

Chapter 421 - 421. Black hole

Noah had never been in charge of a team, he had always been forced to rely on himself.

Yet, he knew which was the most important quality that a leader had to have: Strength!

The battle plan had been prepared by the elder of the sect, he didn't have a say in that matter.

The information about the defensive formation had been provided by Holly and her faction, its destruction wasn't something that could be added to his merits.

However, if he wanted the other captains to follow his every order, he needed to show that he was worthy of the title of Demon Prince!

As for why he cared about that, it was because he needed the complete support of the sect.

Noah's identity had been revealed and he had already given away part of the Inheritance, he had obtained incredible benefits thanks to that but he didn't know for how long the sect would permit such an overbearing behavior.

Even the patriarch with his easygoing attitude could suddenly decide that he wasn't worth the many resources that he expended.

After all, Noah was a criminal in the Utra nation and a troublemaker in the Shandal Empire, the only reason why heroic cultivators weren't after him was that he was still in the human ranks.

Yet, if he managed to maintain the complete support of the sect through his feats, he would have the backing of a rank 6 existence!

That alone would scare away many of his pursuers, after all, who would want the enmity of the Chasing Demon in exchange for a single human cultivator?

Also, Noah didn't hate the idea of taking control of the archipelago, that place would become a safe nation where he could make steady progress without fearing unexpected ambushes.

The solid stage cultivator was a bit surprised by his words but Noah suddenly disappeared from his view.

'Such speed!'

Those were the thoughts of the solid stage cultivator as wind swept his hair, his gaze unconsciously went in the direction where Noah had gone.

Noah was in the air, a pair of large black wings flapped on his back and his legs casually kicked the air, creating circular shockwaves under his feet.

What surprised the cultivator the most was that Noah accelerated every time he kicked, small dark spheres appeared under his feet whenever his legs were about to stretch completely.

Most of Shadow steps, a small part of Blind, about half of Dark empowerment, and the last part of Forced harmonization, the diagrams of four different rank 0 spells had been analyzed by Noah who had taken the lines he was interested in and recomposed to create an improved version of the Shadow sprint!

During six months of seclusion, Noah had mostly focused on his centers of power but he didn't forget to improve his combat abilities.

The new Shadow sprint martial art didn't need a foothold to be performed, the cloud created by the Blind spell would be condensed by the effect of Forced harmonization and imbued with the effects of the Shadow steps.

Also, Dark empowerment simplified the movement that Noah needed to perform to obtain that result, replacing the previous form with a simple kick.

Of course, Noah would have never obtained such a great result in that short amount of time without the Divine deduction technique.

The inscriptions on the walls of his sphere not only analyzed the diagrams at an unimaginable speed, but they also gave him many inspirations on how to recompose the lines he was interested in.

That method couldn't be used to create new spells but Noah had managed to link those lines that had different sources with his body, obtaining a powerful martial art.

He was still using the theory behind the Elemental forging method to activate its effects, the consumption of the "Breath" inside his sea of consciousness had increased but the improvements far overcame that flaw.

After all, Noah flying speed was surpassing that of a rank 4 magical beast in the middle tier and it seemed to be increasing even!

That speed though wasn't entirely thanks to his martial art, his wings also played a big role.

The wings of a rank 4 creature and a rank 4 martial art, it was as if a magical beast was using a real martial art!

Noah arrived on top of the group of rank 3 cultivators of the Empire in no time, his mental energy was expended as lines appeared in the air around them and began to emit an ominous dark light.

The seven cultivators felt as if their bodies were being weakened under the dark halo and quickly moved to leave the rectangle that had formed around them.

However, when the cultivator in the solid stage was about to exit the area, a fuming ethereal slash dug a deep cut on the ground in front of her, blocking her path.

She turned her head to look at the winged man in the air, his cold gaze was fixed on her, it was clear that she was his target.

Meanwhile, a battle exploded around her, the rank 3 cultivator from the Chasing Demon sect attacked the six that had escaped Noah's Death area spell while those in the second rank overwhelmed the soldiers on their level.

The outcome of the battle was basically decided, the soldiers of the Empire didn't have a chance to win unless some backup arrived from the other islands.

The only option was to stall for time!

"Hmph, you are only in the gaseous stage, know your place!"

The woman snorted when she saw Noah's level, she felt that her enemy had underestimated her.

A phoenix made of yellow flames formed in front of her and flew in the air, trying to reach for the winged man.

Noah felt the terrifying power behind that spell, he knew that Heilong would be destroyed a few times before it could block it.

Yet, using his Blood companion had never been his intention.

A black dot appeared in front of him, his image behind the dot began to curve due to the suction force exuded by the spell.

Then, the dot enlarged.

It first reached the size of a fist, then that of a human head.

It stopped growing only after it became as big as a man's chest.

The light around the now sphere curved and was sucked inside, only Noah seemed immune to its suction force.

The phoenix couldn't maintain its trajectory, its flames were slowly absorbed by the Black hole spell before its entire body disappeared in the darkness of the sphere.

#### Chapter 422 - 422. Fighting a solid stage

As the woman's spell was absorbed by the sphere, its entire composition was destroyed and turned into pure energy.

Noah felt a mixture of "Breath" and mental energy entering his body, the Black hole spell allowed him to momentarily store those energies.

Yet, even in that pure form, those energies didn't belong to him.

Noah felt as if his body was going to explode while he resisted the urge to dispel the energies in the air, he had a far better use for them.

The world in his eyes slowed as he performed an extremely fast slash with all his sabers fused into one.

The veins on his arms exploded, the muscles under his skin were torn, and he also felt as if his bones were cracking, the woman was in the solid stage after all, his body at the apex of the lower tier was barely able to handle the energy that her spell contained.

Yet, black veins quickly filled Noah's entire body, they empowered his condition and increased his recovery by a large margin, some of the wounds caused by the execution of the Third Form healed while he was still completing that gesture.

The woman felt a dangerous sensation coming from the winged man, her instincts told her that she had to avoid that attack!

However, the Death area spell affected her condition and even her thinking speed, she realized what was happening one second too late.

After all, she had been surprised since her spell had been blocked, it took her some time to realize that her own power was being used to power the enemy's attack.

A fuming mark appeared on the ground, black smoke came out from it, devouring everything in the area.

'As expected from a solid stage cultivator, they aren't easy to surprise.'

Noah thought when he saw that a wall of yellow flames had appeared before his attack could reach the cultivator.

The flames detonated when they clashed with the Third Form, dissipating a large amount of its power.

The woman's figure became visible after the flames dissipated, part of her robe had been burned during the explosion and deep wound was on her shoulder.

However, the smoke released by the mark and from her wound was restricted by tongues of yellow flames, it seemed that the woman was able to fight the corrosive effects of the Demonic form!

Her attitude though wasn't as arrogant as before.

She inspected the gaseous stage cultivator in the air with wary eyes, only then did she realize that there were two aspects of him able to threaten her life.

The first one was his mental sphere, it was unusually strong for his cultivation level, she felt as if the enemy was a stronger mage than her.

The second one was the pair of real sabers wielded in two of his six arms.

They looked rather simple, with no handle nor inscriptions, they seemed just sharp black slabs.

Yet, she could feel that they matched her level.

'Rank 3 inscribed weapons in the upper tier! He even has two of them!'

The woman realized that when she inspected those blades, they didn't look like inscribed items but the power they held was unmistakable.

Those were the new Demonic swords that Noah had forged during his six months of seclusion!

It took the help of the sect to purchase their core material, the Undead chameleon bones, they had to use their contacts in the continent to obtain it.

Yet, every other material used in the forging came from the dragon's corpses of the darkness element contained in the Inheritance.

Also, Noah had used the peak rank 4 corpses which made up for the gaseous "Breath" used in the forging, allowing his blades to reach the upper tier of the third rank anyway.

Of course, forging while using materials so powerful would be hard considering Noah's level, yet, he managed to reduce the number of failures thanks to the Divine deduction technique.

Noah had relied on the technique to enhance his thinking speed and find the mistakes in the forging, as well as solutions to them.

It had taken him only six forgings before he was able to create his new weapons, that feat alone showed how useful Divine Demon's technique was.

Noah saw that the woman had no intention of attacking and decided to dive toward her, his descending speed was incredible due to the continued usage of his martial art.

The solid stage cultivator wasn't slow in her reaction though, she had already prepared a spell in advance since her mental faculties were affected in that area.

Four flaming spears appeared in the air in front of her and she wielded an inscribed hammer as she waited for Noah to dodge her spell.

Noah saw the spears shooting in his direction but he didn't dodge, Heilong came out of his body and stood in the spell's trajectory.

Its body was pierced, its improved defensive proprieties could do nothing against a spell powered by solid "Breath", the spears pieced its scales and came out from the other side of its body.

The woman prepared herself, she waited for Noah to came out from the dragon's back.

Yet, she felt a sudden dangerous sensation from behind her.

She instinctively swung her hammer in that position only to see that black flames had appeared behind her back and that Noah was almost done performing his attack.

'Even inside the Death area, she was able to react... Impressive.'

Noah praised the woman internally, he knew that fighting a cultivator in the solid stage would be hard but, even with all his methods, he had only been able to hurt her once.

Noah saw the hammer closing with his face, he knew that her attack would arrive before his but he still kept going.

When the hammer was about to hit him, his entire body became ethereal and passed through her attack.

Even his weapons became ethereal, Noah easily passed through her body as he continued in his way.

The woman was surprised but she still pressed on, she waved her hammer to follow Noah's figure, waiting for the moment when he could be hit again.



However, right when she was turning, she felt a grip on her heart, as if a hand was squeezing that organ.

Her attack was interrupted as blood came out of her mouth, she could only watch as Noah returned real and stared at her with bloodshot eyes.

#### Chapter 423 - 423. Losses

The woman felt a piercing shockwave crashing on her mental sphere, she was able to resist the mental attack only after a small crack on the wall of her sea of consciousness was created.

She had also closed her eyes while she resisted the Mental tremor spell, a fuming slash was in front of her when she opened them.

In that fraction of an instant before Noah's attack hit her, the woman let go of every restraint and exploded with her full power.

A phoenix began to form in the trajectory of the slash and she used the hammer in her hands to perform a quick but powerful attack.

Noah's slash cut through the half-formed phoenix, the spell wasn't completed yet so it was destroyed quite easily.

However, the yellow flames that made its body consumed part of the power contained in the attack.

Then, the slash clashed with the hammer, the woman lost her balance due to the Death area around her and was flung away, landing on the ground at a few meters of distance.

The woman left the Death area in that last clash but she wasn't able to savor that moment since she realized that the inscriptions on her weapon had been broken, it was only a normal hammer now.

Also, she felt an external force squeezing her heart, blood flowed out of her mouth as her organ was injured again.

Her situation was quite bad: Her mental sphere had a crack, her heart was slightly injured, and the wound on her shoulder had never fully healed.

She was outside the Death area though, she could use her full power now!

The woman quickly stood up, she stared at the winged man with a venomous gaze as she prepared herself to counterattack.

"I would lay down that broken weapon if I was you."

A voice sounded next to her and she turned only to see a man in the solid stage looking at her with a curious gaze.

Only then did she realize that the battles around her had ended, her mental energy swept the battlefield, the pain coming from the crack on her sphere didn't prevent her from realizing that she was the only soldier of the Empire left alive.

The Chasing Demon sect had killed everyone while she was busy fighting Noah!

Twelve rank 3 cultivators surrounded her, a bitter smile appeared on her face when she understood that no reinforcements had arrived.

"Capture her and bring her to the sect, she might have valuable information. I expect a report with our losses in an hour."

Noah ordered before turning toward the raided building and leaving the battlefield under everyone's gaze.

The rank 2 cultivators directly bowed at his passage, they had watched his battle and felt deep admiration even if they didn't completely understand the difference in the cultivation level between him and the woman.

The cultivators in the third rank were different, they knew that Noah was only in the gaseous stage and they were aware of the difference in power between each stage.

They watched Noah with interest, he didn't defeat the woman but he had been able to keep her busy for a few minutes.

That gave the chance to the other captains to quickly defeat the rank 3 soldiers.

Also, the woman was the strongest of them, using a gaseous stage cultivator to isolate her was an incredible accomplishment.

Many of them had never seen Noah before the events concerning the Demon Prince and were doubtful about his actual power.

However, when they saw that he was able to fight solid stage cultivators while being in the gaseous stage, most of those doubts were solved.

Noah was still weak but it was clear how promising he was!

Meanwhile, Noah quickly walked through the corridors of the raided building, looking for a place where to rest.

The truth was that his cold appearance was only a façade, he felt incredibly tired due to the battle that he had just fought.

After all, he had used the Death area for the entire duration of the battle, Warp, Ghostly claws, Black hole, Dark ray, Mental tremor, Ethereal form, and the partial Demonic form!

All those spells were used while fighting a solid stage cultivator and performing his two rank 4 martial arts, it was obvious that his condition wasn't optimal.

Yet, he didn't want the others to see him in his moments of weakness, he wanted to build the image of a prodigy leading the army of demons, he couldn't appear tired in front of them.

'Even with all my methods, I was still unable to kill her.'

Noah thought as he entered a room and sat on the floor.

There was the corpse of one of the rank 2 soldiers of the Empire in the room but Noah didn't mind it, he just wanted to refill his dantian in peace for the time being.

As for his mental sphere, he chose not to use his many potions, their best usage was when he performed the Divine deduction technique so he would rather let his mental energy refill normally after the battle.

An hour passed quickly and the two cultivators in the solid stage in his team appeared at the entrance of the room where he was cultivating.

They had restrained the woman from the Empire and learnt about her injuries, traces of respect could be seen in their eyes as they stared Noah.

"Speak."

Noah ordered without opening his eyes nor interrupting his cultivation.

"We lost fifteen rank 2 cultivators and a captain is heavily wounded. However, we've managed to retrieve all the resources contained here before they were able to destroy it. Also, all the teleportation matrixes have been destroyed, only those of our sect remain on the island."

One of the solid stage cultivators spoke, Noah couldn't help but shake his head when he heard the report.

'How did they even manage to die? They were two hundred against sixty! Divine Demon was right, the sect has too many useless disciples.'

"What about the other islands?"

"All the other teams have completed their missions and isolated the islands, their losses aren't heavy either."

Noah nodded at that report and gestured for the cultivators to leave.

'Six more days to go, six more solid stage cultivators to face.'

In the solitude of the conquered structure, Noah pondered about his next moves.

#### Chapter 424 - 424. Plan

The first part of the elders' plan was simple: The human assets of the sect had to isolate the peripheral islands of the archipelago by destroying the teleportation matrixes on their surface and by defeating the forces belonging to the other organizations.

Without the matrixes, the only route available toward those islands would be the sea but that matter was left to the cultivators in the heroic ranks to handle.

After all, swimming was already prohibited, the other organizations could only ask for the help of the continent.

Yet, the continent was far away while the Chasing Demon sect had been abrupt with its attack, help wouldn't be able to arrive in time.

Nine islands fell on the hands of the Chasing Demon sect during the first day of battle, the organizations belonging to the Empire suffered heavy losses in the process as almost thirty rank 3 cultivators had been killed.

"Today we will target the peripheral islands controlled by the legal organizations of the Papral nation. They have deployed more troops after yesterday's attack so don't expect the battle to be as easy."

Noah spoke to his fellow captains in the residential area for rank 3 cultivators in the sect.

He was assigning the various tasks to each captain and forming the teams to send to each island.

Of course, most of those assignments had already been planned by the elders, there wasn't much decision making in his choices.

One thing he noticed though was that the captains had begun to look at him with strange gazes.

The news of his battle against the solid stage woman wasn't spread to the other organizations but the members of his sect had been informed about that rather quickly, it only took a day for the captains to be aware of his feat.

Some of them were still doubtful, matching a solid stage cultivator with gaseous "Breath" seemed completely impossible in their view.

Yet, they were starting to believe that Noah didn't retrieve the Inheritance out of luck, the young-looking man surrounded by a cold aura had some talent at least.

Of course, having talent and being willingly accepted as a leader were two different things, it would take time before Noah was able to thoroughly convince them that he was worthy of his title.

That, on the other hand, didn't bother Noah too much.

He had already decided to show his battle prowess in the fights, that was all he could do at the moment.

Also, he was one of the few captains that was aware of the reason behind their focus on the peripheral islands.

Those who had reached the seabed in the separate dimension had some suspects but only Noah was certain about their purpose: They had to empty those territories of enemy troops to prepare the archipelago for the copying technique!

The battle of the second day was far harsher.

Most of the peripheral islands of the archipelago were worthless, they were used as docks by the many rank 1 cultivators that worked as sailors or simple merchants.

Yet, there were a few of them which had valuable structures for each organization.

Noah was tasked once again to lead the biggest group in one of those important islands, thirty rank 3 cultivators and more than three hundred disciples in the second rank were with him that time.

The reason behind such a force was that the organizations in the other islands had become wary of any possible attack after the branches of the Empire were destroyed, they had gathered their troops on the islands with valuable structures, leaving completely defenseless the other useless ones.

Their target that day was a deposit where precious materials were stored, that organization of the Papral nation gathered the resources aimed for the wealthy markets, the deposit contained all the resources that had yet to be sorted out.

The defensive formation fell rather quickly, the Chasing Demon sect had its roots on the Papral nation after all, it was experienced about those kinds of formations.

However, Noah's group soon found about twenty cultivators in the third rank waiting for them, the number of soldiers in the second rank reached one hundred and fifty.

Noah once again charged toward the strongest in the enemy group, a cultivator in the solid stage with water aptitude fought him with everything he had but Noah's defense seemed impenetrable.

The Black hole spell protected him from any attack that he couldn't dodge or that was too powerful, allowing him to counterattack using the energy absorbed.

The Ethereal form spell saved him from any close-range attack, the cultivator's sword had never been able to touch his body for the entire duration of the battle.

Also, ethereal claws were constantly hidden inside his attacks, they slowly wounded the cultivator while Noah tried to force an opening in his defense.

The internal wounds of the cultivator began to accumulate and he didn't have a large variety of attacks methods, Noah's flying speed was enough to render most of his offensive useless.

Then, another series of Ghostly claws were hidden behind his Third Form, the surface of the water shield of the cultivator wavered as he spat a mouthful of blood, giving Noah enough time to near him.

A shockwave was sent by his eyes and landed on the mental sphere of the cultivator, the water shield completely collapsed at that point and Noah cut with his sabers toward him.

The cultivator managed to recover at the last second but he was weaker than the woman from the previous day, Noah's fuming slash managed to pierce the reformed water shield and land of the cultivator.

Its trajectory though was slightly affected by the man's spell, Noah's Third Form was only able to hit his elbow, cleanly severing his arm on that point.

The solid stage cultivator became furious at the sight of his severed arm being consumed by the black smoke exuded by Noah's attack, he was about to charge at Noah when three solid stage cultivators surrounded him.

Only then did he realize that the battle around him was over, his side had lost and he was the only survivor.

"Kill him, we don't need to investigate him."



Noah ordered and turned to leave, the curses of the man behind him reached his ears but he couldn't be bothered by them, his complete concentration was on his balance, he was so drained that he was barely able to walk!

#### Chapter 425 - 425. Reasons

Why was Noah able to fight solid stage cultivators even if his dantian was still in the gaseous stage?

There were many reasons.

The most influential ones were his aptitude and the level of his mental sphere.

Noah had always been advantaged when it came to the sea of consciousness, the level of his mind didn't match at all the normal level that gaseous stage cultivators would have, many of them were still rank 2 mages after all.

Also, his element expressed more power than the others, the huge depletion of mental energy and "Breath" was a normal consequence to those more powerful effects.

Then, there was the variety of spells that he had and the rank 3 Demonic swords in the upper tier.

Noah had profited greatly from the Inheritance, especially when it came to his defensive methods: Heilong, the Ethereal form spell, and the Black hole spell were amazing defensive methods that Noah could apply for any different threat, it could be even said that his defense had no flaws now!

In the end, there was his improved martial art with his flying ability.

Heilong was a rank 4 magical beast, its wings were strong enough to make the huge body of a dragon fly!

When they were coupled with a martial art in the fourth rank and with a relatively light body, the speed that Noah was capable of even surpassed that of magical beasts in the same rank.

All these factors allowed him to explode with a burst of power that could match solid stage cultivators for a short time!

His large variety of spells allowed him to fight safely in every situation and to find a flaw in his opponent's defense.

His martial art allowed him to avoid most of his opponent's attacks when he was in the air, making him also able to escape at will.

His new weapons gave him the ability to execute attacks that almost reached the solid stage, making them a threat even for solid stage cultivators.

Of course, that explosive power couldn't be supported for a long time by his centers of power.

His mental sphere wasn't that of a problem, its level was high for a cultivator in the third rank and Noah smartly used spells that mostly required mental energy for their execution to exploit his advantage.

Yet, the "Breath" stored in his dantian simply wasn't enough to fuel all his spells.

The mental sphere set the power of his spells, leading to huge consumptions of "Breath" since his dantian was on a lower level.

That's why, even if his many methods allowed him to obtain some sort of initial advantage against solid stage cultivators, he wasn't able to sustain those fights till their end.

'I went a bit over my limits today... Well, nothing I could do, the organization from the Papral nation was prepared.'

Noah thought as he found an empty room in the raided deposit and sat on the floor.

A simple looking potion appeared in his hands and he directly drank its contents, the potion was quite precious but it was the least precious one in Noah's ring.

The drug increased the quantity of mental energy produced for a short time, Noah needed it to start refilling his dantian immediately.

'Being in the gaseous stage is a bother but I've just reached this stage, I won't be surprised if I was to face the Earth Tribulation before entering the solid stage.'

The amazing sensation of having the fatigue of his mind slowly swept away by the potion gave Noah time to think about his future prospects.

'I might have a clearer picture of the heroic ranks after I become able to see the world behind the layer around the human ranks, I wonder if I should just wait for the breakthrough.'

Noah had made no progress in the creation of a cultivation technique.

It was true that its creation hadn't been his focus in the six months of seclusion before the war, Noah had used the Divine deduction technique only to improve his martial art and to reduce the number of mistakes in the forging of his new weapons.

Yet, it was also true that he didn't have many ideas about it, the cultivation technique from the Inheritance and the one that he found in the inventory of the sect gave him a general idea but he still didn't know how he could affect the "Breath" contained in the matter.

As for what concerned a body-nourishing method, Noah was even more lost.

Methods that improved the body were very different from each other, they didn't need just better "Breath" but also some specific application that would ultimately modify the nature of his body.

For example, Noah had the chance to choose between two rank 4 body-nourishing methods when he was in the academy: The Way of the phantom, which produced effects similar to his current Ethereal form spell, and the Yin body.

He had ultimately chosen the Yin body because he preferred to improve his survivability but the differences between those two methods were clear.

Even the two rank 4 methods that he found in the Inheritance and the one retrieved from the inventory followed that behavior, they used the "Breath" absorbed through the nourishing method to modify the body in specific and different ways, they weren't limited to a simple enlargement or improvement like with the other two centers of power.

Also, Noah didn't want to limit himself to create a method that just improved his body, he wanted something that gave him additional effects like his Yin body.

The additional effects were the sign of a top tier nourishing method after all, Noah wouldn't accept mediocrity when it came to his creations.

"Prince, I have the report of today's battle."

One of the solid stage cultivators in his group appeared at the entrance of the room where he was cultivating, Noah gestured him to speak without opening his eyes.

"We lost a total of forty rank 2 disciples while five of the captains are injured, some of them even heavily. I don't think we will be able to take over so many islands in only one week if we continue like this, even our mighty sect can't face so many organizations at the same time."

The solid stage cultivator spoke politely, there was even some insecurity when he gave voice to his doubts about the current battle plan.

Noah opened his eyes and decided to reveal some information to appease those doubts.

"Don't worry, the other underground organizations will join us from tomorrow onward."

#### Chapter 426 - 426. Orders

The underground organizations were the true rulers of the archipelago and they were simply labeled as Hive by the legal organizations.

Yet, the Hive had many branches as well as a hierarchy.

The Chasing Demon sect was already one of the strongest branches of the Hive before the Chasing Demon had his breakthrough, it could be easily considered the strongest one now that it had a rank 6 entity leading it.

The other ones though weren't weak, especially when the human assets were compared.

The underground organizations had suffered heavier losses than the legal ones in the separate dimension but they could be still considered stronger than them, their heroic assets and the cultivators in the second rank had been unaffected by the trials after all.

Noah wasn't aware of the reasons that led the elders of his sect toward the creation of the battle plan but he knew that they had considered the other underground organizations in it.

On the third day, Noah led again his team to battle.

He had to secure the islands with a valuable geographical position that day, these islands didn't belong to just one organization but their control was shared between the three powerful nations of the continent.

Of course, Noah had been tasked to take care of the most important one.

Yet, even if Noah expected for more than twenty rank 3 cultivators to be in its defense, his group only featured five captains and a few dozens of disciples.

"Are you sure about this? My hallucinogenic abilities can't affect that many of them."

Alison asked as she followed Noah through the narrow streets between the poor-looking buildings, she was aware of the number of soldiers stationed on that island and she couldn't help but have some doubts about the plan.

Noah didn't turn toward her, the smoke of the Demonic form countered the hallucinogenic gas released by Alison's body so he was able to see her real form, he would rather avoid looking at her unless it was necessary.

He didn't need to answer though since a group formed by thirty rank 3 cultivators and more than one hundred rank 2 cultivators appeared in their sight when they reached a small square.

The cultivators wore gray robes and had proud expressions, Noah couldn't help but accept the fact that they really came from the central part of the continent.

They were the members of another underground organization called "Resistance", it was formed by cultivators that had managed to escape from countries conquered by the Shandal Empire in its unceasing expansion.

The Resistance aimed to destroy the Empire and to free all their enslaved companions but the presence of a God, no matter how weak it was compared to other beings in the divine ranks, was enough to put a stop to that dream.

The countries near the Empire had benefitted from how freely techniques and nourishing methods were handed by the Empire, giving birth to many strong cultivators.

Yet, they had still been unable to defend themselves when they were attacked, the majority of the cultivators that had survived the war were enslaved but some of them had managed to escape in the archipelago, forming one of the branches of the Hive.

The Resistance was quite strong in the archipelago, it was considered a match of the Chasing Demon sect in terms of power.

Of course, that was before the Chasing Demon reached the sixth rank but this news seemed to be known only to few people.

One of the members of the Resistance stood up and neared Noah's group, he was an elderly man with white long hair and a long beard of the same color but that had its ends tied together with a red ribbon.

He directed his gaze toward Alison and bowed slightly before speaking.

"I'm Willis, I'm the leader here. I wanted to make sure of a few things before helping your sect in the conquest."

Alison smiled when the man gave her attentions but she quickly returned to reality and coughed before pointing at Noah with her gaze.

Willis was confused, he had gone to the cultivator with the highest level in the team but she had actually indicated the weakest one instead of answering!

"Are you already thinking about retreating? I didn't expect that from someone trying to dethrone a God."

Noah shook his head as he spoke, his inscribed notebook appeared in his hands and he swept through its pages, preparing himself to send a mental message.

Willis didn't like Noah's tone but he had orders too, he politely bowed toward Noah before explaining the meaning behind his previous words.

"No one spoke about retreat. I just wanted to make sure that your sect will keep its part of the deal."

Noah shot an uncaring gaze toward Willis before continuing on his way, he spoke as he surpassed him, waving his notebook in the process.

"What's the point of asking? We in the human ranks have no part in these decisions. I have orders and so do you, I will simply contact another organization if yours isn't willing to help in the conquest of the archipelago."

The others from the Chasing Demon sect began to follow Noah as soon as he moved but Willis stood still, slowly processing his words.

Noah was right, he had orders by the higher-ups of the Rebellion, his questions were simply the personal doubts of a curious and cautious man.

Yet, he didn't expect such a resolute behavior from a cultivator in the gaseous stage, he was beginning to understand that Noah wasn't in charge because of some sort of social status.

That was further proved after he followed Noah with his group and fought the battle near the teleportation matrixes of the island, the legal organizations had understood by then that those formations were being targeted.

The soldiers were set on protecting them but they didn't expect Noah to suddenly warp inside their formation and launch a barrage of Instabilities before hiding inside Heilong's body and warp away.

The chaos of the battle didn't allow them to keep track of every cultivator and they didn't expect someone in the gaseous stage to have that amount of firepower.

However, that ended up being a fatal mistake!



Without the matrixes, the soldiers from the legal organizations couldn't be provided with reinforces and were crushed by the joint force of two underground organizations.

The battles on the other islands were a success too, the third day ended with another series of peripheral islands falling on the hands of the Chasing Demon sect.

Also, differently from the previous days, Noah's feats began to spread.

#### Chapter 427 - 427. Castle

When conquering and isolating an island, rumors would be kept inside the Chasing Demon sect, they couldn't reach the other organizations.

Yet, the sect had received the help of the Resistance on the third day, it was impossible to contain some of the most amazing matters a secret.

One of those was the fact that the Chasing Demon sect controlled and had isolated more than thirty peripheral islands by then, that matter wasn't a huge blow to the main branches of the legal organizations but it would surely affect them in the long-run.

The other one concerned Noah.

A rank 3 cultivator in the gaseous stage able to fight against solid stage cultivators wasn't a small matter, some of the witnesses to his battles still suspected that he couldn't maintain that power for too long but that didn't decrease the value of such a feat!

Also, Noah seemed in charge in the eyes of the cultivators belonging to the Resistance, that alone was already enough to raise his status.

It didn't take much for those pieces of information to spread to the other underground organizations, completely freeing the archipelago from the continent's control was something that the Hive had always hoped for but never had the strength to pursue.

However, the Chasing Demon sect had taken the first step and even managed to be successful in those initial days of battle, many began to suspect that the Inheritance had fallen in its hands.

That led to many other branches of the Hive to come out in the open and join the fight, the precise terms of the alliance between those underground organizations were negotiated by the elders, the assets in the human ranks simply saw more and more cultivators helping them as the battle continued.

Days passed quickly, the circle of siege and rest didn't give much free time to the cultivators but any successful battle provided incredible gains.

It wasn't just a matter of territory, a vast stream of resources was successfully stolen from the legal organizations and divided between the branches of the Hive that had taken part in those battles.

Of course, the Chasing Demon sect took the biggest share since they had started that war.

The battle on the seventh day ended, more than eighty rank 3 cultivators together with an army of cultivators in the second rank successfully conquered an inscribed castle that was created for defense purposes.

The battle had been harsh, the formations on the surface of the castle were intricate and the structure contained deep reserves of Credits, making it able to sustain the siege for a long time.

Yet, that huge number of strong cultivators, coupled with the joint pieces of information shared by the organization from which they came from, was enough to take the defenses of the castle down.

After the defenses went down, it was just a matter of overwhelming the few soldiers inside with their numbers, it was a simple and quick onslaught.

Many casualties occurred on the unorthodox organizations' side though, especially when considering the rank 2 cultivators that had been used as cannon fodder.

Noah read the reports as he sat on the battlefield surrounded by his troops, he didn't provide much help that day since the only way to take down the castle was through sheer power so he didn't need to hide and rest.

'Almost two hundred rank 2 cultivators lost and even one in the third rank has died, we definitely need to reorganize after today.'

Noah thought as he analyzed the losses suffered from his sect.

The battle against the inscribed castle had been the harsher one so far, many rank 3 cultivators had died under the counterattacks of the defensive formation or due to the attacks launched by the soldiers in its insides.

All in all, the Chasing Demon sect had suffered more losses than the other underground organizations: The sect had fought for seven days straight, deploying its human assets in many different islands to maximize the conquest speed.

Yet, that approach wasn't fruitless.

The sect now controlled more than fifty islands and had pillaged the valuable resources contained in them.

That type of control wasn't the hidden one that it was used to have, it was a proper rule over the islands, the captains stationed there were quite thrilled to openly rule on the surface.

'Together with the other underground organizations, the Hive now controls more than ninety peripheral islands, we can completely isolate the archipelago now. The legal organizations shouldn't attack too soon, their cautious nature

will make them wait for the reinforcements from the continent which should give enough time for part of the copying technique to be set.'

Noah reviewed the situation in his mind.

He knew more details about the reasons behind the battle plan and knew why his next orders were to defend the conquered islands.

'I guess I can resume training for a period now. The sect wants me to stay on the surface and defend this castle once they set another defensive formation, I'll ask to prepare a suitable training room inside it then.'

Noah planned his next moves and was quite eager to go back in seclusion, he still had the strongest spells to analyze and he wanted to spend some time deducing cultivation techniques with the Divine deduction technique.

He quickly sent mental messages to Kate, the leader of the formations' faction, in which he illustrated the precise standards that his new training area must have.

Many gazes were shot in his direction, Noah was still on the battlefield after all, the forces belonging to other underground organizations paid a lot of attention to the sect that had started the war.

Of course, that attention was ultimately redirected toward Noah since he was the one leading the troops of the sect.

His identity had long been linked to that of Noah Balvan, he had fought for four days together with other organizations after all, it wasn't hard to link him to the criminal of the Utra nation when his aptitude was revealed.

Also, his exceptional battle prowess was something that further publicized his name, almost every member of the Hive was aware that Noah Balvan was in charge of the human assets of the Chasing Demon sect.

'I wonder who the Utra nation will send from the continent, I wouldn't be surprised if they learnt about me and were to use this information to their advantage.'

Noah worried as he stood up and led his troops inside the castle which was going to be his home for a while.

#### Chapter 428 - 428. Battle prowess

Noah's worries weren't groundless.

His identity and some of his abilities had been revealed to the other underground organizations, it could be said that the information about him was mainstream by now.

It couldn't be helped, he was in charge of the human assets of the organization that had started the attack on the archipelago, it was impossible to remain unknown.

Yet, Noah wouldn't worry too much if that information was contained among the underground organization but he had little hope about that.

Not all the branches of the Hive had joined his sect in the war, many still wanted to maintain peace and continue to slowly increase their power by doing secret deals with the legal organizations.

Because information was a valuable currency, Noah felt quite sure that the legal organizations were already aware of him.

'Even if the Utra nation was to send stronger reinforcements because of our personal grudges, there isn't much that I can do. Becoming stronger is always my only available path.'

Noah thought as he deduced inside his training room in the inscribed castle.

The Chasing Demon sect had quickly built an area that met his standards, Noah was actually surprised to discover that it had taken it so little to create

something similar to the training area where he had secluded himself in the six months before the beginning of the war.

The density of "Breath" and the pressure on his mental sphere didn't match it of course, but Noah was still satisfied with the result.

As for his worries, Noah didn't think that the Empire would invest too much in his capture.

After all, he was only a troublemaker that had hindered the events in their training ground for a few years, the Empire had its wars to take care of, it wouldn't chase Noah till the archipelago just for that.

Yet, his ties with the Utra nation were far more personal.

Noah was sure that the Balvan family would never let him go, he had undermined its future prospects by killing three heirs and vanquishing some promising soldiers, he was sure that he was on top of its wanted list.

However, due to the system applied in the Utra nation, noble families rarely had soldiers in the heroic ranks, all the resources and techniques on that level were available only for nobles and trustworthy subjects.

That's why Noah didn't fear his family, he was simply too far away, the Balvan family would just further weaken its position if it was to send powerful soldiers after him.

What worried him was the Elbas family.

Noah didn't directly hurt it, it could be said that he had a worse relationship with the Empire in that sense.

Yet, he was aware of too many secrets.

The Royal Inheritance, the creation of a secret army made of criminals, these pieces of information could single-handedly start a war between the families loyal to the Royals and those loyal to the Cause.

Also, Noah had escaped their control, that feat was a stain on Thaddeus' honor.

That's why he was quite sure that there would be stronger reinforcements from the Utra nation.

'Well, I have to defend this position anyway, I can't go anywhere else for now.'

Noah sighed as he thought about that before drinking a potion to refill his mental energy.

The Divine deduction technique allowed Noah to save hours of thinking, even days, it was an enormous help in analyzing diagrams and mistakes in his forgings.

Yet, it needed huge quantities of mental energy to be activated, Noah constantly requested potions and used his stash of drugs to keep using it.

His deductions at that time concerned his battle prowess and how to increase it quickly.

The Shadow sprint art seemed to have reached its limits, fusing four rank 0 spells was the best that Noah could think of with his current level, he would need to use diagrams of stronger spells or have access to more powerful energies if he wanted to further improve it.

The Three Forms of the Ashura was the same, Noah had mastered it but he wasn't able to modify it without creating flaws in those already perfected forms.

His deductions led him to two options at that point.

The first one was to master a secret art but Noah soon discarded it.

Secret arts could make a cultivator able to push a center of power over its limits but Noah's strongest point had always been the sea of consciousness

and his large variety of spells already expressed enough power in his opinion, he was able to fight solid stage cultivators thanks to that after all.

The second one was to create another martial art.

Yet, that option led to another problem: What would this new martial art even do?

Shadow sprint, Warp, and Heilong covered Noah's movement, they were perfect for any situation and Noah could freely choose the one to use according to his opponent.

His many spells, his Demonic swords, the Three Forms of the Ashura, and his explosive creations covered Noah's offensive, he wasn't that deadly against solid stage cultivators but that was caused by his low cultivation level, he had far too many attack methods.

His defense was almost impenetrable with the Black hole spell, the Ethereal form spell, and Heilong, adding some other method would just conflict with the previous ones.

These analyses and deductions were made in a single afternoon where Noah pondered about ways to further improve his battle prowess.

The only conclusion he could reach was nothing!

'Maybe I'm just too greedy for wanting to push my battle prowess even more without improving my centers of power, it might be possible that I've reached the maximum strength that a gaseous stage cultivator is capable of.'

That thought lingered for a while in Noah's mind, he sighed when he decided to give up in finding quick ways to become stronger, only the slow ones seemed to be left.

'I can either study rank 1 diagrams and try to extrapolate the effects that I need or begin the work on my cultivation techniques and nourishing methods.'



All those processes that Noah had thought of would take him a long time and days of deductions, meaning that Noah wouldn't be able to become stronger than he was in the short term.

'I don't see the point on studying diagrams, I can't have better offensive and defensive methods than those that I already have. I have less experience in body-nourishing methods so it would take longer to create something worthy to be trained. I guess I don't have other choices, I need to start the experimentation for my cultivation technique.'

As he decided, his eyes went on the "Breath" blessing under him, his cold gaze shown some uncertainty as he stared at the blue mineral.

#### Chapter 429 - 429. Cultivation technique

Noah had some sort of inspiration after his continue deductions and a week of battles.

He was aware that his inscription method wasn't suited for the creation of diagrams and techniques but it was amazing at creating items.

He didn't know yet how he would solve that issue in the future, spells needed diagrams after all, he wasn't ready to give up on their creations.

Yet, he knew that, for now, if he wanted to create a cultivation technique, he had to forge an item.

The inspiration came after his repeated use of the Black hole spell in battle, that spell was able to absorb enemy's attacks, destroy them, and direct the energy contained in them in the body of the cultivator who could use it in its next attack.

'A black hole is an unthinkable amount of mass concentrated in a small space, it is even able to curve the light due to its immense gravity... That might be the right path to follow to create a cultivation technique.'

Noah reviewed the little information that he remembered about a black hole in his mind, he felt strange to realize that his cultivation techniques had a similar aspect to that astronomical object.

The rank 2 Dark vortex technique created a black vortex that totally resembled a black hole and the rank 4 Dark convergence created a sphere around his dantian with even more resemblance.

'It should be something mine though and not a modified copy, the Elemental forging method is the only path.'

Noah's deductions ultimately led him to the "Breath" blessing, that miraculous mineral was able to attract "Breath" but it didn't have any absorbing capabilities.

'I might not need any other material, I don't think there is something that matches my needs after all. The "Breath" blessing could be the core of the item that will allow me to cultivate in the heroic ranks!'

An item that worked as a cultivation technique, that was Noah's solution.

'I would need to add an absorption ability and limit it to the darkness element but that's not the main issue. The real problem is that the item would need to be in the heroic ranks.'

To absorb "Breath" suitable for the heroic ranks, an item in the heroic ranks was needed, that was only logical.

'How big the mineral must be though? Even the boulder in the Royal Inheritance was only suitable for the human ranks! Yet, the bigger it is, the stronger its suction force will be once I compress it.'

Noah's idea was quite simple.

He needed to find a "Breath" blessing big enough to affect the "Breath" inside the matter, compress it, and add a function that allowed it to absorb "Breath" of the darkness element through the Elemental forging method.

Ideally, the item created in that way would have an extremely small size and absorb "Breath" of the darkness element continuously, Noah would just have to insert the item in the dantian to cultivate autonomously all the time.

However, there were many problems linked to that project.

First of all, he wasn't able to create rank 4 inscribed items yet, his new Demonic swords had barely reached the upper tier of the third rank and most of that was thanks to his experience in their structure and the quality of the dragon' corpses in the Inheritance.

Second, that continuous training would put his dantian under heavy stress.

There was also the issue of the Credits needed to purchase enough minerals with which test the technique but Noah didn't feel as if it would be a problem.

He had eighty million Credits and the complete support of his sect, he couldn't think of something that he couldn't buy.

Yet, before requesting for the minerals, he had to make sure that he could modify them to match his needs.

A white saber appeared in his hands, Noah swiftly slashed at the "Breath" blessing under him and cut away a small corner of the cube.

Then his mental sphere quickly imbued the unrefined gaseous "Breath" inside it with a meaning that Noah had created without much thinking.

Following the procedures of the Elemental forging method, Noah controlled the now refined "Breath" and fused it with the severed corner of the mineral.

Noah tried to modify the mineral according to the Dark convergence technique but hoping to limit its effects to the darkness element.

It was needless to say that his first attempt failed, the small piece of "Breath" blessing crumbled when Noah tried to modify its internal composition.

'I guess I can only deduce and try again later, I can't hope to succeed so soon after all.'

Thinking that, Noah used again the Divine deduction technique to evaluate the many approaches to his new creation.

Time passed slowly on the archipelago.

The underground organization had suddenly revealed themselves on the surface and conquered all the peripheral islands, the legal organizations felt surrounded in the internal islands where their headquarters were.

They didn't have the power to break through the blockage, the legal organizations there were under the orders of the continent after all, there was a limit to how much they could cooperate.

Also, they had no reason to force the blockage, they had already notified their nations on the continent, they just had to wait for reinforcements to arrive.

The Coral archipelago was at some distance from the continent, a couple of months were needed to traverse the sea.

The closest big nation was the Shandal Empire but the many wars fought on the countries near it delayed the dispatch of reinforcements.

The Papral nation and the Utra nation were a bit more far away and they too had some reserves about the matters in the archipelago.

The situation on the continents wasn't exactly easy, the balance of the three big nations had to be kept, none of them wanted to be the first to send reinforcements.

Nevertheless, unaware to most noble families, a ship still sailed from the shores of the Utra nation on the direction of the archipelago.

On the main deck of the inscribed ship, two young-looking cultivators, a man and a woman, could be seen staring in the distance.

If Noah was there, he would be able to recognize both of them.

The man was Errol, the tall youth that had been part of Noah's team during the exploration of the Royal Inheritance.

The woman was Ruth Eeggi, the red-haired girl that Thaddeus had picked as his disciple.

#### Chapter 430 - 430. Criminals

"What do you feel?"

Errol asked Ruth, she had always had an exceptionally keen perception of the meaning behind the "Breath" in the air.

That gave her the ability to predict some dangers and even to understand part of their nature, as well as making her extremely talented in the Attunement method.

"I feel as if a wall has been raised around the archipelago. The sea is dangerous, the islands are the same, I think Master has overestimated our power."

Ruth spoke as her pupils shrank when she looked at the horizon, in the direction of the Coral archipelago.

Thaddeus had instructed for her and Errol to lead the reinforcements sent to aid the branch of the academy on the archipelago but they were far weaker than the rest of their group.

Errol and Ruth were simple rank 2 cultivators and only Errol had reached the solid stage, Ruth was still in the liquid one due to her focus on the study of the Attunement method.

"We have fifty rank 3 cultivators who are forced to follow our orders, do you really think that we won't be able to restore a connection with the continent with this force?"

Errol doubted Ruth's words, he was aware that the battle happening on the archipelago was above their level but Thaddeus had sent a small army of cultivators at the peak of the human ranks to accompany them.

Also, their mission only required them to reclaim one island and restore the teleportation matrixes, Errol felt that their power was far more than enough for that task.

It must be said that the political situation on the archipelago wasn't clear to the people of the continent, most of them believed that the legal organizations were in charge, just as the Hive wanted.

"Hmph, we have fifty criminals who are forced by Master's bindings to follow our orders, they'll flee as soon as the battle becomes harsh."

Ruth snorted and replied Errol.

The fifty cultivators that made their force were criminals turned into troops by Thaddeus' branch of the Royal family, just like those sent in the assassination of Samuel Muwlos.

Errol didn't answer her, he knew that she was right but he still thought that they would be able to complete their task.

An image appeared in his mind then, it depicted a young man with long black hair and a cold gaze.

His expression turned to one of sorrow when he thought about the man with whom he had surpassed the trials in the Royal Inheritance.

Noah's identity had been revealed years ago, the information about his crimes was common knowledge in the Utra nation.

Also, some of his feats in his escape had reached the nation, it was when Thaddeus became aware that Noah was a member of the Hive that he decided to send that ship.

"D-do you think that everything we heard about him is true?"

Errol spoke and Ruth immediately understood who he was referring to.

There was another reason behind reclaiming a peripheral island which was gathering information about Noah!

"Vance, no, Noah is a criminal. He has betrayed his family, his master, and the Royal dynasty, our orders are to capture and not kill just because we have to make sure that he didn't share the information about the Royal Inheritance with anyone."

Ruth spoke with a cold tone.

She was aware of the Royal Inheritance, she was Thaddeus' personal disciple after all and her family had greatly benefitted from her position.

Errol sighed when he heard those words, he had always been softer than his fellow students, he was what was generally considered a good person.

"How many years have passed? You and June have moved your respective families near Elbas city and obtained important positions, I've become a captain in the Royal army, Daniel is in charge of a section of the alchemy facility, and Vance..."

Errol stopped speaking, suppressing his memories, he longed for the time when they were simple students, away from all these political struggles.

"Oh, right. You were supposed to convince June to join us, what happened?"

He asked when he remembered that detail.

Ruth answered after lowering her gaze and reviewing the conversation that she had with that wild woman in her mind.

"She said that she liked to be alive."

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Noah continued to cultivate in his training room inside the inscribed castle.

His attempts to modify the "Breath" blessing had always ended in failures, the mineral persisted on breaking apart no matter how many times he deduced his mistakes with Divine Demon's technique.

Yet, his centers of power were improving steadily at least.

Cultivating with a rank 4 cultivation technique and training with the Kesier rune in an environment extremely suited for both mind and dantian made his seclusion quite profitable.

Noah would never diminish his cultivation speed for the sake of his experiments, he knew that the centers of power were the foundation of the strength of a cultivator.

That's why Noah wasn't able to defeat solid stage cultivators but just match their power for a short amount of time, his dantian simply couldn't sustain such harsh battles for long periods.

Also, he didn't feel hurried about creating a cultivation technique.

Noah knew that his mind would most likely reach the fourth rank before his dantian neared the solid stage, he could redirect the majority of his focus on the creation of techniques and nourishing-methods after that breakthrough.



The Divine deduction technique consumed mental energy, a higher quality of mental energy would produce better results.

Apart from Divine Demon's technique, a rank 4 sea of consciousness would improve his mental capabilities in ways that Noah couldn't even begin to imagine.

Those were the heroic ranks after all, Noah was certain that once he reached that level, creating a technique would be far easier.

Months passed on the archipelago, the battles had suddenly ceased, leaving the legal organizations in a tense mood.

They couldn't understand why the Hive would stop its campaign after taking control of the least valuable islands in the archipelago, the underground organizations couldn't have possibly ruled in secret for so many years only to reveal themselves to momentarily isolate the archipelago.

They knew it could only be a momentary conquest because they had the support of the continent, the latter couldn't just let the entire archipelago be isolated for too much time.

It was a few months after Noah was stationed on the surface that he received a mental message from Roy.

The message spoke simple words but the orders behind them were clear, Noah was the leader of the human assets after all.

"My mother discovered a ship coming from the Utra nation, it will reach island two hundred and seven in a couple of weeks and it seems to have a decent number of rank 3 cultivators. You can take care of the battle plan."