spells of the darkness element usually had explosive effects capable of great might, the Demonic form and the Mental tremor spells were a perfect example of that.

Yet, the consumption of "Breath" and mental energy for the activation of such spells was extremely high, a sort of balance was enforced by the fairness of Heaven and Earth after all.

The Ghostly claws, instead, lacked the usual power of the spells of the darkness element but they expended far less energy to be created.

Also, their ethereal form made up for that lack of power, Noah could just focus on the sensible areas of his enemy when he attacked.

That was exactly what had happened in the battle.

Noah had launched his new spell which passed through Heilong and the ice layer, crashing on the internal organs of the inscribed man and inflicting some damage.

'Being able to attack while defending is nice but my opponent has deeper reserves of energy since he is in the liquid stage, the dimension made a perfectly lifelike copy of him, it's safe to assume that even his dantian contains the proper amount of "Breath".'

The inscribed man's battle style was quite straightforward: He would create the ice layer when attacked and use that moment to launch ice spears.

Also, the ice shards that accumulated on the battlefield could be used to empower his spells which, coupled with his deeper reserves of "Breath", favored him in a long battle.

Another round of spears crashed on Heilong's body, the pain endured by the Blood companion was shared by Noah but his mind couldn't be bothered by that, he was completely focused in finding a way to end that battle quickly.

His attention went to his companions, Nate was suppressing his opponent but the other three seemed on a stalemate, their power seemed evenly matched.

'Nate will likely defeat the liquid stage in front of him and help the others but I don't know if we will be given time to rest after this battle, it's better to let them preserve their strength.'

Noah thought that he could just passively defend and wait for his teammates to help him but he didn't know what kind of trials they will face deeper in the mountain range.

The strongest assets in his team were the solid stage cultivators, it was better to let them preserve their energy.

Also, he wanted to see if he could really defeat a liquid stage cultivator on his own.

'Complete Demonic form is a no, I'll just risk disrupting the other battles. The partial one has to be enough.'

Noah decided his approach and waited for the barrage of spears to end.

That was already the inscribed man's fifth attack, more than thirty sharp spears were created and launched toward the black dragon defending the human with its body.

When the last of the spears hit Heilong's body, Noah absorbed the intact part of his puppet and shot in a straight line toward the inscribed man.

Shockwaves resounded under his feet as he sprinted at full speed, it didn't take him even an instant to cross the ten meters dividing him and his enemy.

The man watched Noah raising his sabers to attack but his expressionless face didn't even flicker, he simply waved his sleeve, shattering the layer of ice in front of him.

Noah hadn't expected such a move but his reaction time wasn't slow, Heilong's body engulfed his figure as soon as he saw the sharp white shards nearing him.

Some cuts appeared on his body, Heilong had blocked most of the attack but some shard still managed to hit him.

Also, ice began to spread from his wounds, Noah felt a piercing cold sensation that tried to affect his movements.

Black smoke immediately came out of his body, the Demonic form destroyed anything except for its user, the ice soon stopped spreading and was quickly devoured by Noah's corrosive smoke.

The liquid "Breath" in his circulatory system was expended at a fast pace to heal his injuries, the ability of his Yin body kept Noah battle-ready in any situation!

'F.u.c.k!'

Noah cursed in his mind when he saw that another defensive layer of ice was forming right between him and the inscribed man, according to his calculation, his sabers wouldn't be able to reach him before the shield was formed.

Heilong roared as it bit downward, another layer of ice appeared right over the man's skin, preventing the dragon's fangs from stabbing deeper, only some superficial wounds had been inflicted.

Meanwhile, the ice-shield continued to form, it began to envelop Heilong's figure and even Noah felt a cold sensation trying to affect his mind.

Noah's face appeared at the bottom of his companion's throat, his eyes were bloodshot as a mental beam was shot from them.

The Mental tremor spell successfully hit the sea of consciousness of the inscribed man, his sphere trembled violently as it tried to defend against the piercing force that was making its way on its walls.

The man's focus was finally disrupted and the two layers of ice crumbled as he stopped providing mental energy and "Breath" to them, Noah had finally broken through his defenses!

Chapter 398 - 398. Victory

The inscribed man was expressionless, his face didn't change even when his mental sphere trembled violently.

Ice shards fell everywhere, his body became completely exposed and Heilong's fangs finally managed to dig deep into his flesh.

Black smoke came out of its fangs, the defenseless flesh and muscles of the cultivator could only be consumed under the assault of Noah's corrosive spell.

Noah, on the other hand, was about to directly attack his opponent when the latter's mental sphere stopped trembling and he recovered his focus.

A torrent of water engulfed the man, Heilong and Noah were flung away by the explosive power of the spell.

'Another defensive method!'

Noah cursed in his mind as he controlled Heilong's wings to stop himself mid-air, his gaze was fixed on the inscribed man as he quickly landed on the floor, ready to assault him again.

However, he was surprised to see that all the ice-shards on the battlefield were gathering around the man, surrounding him and forming a big block of ice in his position.

'What kind of spell is that?'

Noah tried to guess the effect of the spell but he could only sense that a large amount of "Breath" and mental energy were being converged in the inscribed man's position.

It took only a few seconds for Noah to decide his next move, large amounts of mental energy and "Breath" were expended as more than ten Ghostly claws were created.

The claws flew through the air, entering the block of ice and looking for the man's body.

Noah shared part of the sensations of the claws, that sharing wasn't as accurate as with his Blood companion but it was better than blindly attacking the spell nonetheless.

The ice composing the big slab was white, sight couldn't reach its insides.

Also, the arena had the same proprieties of the walls of the labyrinth, mental energy couldn't be relied on.

That's why Noah immediately used the Ghostly claws spell, he didn't know the purpose behind the man's spell but, from the amount of energy gathering around him, he knew that he didn't want to face its effects.

Ethereal claws entered the block of ice and searched for the internal organs of the inscribed man, the chunk was about six meters large, a grown man didn't have many places where to hide inside it.

Soon, the claws hit something soft, Noah's eyes sharpened when he felt that vague sensation and commanded the remaining claws to attack that position.

Then, he summoned even more claws and launched them in that position, ice shards and ethereal claws converged on the chunk of ice at high speed.

Noah didn't stop, he continuously activated his spell, it was only when more than forty claws had been created that he started to feel some kind of tiredness.

His mental energy was nearing depletion!

Yet, when the thirty-eighth claw stabbed itself on the soft spot inside the chunk of ice, a change occurred.

Cracks began to appear on the white surface of the block and the shards flying in the air stopped their tracks and fell on the floor, shattering in hundreds of small fragments.

The cracks on the block enlarged, large pieces of ice separated from its body and fell on the ground, shattering in the process.

White chunks continued to fall on the floor, the spell of the inscribed man was dismantling itself and it had also stopped absorbing energy.

Then, the pale face of Noah's opponent appeared among the ice, a large amount of blood had come out of his mouth, eyes, and ears, it had formed red frozen stains on the white world inside the spell.

His eyes were still open but, to Noah's relief, his figure soon vanished and the ice all around the battlefield evaporated into nothingness.

Noah's opponent had been defeated!

Noah heaved a tired sigh as he sat on the floor, his hood had flown away after the torrent of water appeared, allowing him to rub a hand on his short hair as he supported himself in the process.

Heilong was by his side, it supported Noah with his scaled body and coiled himself around him in a protective manner.

Noah felt exhausted, he hadn't used much "Breath" nor his most powerful spell but most of his mental energy had been depleted in the continuous activation of the Ghostly claws spell.

'Maybe I could have obtained better results if I had covered the area with the corrosive smoke but that would have affected the other battles.'

Noah, as usual, pondered about the recent battle.

He was satisfied with the power of his new spell, it was an attack method that he lacked after all.

Also, he was extremely happy when he realized that his battle prowess was on par with liquid stage cultivators!

His opponent hadn't been weak, he had used four different spells that were even connected!

'Heilong has also played an important role, I don't know if I could have endured so many spears with the protection of the Demonic form.'

Noah patted the dragon's body as he thought of that before standing up to inspect the other battles.

The fights of his teammates had evolved as he had predicted.

Nate had killed the liquid stage cultivator in front of him and went to help the others.

He, Helga, and Cora were successfully suppressing their two opponents in the solid stage.

On another corner of the arena, David was surrounded by an army of beasts made of flames.

The temperature in that place was so high that Noah could feel warm waves reaching his face and dispersing some of the innate coldness of his body.

Also, David was wielding a flaming bow.

His opponent was cornered, fire-beasts recklessly assaulted her, exploding and dispersing scorching flames whenever they were destroyed.

Meanwhile, David shot fire-arrows from his bow, aiming for the defenseless spots on the body of the inscribed woman.

'David usually uses a greatsword, I'm surprised that he can handle a bow so well... Those two should be his new spells, powerful indeed.'

Noah judged from his position and decided to focus on recovering his energies when he saw that the outcome of the other battles was pretty much decided.

Chapter 399 - 399. Five corridors

David continued to assault his opponent, his corner of the arena was soon filled with flames due to the reckless assault of his flame-beasts.

Then, a flame-arrow hit the inscribed woman's head, finally ending the battle.

David had won before the other three solid stage cultivators in his team!

He then dispersed his spells and turned his head toward the other areas of the battlefield.

His gaze lingered shortly on the battle of his three companions before moving toward Noah.

Noah stared him back, he was paying attention to the battlefield too as he sat cross-legged on top of Heilong to refill his dantian, he could see the traces of surprise in his captain's eyes as he looked at him.

'No wonder he is our captain.'

Noah thought before David nodded, Noah's performance in the separate dimension had surpassed all his expectations, that gesture was his way to formally recognize his power.

He then sat too, there was no reason to help the other three, they were just using their numerical advantage to slowly exhaust their enemies, it was a safe approach in a situation that didn't require them to go all out.

It took about twenty minutes for the remaining two inscribed cultivators to deplete their reserves of energies and being killed by the joint assault of the three solid stage cultivators, their figures quickly vanished as fatal wounds were inflicted on their bodies.

All the enemies had been defeated!

The formations in the area lit up as soon as the last inscribed cultivator vanished, the sandy walls on the opposite side from where David's group

came from moved, creating a passage that led deeper into the mountain range.

"Good work everyone, let's rest now."

David ordered before closing his eyes to focus on his recovery, the others did the same without adding a word.

An entire day passed, the five cultivators sat silently and then slept to quicken their recovery.

Then, they formed a circle right in front of the corridor that had just opened.

"There were no rewards this time, this should be a good sign."

Cora spoke as she scratched her space-ring, the absence of rewards after such a tough battle was disappointing but that could only be explained by the fact that they were getting closer to the end of the dimension.

"It's probably a method to preserve resources. The ninth trial gave spells to anyone surviving the fall through the void, it means that the creator isn't sure that we will survive the next tests."

Noah added.

He had been in two different Inheritance grounds already and met with a creator.

There was always some kind of purpose behind the creation of a separate dimension, it wouldn't make sense to spend a large deal of effort and resources otherwise.

"It is strange though. The trials in the labyrinth had specific requirements while all of that was thrown away after the ninth test... I wonder what the creator was thinking when he set all of this up."

Nate gave voice to everyone's doubts.

His complaints were on point, it seemed as if the trials had purposely skimmed the cultivators in each team to allow only the most complete ones to reach the seabed.

"No point thinking about that now, we will ask the creator once we reach the end."

David spoke as he stood up.

The others in his group understood the meaning behind his actions, they were going to continue in the exploration!

The other part of the corridor was identical to the first part, tall pillars and inscriptions filled the large azure passage.

The light of the inscriptions continued to scan the cultivators and their centers of power, Noah guessed that even the next test would feature humans.

'I hope that the copy of our team has killed its opponents, it would be a problem if my powers were to be exposed.'

Noah thought as he imagined his copy recklessly entering the complete Demonic form to fight the other cultivators in the mountain ranges.

'It shouldn't be a problem if the copy was sent against the real version of our opponents, we were stronger than them after all, but I can't be sure of that.'

The march through the corridor gave him a lot of time to think, he couldn't help but feel worried about his identity being revealed.

'Well, I'm not on my own right now, I have the backing of one of the most powerful organizations in the archipelago... Everything should be fine.'

Noah suppressed those thoughts as he continued to walk with his team, he was still in the Inheritance ground after all, his biggest problem was surviving the trials.

It took even more than last time for a change in the scenery to appear.

After about one and a half weeks of travel, David's group saw how the corridor divided itself into five different passages.

Hesitation could be seen in David's eyes as he inspected the passages, no matter how much he probed, he couldn't find any difference between them.

"Let's go to the central one."

David spoke, leading his group into the central passage.

The familiar corridor appeared but, that time, it took only one day for a change in the scenery to occur.

The five cultivators were surprised to see that the same five passages had reappeared in front of them!

"Were we teleported back?"

Helga asked but none of her companions could give her an answer, they were as confused as her.

David took an orb from his space-ring and activated it before leading his teammates into the leftmost passage.

The scenery was the same and, after exactly one day of travel, the same passages appeared and a shining orb was hovering in the air in front of them.

It was clear now that they were stuck in a sort of loop!

"Let's try all of them before evaluating other possibilities."

David ordered as he led his team through the rightmost passage.

The same event occurred, they reached again the five branches of the corridor after marching for one day.

No one spoke that time, the group went directly for the remaining corridors only to find out that they always bought them back at their entrances.

The felt confused, they had wasted five days already in that spot but they had no idea how to advance.

Then, Noah had an idea when he thought about Nate's words.

"The creator allowed us to face the trials with teams but the trials slowly forced us to separate. We fought five cultivators in the previous test but we know that there are more and less numerous teams. Also, their power was similar to ours but we know that there are more and less powerful teams. Five passages, five cultivators..."

Noah's eyes shone with understanding as his gaze went on the entrances in front of him, he was beginning to understand the reason behind the Inheritance ground's layout.

Chapter 400 - 400. Copy

First, there were the impossible trials in the labyrinth, a single rank 3 cultivator, no matter how strong it was, couldn't face them alone.

Second, the trials had specific requirements, be it flight, teamwork, or ability to fight in the darkness, the tests could be passed only by teams that were prepared for every situation.

Then, it was time for the ninth trial, where only those with the best survival instincts would survive.

Also, those cultivators had to have methods to slow their descent to survive the fall toward the seabed.

In the end, there was the journey toward the mountain ranges, where one had to survive against enemy ambushes and fight to protect its rewards.

Once inside the corridors, an opposing team that matched your level would appear.

'And now the corridor divides itself into five branches, which is precisely the same number of cultivators in our team. This can't be a coincidence.'

Noah's thoughts brought him to that conclusion.

'The creator was probably looking for certain types of cultivators, teams that could fight in a group but that won't panic when divided, teams that could fly and also fight in the darkness, teams stronger than their competitors and...'

His thoughts stopped at that point and his gaze sharpened as he looked at the five passages, he knew that the other requirement would be clear after the trial hidden behind them.

'Still, the creator could have just set different trials if he was looking for a small group of people, it would have been easier than capturing so many different dragons!'

Even if Noah felt that he had understood part of the creator's intentions, there was still a lot that he didn't comprehend.

"Are you suggesting for each of us to enter a different corridor?"

David asked as he turned his head toward the entrances too, Noah's theory made sense.

"Yes, the number of corridors matches ours, this can't be a coincidence in a place that can teleport us back at will."

Noah answered, he didn't give voice to all his thoughts but focused on those that concerned the current issue.

Time could be another requirement after all, he didn't want to waste more of it discussing his theories about the creator's intentions.

"I guess it's time to disband the team, I hope to meet all of you on the other side."

Nate exclaimed as he moved toward the rightmost passage, it was clear that he was leaving the central one to David.

Noah shrugged his shoulders and went to the leftmost one, he then turned to wait for everyone to take their position.

David neared the central entrance and Helga and Cora took those at his sides, everyone turned to David as they waited for him to give the order.

"Good luck."

David didn't shout nor instructed, he simply said those words in a soft tone before turning and crossing the entrance behind him.

At that gesture, the others entered their respective corridors.

Noah found himself in the same passage that he had already crossed five times in the previous days.

However, the light radiated from the inscriptions had stopped investigating his centers of power and was only illuminating the environment.

'I was right.'

That change proved that Noah's idea was on point, all he had to do now was reaching the area where the next test would be held.

'What will it be now? A single cultivator from an enemy team? One of my team?'

Noah's thoughts ran wildly inside his mind, he was quite sure that the next trial would feature a human opponent, he simply wasn't sure about its power.

It took him about two days to reach the end of the corridor where a dark-looking area appeared in his view.

The sandy walls closed behind him as he crossed the end of the passage, Noah warily watched his surroundings as he waited for his opponent to appear.

There was a formation at the center of the area and its lines lit up a few seconds after the arena was sealed.

The light gathered to form a human figure, it had a medium stature and a peculiar cold aura was radiated from it.

Also, it wielded a pair of black sabers which Noah recognized immediately.

'The cultivation level isn't a requirement then.'

Noah could be sure of that because the opponent in front of him was a rank 3 cultivator in the gaseous stage with centers of power at the exact level as his.

The trial featured a fight against a copy of yourself!

Noah calmly walked ahead, he undressed his upper body and stored his hood as he wielded his Demonic swords.

The copy did the same, Noah felt as if he was watching a mirror, white skin, delicate facial features, short black hair, the copy was identical to him.

Also, on the bare chest of the copy, the tattoo of a dragon could be seen staring fiercely at the incoming Noah.

'To think that I could test my own power!'

Noah's battle intent surged, he was finally alone and was facing an opponent that he knew was strong enough to be a threat to his life.

Black smoke came out of his body, Noah's figure vanished only to be replaced by a horned fiend.

The copy did the same, Noah soon found himself facing a fiend covered with inscriptions.

Demonic form against Demonic form!

'Let's see if I can defeat the spell that has allowed me to reach this stage!'

Shockwaves resounded under his feet as he shot in the direction of his copy.

The copy stood still, the smoke exuded from his figure created a black cloud that was almost about to hide his features.

When Noah was at less than five meters of distance from his opponent, a fuming Heilong came out of his chest and pounced his copy.

However, an identical fuming Heilong came out of the copy's chest and clashed with Noah's Blood companion.

The two dragons clashed and the smoke from the two Demonic forms began to devour each other.

Time seemed to slow down in Noah's eyes as the veins on his arms exploded due to the pressure that they were enduring.

His sabers became one and the most powerful attack that his martial art was capable of was performed.

An extremely quick fuming slash was released from his weapons, its ethereal proprieties traced a sharp line along its trajectory that was about to cut in half everything in the twenty meters area in front of him.

Yet, the Third Form met an attack that had its same proprieties and its same power, the copy had executed the Third form too!

Two sharp lines clashed, the air seemed to shatter under the power generated by that confrontation.