

Chapter 431 - 431. Monster

Roy's message contained detailed information about the force inside the ship.

The Chasing Demon sect was busy setting the copying technique around the archipelago, it was obvious that they would have heroic rank cultivators investigating its borders.

With the human assets occupying the peripheral islands and the heroic ones protecting them from any threat that surpassed their level, the Chasing Demon could completely focus on the technique left by his master.

At least, that was what Noah could deduce.

He wasn't exactly aware of those matters, he had just supposed that those events were taking place while he defended the islands.

After all, he couldn't ask for confirmation to the elders but the battle plan seemed perfect for what he had guessed.

The fact that Elder Iris or someone else in the heroic ranks was watching over the borders of the archipelago was another confirmation to Noah's hypothesis, the sect was securing the borders before moving toward the internal islands.

'Fifty cultivators in the third rank, I would need to ask the other underground organizations' help if I want to contain the losses of the sect.'

Noah thought as he pondered about the incoming battle but there was one detail that didn't fit the power contained in the ship

'What's the point of having two rank 2 cultivators among so many powerful troops?'

The elder of the sect that had spotted the ship didn't describe the facial features of the invaders, only their cultivation level.

However, Noah knew how the Utra nation acted, the noble families were unwilling to see their power diminish, those powerful soldiers had to come from the human assets of the Royal dynasty.

'Judging from my current experience, I'd say that the entirety of the Royal family has at least six hundred rank 3 cultivators between the Royal army and the Royals, probably more. Taking the entirety of the archipelago isn't a problem if they were to use their full strength but this can be said for the other two big nations too.'

Noah thought.

He had only been a lone rank 2 cultivator with no experience when he was in the Utra nation, he couldn't understand the power that each noble family held.

Yet, after seeing so many organizations and countries, he could understand many things that concerned the human matters.

In his opinion, the Chasing Demon sect's power surpassed that of a large-size noble family of the Utra nation, his sect had been one of the strongest organizations in the archipelago for many years, long periods of peace and the constant accumulation of resources given by its position made it grow in ways that the nobles families couldn't hope to do.

Nevertheless, the Royal family was the ruler of a powerful nation, the Royals had accumulated wealth from an entire country for two thousand years, they had to be at least three times stronger than Noah's sect.

That strength though had to be used to maintain control over the Utra nation, it couldn't be used for overseas campaigns recklessly.

Also, those two rank 2 cultivators were suspicious, they didn't make any sense among those troops.

'If this force is what I think it is, then there is a better approach to their invasion...'

As he thought of that, Noah sent a detailed mental message through his inscribed notebook.

Two weeks passed quickly.

On island two hundred and seven, an inscribed ship arrived and fifty-two figures quickly jumped on the shore.

The sight was quite peculiar, two rank 2 cultivators were wearing golden clothes and were followed by fifty hooded rank 3 cultivators.

Errol and Ruth inspected the area before turning toward the cultivators behind them.

They immediately understood the meaning behind that gesture and a few of them left the group to inspect the seemingly desolate islands with their stronger minds.

Island two hundred and seven was one of the poorest islands of the archipelago, only a couple of rank 3 cultivators would be deployed there in its defense during normal times.

Of course, they would be accompanied by a decent number of rank 2 cultivators but, at that moment, the group from the Utra nation could barely sense any trace of life.

Then, faint steps resounded in the distance, the group from the Utra nation turned in that direction only to see a rank 3 cultivator with cold eyes walking toward them.

At once, Ruth and Errol's eyes widened in surprise.

They knew that Noah was in the archipelago but the details about his cultivation level were conflicting.

Once his identity as the Hooded devil had been confirmed, they were sure that he had to be at least in the liquid stage of the second rank.

Yet, what had appeared in front of them was a cultivator in the third rank.

"Twenty-eight years, rank 3 cultivator, he is still a monster."

Errol commented softly when he saw Noah's nearing his group, he couldn't help but think loudly when he realized how much he had grown.

His surprise though would even increase if he was to know that Noah had been at that level for one year already!

"I see that Thaddeus didn't give up to the idea of forming a secret army, I don't see the point of sending you two along though."

Noah spoke, his uncaring tone didn't match the dangerous situation.

Ruth wasn't overwhelmed by feelings like Errol, she could immediately understand that something was wrong.

She wasn't surprised that the Hive was aware of their arrival, she had never hoped to reach the islands unnoticed but the underground organizations of the archipelago had never dared to oppose the troops of the continent for fear of the repercussions of the big nations.

Yet, their main target had appeared in front of them alone, it was obvious that there was some kind of trap waiting for them.

"Vance, come back with us. You know too much, we are the last warning before the Royal family sends heroic ranks cultivators after you. You can't hope to escape them."

Errol spoke, it was clear from his tone that he still cared about the companion with whom he had cleared the trials in the Royal Inheritance, his position in the Royal army was mostly due to what Noah had managed to save in there.

"You are not the last but the first warning, the truth is that the Royals weren't aware of my position until now. Also, my name is Noah, I thought you would be aware of that by now."

Noah shrugged his shoulders as he answered, the threat of cultivators in the heroic ranks going after him didn't seem to bother him at all.

"Then, Noah Balvan, are you ready to be captured and brought back home to answer for your crimes?"

Ruth took a step forward as she spoke those words, her hand was raised, ready to give the signal to the troops behind her to attack.

Chapter 432 - 432. Elder

Noah stared Ruth, she was only a naïve kid when he saved her in the entrance test.

Now, she was threatening him with a force that surpassed the human assets of the weaker organizations in the archipelago, he couldn't help but sigh when he realized how much time had passed.

However, his gaze didn't linger on her for too long, it quickly went on the hooded criminals behind her.

"Tell me, would you like to be freed?"

Noah's words resounded on the shore, confused expressions appeared on the criminals.

Noah couldn't see their faces but he knew that his words caused the desired effect.

After all, he was once like them, a criminal forced to do the dirty work for the Royal family to obtain cultivation resources.

Yet, he also knew that their situation was different from his, Noah didn't swear any oath back then due to the Royal Inheritance but those cultivators were most likely bound by some restriction.

There would be no reason to send two rank 2 cultivators to lead them otherwise, Noah was sure that they had sealed a pact with the Royals.

"What are you even saying? Do you think that someone like you would be able to break Master's oath?"

Ruth spoke, confirming Noah's hypothesis as her eyes sharpened.

That situation was simply too strange, she didn't have a good feeling about it.

Noah had come alone, there had to be some sort of trap laid somewhere!

Though, she would have never expected the trap to come from the sky.

The air suddenly seemed to freeze, the waves crashing on the shore seemed to soften their assault on the land.

A figure descended at a slow pace from the sky.

It was impossible to miss the arrival of that cultivator, the world itself seemed wary of its presence!

Ruth and her group stared at the man descending from the sky in fear, his piercing green eyes were fixed on them as his long gray hair fluttered in the wind.

He wore a simple black robe with large sleeves, the cultivator had the aspect of a middle-aged man but his skin radiated a light of its own.

The man's gaze then went on the young-looking man bowing in his direction, Noah had promptly made that polite gesture to welcome the heroic rank cultivator.

"Your request is feasible, their oaths weren't made to resist against heroic ranks cultivator."

Noah didn't raise his head, he just limited himself to speak a few words.

"Please, Elder."

The elder was expressionless, it was as if he was going out for a walk instead of facing fifty rank 3 cultivators.

He took an orb from his space-ring and injected his "Breath" inside it.

The orb began to shine, its light illuminated Ruth's group, making golden runes appear on the bodies of the criminals.

The runes flickered, they seemed to suffer under the orb's light but there wasn't much that they could do.

The runes slowly began to break apart, turning into golden dust that was then swept away by the wind.

The process wasn't painless for the criminals.

They either fell on the ground or puked blood as the light destroyed every trace of the oaths that they had with the Royal family, their destruction naturally caused a backlash to happen in their bodies.

The light thoroughly erased the oaths before the orb stopped shining and the elder stored it back in his ring.

"Many thanks, Elder."

Noah had his head still lowered as he spoke, he had never raised it for the whole process.

He had asked for the help of a heroic rank cultivator from his sect to deal with that matter but he didn't know how well his request was received.

He didn't know if the elder was pissed because he had been asked to deal with a human matter, he would rather play it safe until he was gone.

The elder though didn't seem to mind him at all, he simply left after Noah spoke, disappearing in the sky after he took a single step.

Only then did Noah raise his head, he sighed internally when he understood that his plan had succeeded.

His gaze went back on the group from the Utra nation, Ruth and Errol had scared expression as they watched the hooded figures behind them on the ground and injured.

Removing an oath was a dangerous procedure, it was normal for them to have suffered some relatively heavy injury.

"Move."

Ruth heard Noah's voice behind her back, she turned only to see a pair of icy eyes fixed on her at a short distance.

Her cultivation level was too low, she could only lower her head and make a path when Noah ordered her.

Noah neared the group of criminals and made a speech when he was sure that each one of them was listening.

"I removed the oaths binding you to the Royal family, you are now free to act as you want."

Noah felt a series of gazes landing on him, he knew that he was being probed by the criminals.

"Yet, you are still wanted. I know that all of you are aware of the struggles of lone cultivators, the backing of a powerful organization is necessary to reach the heroic ranks, talent alone can't open that path."

The gazes stopped probing his power and softened a bit, the criminals were starting to understand the meaning behind Noah's words.

"You probably know me, I was once used like you to do the dirty work for the Royals because I lacked the resources needed to pursue power. Now, though, I can ask for the help of heroic cultivators from my organization. I don't want to kill nor force you, your power is valuable for my organization at this point in time. Join me and I promise that your growth will never be hindered."

Noah stopped speaking and waited for their reaction.

He wasn't scared that they would attack him, they had just seen an elder helping him with some human matters after all.

Also, his words were on point.

In the Utra nation, most cultivators in the human ranks knew Noah, especially those that lacked a noble bloodline.

Noah was a bastard who had managed to escape the restrictions not only of his family but also of the leaders of the nation!

Such a character was admired by those that suffered from the same fate, they wanted to be like him and simply escape where their talent wouldn't be restricted.

They would have never imagined that Noah Balvan would be the one offering them that chance.

Noah was clearly a rank 3 cultivator, he couldn't have possibly been restricted during his cultivation journey to reach that level so soon.

Little by little, the criminals gathered their strength and stood up, one by one, they began to bow toward Noah.

Noah watched the scene with cold eyes, seeing fifty rank 3 cultivators bowing toward him didn't give him any happiness or joy, he was simply glad that his plan had succeeded.

'I guess they recognized the importance of having a sturdier foundation...'

Noah thought but he wasn't referring to the criminals in front of him, his mind was on the elders of his sect.

'When a heroic rank cultivator joins the battlefield, all the human assets become powerless. Such a difference of power, and to think that there are even elites among them.'

Fifty rank 3 cultivators were enough to deal a huge blow to the sect's foundation, especially after being weakened by the separate dimension and pursuing the conquest of the archipelago.

Yet, as soon as an elder arrived, those fifty cultivators were dealt with in the best possible way: By making them switch faction!

Noah believed that, if the current situation of the sect wasn't so frail, the elders would have never accepted his request.

However, due to the lack of manpower and the campaign, they had ultimately agreed to help him.

After all, the elders were busy controlling the perimeter of the archipelago, they had to leave the human matters to Noah.

Also, the criminals from the Utra nation were different from the captains of the sect.

They had high battle prowess due to their status but they lacked the resources and technique to fully express their potential, that was the curse of the lone cultivators.

Adding their numbers to the sect would boost its power by a large margin and create a more stable foundation, they would also alleviate the losses suffered in the dimension.

'Maybe, the elders were willing to help me out because I didn't request them to fight.'

Noah evaluated that possibility too.

Heroic ranks cultivators had their pride, they wouldn't easily be ordered around and used as pawns.

Asking them to deal with the invaders would have been simply too unrespectful but Noah had only requested them to deal with the oaths, he wasn't in danger after all, his terms with Chasing Demon didn't cover that situation.

As for the elites among those in the heroic ranks, Noah was referring to those that had already created their cultivation techniques.

Seeing how powerful the elder was made him even more determined to embark on his own path before reaching the fourth rank, he wouldn't willingly choose a road that led to weaker results!

An inscribed notebook appeared in his hands, Noah sent a simple message to Roy before speaking to the bowing crowd.

"An elder is waiting for you on the other side of the island, he will take care of your recruitment. I'll deal with these two."

The criminals raised their heads and felt a bit hesitant when they heard the word "elder", they couldn't possibly know that Noah was speaking of a human cultivator.

Yet, they quickly accepted those orders and left the shore, uncaring of Ruth's loud pleads.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"The Royal dynasty won't let you go!"

"I'll forget what has happened if you come back now!"

Ruth's desperate pleas couldn't affect the criminals and she helplessly watched as they left the shore.

They had just been freed from the control of the Royals and were offered an opportunity that even the renown criminal Noah Balvan had accepted, there was no chance that they would go back to the Utra nation now.

Errol was silent, he had lost any hope after the elder showed himself and was simply waiting for Noah to decide his fate.

He and Ruth were only rank 2 cultivators while Noah was in the third rank and had the backing of an entire organization, they were completely in his grasp.

"Normally, I would just kill both of you, I don't really like to see entitled cultivators whose only merit comes from their birthright. You are just a waste of cultivation resources."

Noah spoke coldly, his gaze was on Ruth, she had been nurtured because of her talent in the attunement method but she didn't accumulate any other merit.

Errol was different, he had fought side by side with Noah in the Royal Inheritance, Noah knew that he was more similar to him than to other nobles.

"Yet, I have a message for Thaddeus and the Royals in general."

Errol saw hope for the first time when Noah gave voice to those words, he had hope to escape from that situation alive!

"Who do you think you are? What can you possibly say to Mast-"

Ruth began to complain, she had less real-life experience than Errol and she had never suffered such a loss before, her mental state didn't allow her to understand that she was completely powerless in that situation.

Her words, though, were interrupted by Noah's slap, blood came out of her mouth as a few teeth flew away.

Then, Noah walked toward her and grabbed her hair, raising her in the air as his mental sphere suppressed her mind.

"You must tell the Royals that if they ever were to come after me, not only the Shandal Empire, but all the nations near the Nerere country would be notified about the Royal Inheritance."

Ruth's expression froze when she heard that, the information about the Royal Inheritance was exactly the reason behind their mission.

Yet, Noah directly used that information to his advantage, threatening to disclose it to all the enemies of the Utra nation.

Noah saw that change in her expression and nodded internally, he knew that they would take him seriously from now on.

He had already informed his sect about the Royal Inheritance when he requested for the help of the elders, the Chasing Demon sect was too busy with the conquest of the archipelago and too far away from the Nerere country to be interested in the Inheritance.

Noah threw Ruth on the ground near the ship and stretched his hands as if waiting for something before speaking again.

"Give me all your belongings, they are wasted on you anyway. Oh, I saw that your robes are inscribed items, I'll take them too."

Ruth wanted to complain but Noah's gaze seemed to dig holes in her mental sphere as he looked at her, her instincts told her to do as he said.

She accepted that the situation was real only when she saw that Errol lowered his head and slowly began to undress his robe.

Chapter 434 - 434. Face

Noah watched the two n.a.k.e.d figures jumping back on the inscribed ship before turning his gaze away.

He had their space-rings and robes in one hand, all he had to do was hope that his threat would be able to buy him some time.

Noah knew that the Royals would never let him go, the information that he held could change their public image, making many noble families join the Cause instead of supporting them.

Also, the matter about the Royal Inheritance could very well bring a war on them: Maybe the other countries under their influence wouldn't dare to challenge them for the Inheritance but the Empire wouldn't let go of such a profitable opportunity.

The Inheritance most likely contained the complete acc.u.mulation of the previous Royal family, the Inheritance ground was set up before it was dethroned after all, there was no reason to hold back some resources as Divine Demon had done.

The wealth contained there might surpass that retrieved by Noah, the Elbas family obviously wanted to keep that information a secret.

The current Royal family worked like any other organization, it had factions and sides, they didn't always have a unified opinion when it came to these matters.

That's why Noah was quite confident that his threat would leave him off the hook for some time, it would take a bit before the Royals decided on how to handle him.

Noah went for the other side of the islands, where he had sent the criminals before.

He soon found Roy and the group of fifty rank 3 cultivators, some smirks appeared on their now uncovered faces when they saw the robes in his hands.

"Prince! This will be a huge boost to our power, we have almost completely recovered from the losses in the separate dimension!"

Roy excitedly spoke when he noticed Noah, the latter simply nodded as he dropped Ruth and Errol's belongings next to him.

Heated gazes were fixed on him, the criminals couldn't help but admire Noah even more when they learnt about his position in the sect.

"How did you know that they would switch side? Well, convincing the elders to help you on this matter is already an amazing feat!"

Roy continued to talk, he couldn't contain himself when he saw the human assets of the sect suddenly becoming stronger.

"Criminals understand each other. Be sure to deploy them in the valuable islands after you're done with the introductions."

Noah plainly explained before leaving for the teleportation matrix that would bring him back to the island where he was appointed.

After obtaining the Inheritance, the sect had set a series of special missions linked to the merits accumulated in the war.

In that way, the cultivators with the highest battle prowess would grow even stronger while the weak ones would be forced to focus on their power if they wanted to obtain those benefits.

That method was commonly seen in organizations engaged in a war, it was a way to motivate the captains and disciples while rewarding those worthy.

Of course, the new reward system didn't concern Noah, he could simply ask for anything he wanted from the inventory.

The news of the ship from the Utra nation being defeated quickly spread on the continent.

It was clear for the three big nations that the Hive had stopped hiding now and was actively opposing the domain of the continent.

The specifics of the failed invasion were kept hidden by the Royals, they had only lost criminals after all, their forces out in the open hadn't been affected so it was easy to mask that invasion as a simple probing mission.

Face was something that they needed to maintain due to their peculiar status, they couldn't show signs of weakness to the Empire and the noble families affiliated with the Cause.

Yet, learning that the Hive was openly opposing the continent forced the three big nations to take action, they could turn a blind eye as long as the legal organizations sent valuable resources back in the continent but they couldn't tolerate someone directly opposing their rule.

Sh.i.p.s containing threatening forces sailed from the continent in the direction of the Coral archipelago, rumors said that even a few heroic cultivators were among them.

Noah didn't care about those in the heroic ranks, they were left to handle to the elders of his sect and the heroic assets of the other underground organizations.

However, some preparations had to be made for the incoming tide of rank 3 cultivators coming to reconquer the peripheral islands.

What bothered Noah the most was that he didn't know when the copying technique would be completed, all he could do was hold the ground until the Chasing Demon completed that task.

Once the copying technique was completed, the archipelago would become impenetrable by forces below the heroic ranks, leaving only the internal islands left before the Hive could announce its rule to the world.

'Almost all the underground organizations are siding with us now, we should be able to defend the islands for a few months at least. I wonder if that's enough...'

Noah thought as he cultivated inside the castle, where his training area was.

He had never stopped cultivating, the sh.i.p.s would take a few months to arrive anyway, that period wasn't enough for Noah to drastically improve his strength but it could still improve his foundation.

Also, his mind was improving quickly, the continuous execution of the Divine deduction technique forced his sea of consciousness to work at full speed, further increasing his training speed.

It was a pity though that his deductions didn't manage to produce any satisfying result yet, the "Breath" blessing on which Noah usually sat was slowly seeing its size being reduced.

Noah didn't mind losing his "Breath" blessing if that gave him a rank 4 cultivation technique, his piece of the mineral would have become useless soon anyway.

Yet, he was somewhat worried that his mineral wouldn't be enough for him to create something, he began to wonder if he should request for more "Breath" blessing from the sect or simply wait for his mind to reach the heroic ranks.

Nevertheless, the war impended, forcing him to focus on more reliable sources of improvement rather than on his experiments.

In a bit more than two months, the sh.i.p.s of the continent reached the Coral archipelago.

Chapter 435 - 435. Invasion

Noah read the reports sent by Roy and frowned.

The sh.i.p.s coming from the continent were numerous, the elders controlling the perimeter of the archipelago were able to spot more than fifty of them!

What was worse was that they weren't able to tell the exact force contained inside them, it was obvious that the continent had sent even heroic cultivators who were able to block the investigative methods of the elders.

'The heroic cultivators aren't my problem but there are fifty sh.i.p.s, I can expect more than two thousand cultivators to crash on our islands. Also, I can't ignore the cultivators from the legal organizations in the internal islands...'

Noah thought as he reviewed what he knew about the current situation.

Capturing the peripheral islands had been easy but managing to maintain control over them was hard, especially since the continent had decided to send real reinforcements.

The underground organizations were surrounded, they would have to defend two sides while the enemies just had to charge ahead, they were clearly in a disadvantageous position.

Generally speaking, the best course of action for a battle tactic would have been to capture the central islands and slowly expand, it would be impossible to isolate the underground organizations since they had way too many contacts in each island.

Yet, even that tactic would ultimately fail since the continent could simply overwhelm the archipelago with their higher numbers.

The Utra and Papral nation would find it harder to gather the necessary troops for the task because the threat of the Empire required for most of their power to remain inside the nation.

Also, their political system didn't allow them to accumulate that many assets, the powerful cultivators of both nations were divided between the many sects and noble families, the Royals and the Council couldn't force them to hand too many assets.

The Shandal Empire though was different.

The Empire was a constantly expanding nation that founded its economy on wars and slaves.

With a God in its lead, the Empire could gather all its soldiers under one banner and handle them as it wanted.

The reason why the Empire was the strongest force on the continent wasn't just because of the God but also due to its cohesive power.

'I wonder which methods do the other two nations have to deal with the God of the Empire, maybe the God has some kind of weakness due to its peculiar situation.'

Noah couldn't help but think about Divine Demon's words and the continent in its entirety.

He knew that if he was a divine being set on conquering the continent, he would just wreak havoc everywhere, uncaring of the level of his enemies.

Yet, cultivators rarely fought against those on a different rank, especially when considering human and heroic cultivators.

Unless there was some personal matter or someone directly offended them, heroic cultivators wouldn't care about the human world.

Their gazes were fixed on the sky, at the ranks above theirs, they didn't have time to waste minding the ants that human cultivators were in their eyes.

It was also a matter of face but the main reason why heroic cultivators or above let the human cultivators handle the human matters was that they represented the foundation of any organization!

Strong human assets would produce more cultivators in the heroic ranks who could eventually become Gods.

The only way to forge human cultivators was through battles and struggles, they would never survive the Tribulations if they didn't have the right amount of determination and will.

Those reasons only worked for the organizations though, lone cultivators could act however they wanted and don't care about things like pride.

Noah was the Demon Prince of the Chasing Demon sect but, inside, he was still the lone cultivator that was ready to do anything to obtain more resources, he didn't blink at the thought of using an elder to deal with the criminals from the Ultra nation after all.

A message arrived through his inscribed notebook, it explained the plan created by the elders for the incoming invasion.

According to their words, the copying technique had been almost completely set up, Noah only needed to maintain control over the islands and the battle would eventually be won.

What made him heave a sigh of relief was that the plan involved all the underground organizations of the archipelago, it seemed that some kind of agreement had been made between the various branches of the Hive.

A united front was stronger than many sparse ones, the Hive was finally fighting together against the forces of the continent!

Noah didn't waste time, he had his orders and the sh.i.p.s were nearing the shores, many preparations had to be made.

The pages of his inscribed notebook turned continuously, Noah sent a series of mental messages as he exited his training area.

The plan of the elders involved formations, traps, and even the usage of many rank 1 cultivators as cannon fodder.

All of that had to be set in one week!

Noah sent orders to anyone involved with the plan and began to help with the preparations, the peripheral islands seemed to burst with life as all the organizations occupying them began to work on the defenses for the incoming attack.

Noah willingly began to forge new Instabilities and Hidden blasts to add on the traps, he worked at close contact with Kate to set as many explosive formations as possible.

Kate was the leader of the faction handling the teleportation matrixes, she was immediately able to modify some of the defensive formations she knew to work together with Noah's disposable weapons.

The week passed quickly.

On the morning of the eighth day, an eerie silence filled the purple shores of the peripheral islands.

Many sh.i.p.s could be seen docking on them, the fleet divided itself into three groups, each of them representing a big nation.

These three groups of sh.i.p.s neared three different valuable islands, they would leave the less important ones to the forces of the legal organization.

Then, groups of cultivators of various strength jumped off the sh.i.p.s, landing on the shores illuminated by the purple light.

The invaders were wary of their surroundings, the fact that they couldn't see anyone in sight was the clear sign that there was a trap somewhere.

As if answering their thoughts, shining lines appeared on the sandy terrain as soon as the troops took the first step, they were unable to react since an explosion immediately followed the activation of the formation, engulfing them with a series of fuming spikes.

Chapter 436 - 436. Charge

Dozens of rank 2 cultivators died in an instant, explosions resounded on the various battlefields that the continent had chosen to invade.

The torrent of fuming spikes pierced the defenses of the rank 2 cultivators used as cannon fodder, they could do nothing against Noah's improved weapons.

A series of attacks followed the explosions, the cultivators of the underground organizations ambushed the soldiers of the continent in that defenseless moment.

Noah was on an island attacked by the forces of the Empire.

The Shandal Empire had been the one to send more troops so it was Noah's duty as Demon Prince to intercept them.

'We only have about eighty rank 3 cultivators here, I need to focus on reducing the number of those in the second rank so that we can overwhelm them.'

Noah stared at the battlefield from his hiding spot on top of a building.

It was morning so he couldn't use the Dark cover spell but the layer of mental energy around his figure managed to keep him hidden even from the inspections of the rank 3 cultivators still on the sh.i.p.s.

There were simply too many cultivators hiding on the buildings near the shore, it would be hard to spot Noah since he had yet to make his move.

More cultivators jumped off the sh.i.p.s, defending was easier than attacking, the Empire had long since predicted that the first assault would fail.

The second group of soldiers had a few rank 3 cultivators in their ranks, they advanced surrounded by the weaker soldiers as a form of protection from the traps.

It took only another series of steps before another formation lit up under their feet.

At that time, the soldiers of the Empire were prepared.

A blast occurred and many fuming spikes filled the battlefield, however, a large dome made of water covered the entirety of the invaders, preventing the spikes from reaching them.

Only the cultivators hit by the blast were injured or killed, the spikes didn't manage to take any life.

'They have come prepared.'

Noah's eyes sharpened when he saw how fast the soldiers countered the traps that he and Kate had prepared, that defensive spell perfectly countered the Instabilities hidden by Kate's formations!

'They know I'm here.'

That realization forced Noah to change the battle plan, his notebook appeared and he sent orders to the various captains.

Noah was the Hooded devil, his creations had taken many lives on the battlefield in Odra nation.

Also, the separate dimension had revealed his position, it was normal to expect that the invaders had prepared countermeasures to his weapons, especially someone like the Empire that had personally tasted their power.

The captains followed Noah's orders and launched another series of spells toward the incoming group, they were prepared to the eventuality that the traps wouldn't work so their reaction was almost immediate.

The water dome appeared again to cover the troops on the ground, that time though it couldn't defend against the spells of so many cultivators and ultimately crumbled under their assault, allowing the attacks to land on the soldiers.

The rank 3 soldiers were able to retreat in time but those in the second rank were annihilated by the more than one hundred spells launched toward them, they had no hope to survive.

The rank 3 soldiers retreated on the ship to reorganize, they were only meant to probe the defensive measures that the Hive had deployed, those losses were totally acceptable.

Minutes of silence passed in the tense atmosphere on the island, the hidden forces of the Hive were waiting for their enemies to make a move.

After all, they aimed to buy as much time as possible, even though most of them didn't know why.

Then, hundreds of soldiers jumped off the many sh.i.p.s docked on the shore.

Noah recognized almost one hundred rank 3 cultivators and about six hundred soldiers in the second rank, that army could almost match the

entirety of the human assets of the Chasing Demon sect and they were only a fraction of the full power of the Empire!

That sight was discouraging, the army completely filled the shore, becoming the only visible thing on the horizon.

"Let's bait them."

Noah ordered through his notebook, he expected nothing less from the number one country of the continent and didn't hesitate in switching battle tactic.

A series of spells was launched once again by the forces of the Hive but they didn't manage to break through the defenses of the rank 3 cultivators.

Meanwhile, they counterattacked with spells on their own, fireballs, bullets of various elements, and thunderbolts shot in the direction of the cultivators in hiding.

Attacking had revealed part of their position and it was simply impossible to defend against that sheer number of spells, many rank 2 cultivators in hiding died under that counterattack.

"Again."

Noah had a cold expression as he spoke, ordering them to attack was basically asking them to reveal their position.

However, he couldn't care less and those under him didn't dare to oppose his orders.

Another exchange of long-range attacks occurred, the soldiers of the Empire managed to defend and counterattack again, killing dozens of rank 2 cultivators in the process.

"Again."

Seeing that the soldiers didn't dare to advance yet, Noah could only order to attack.

The same thing happened, the soldiers defended and killed many cultivators in the second rank in the process, the Hive had lost almost one hundred cultivators already!

Then, Noah went silent, he waited for the Empire's reaction to those small victories.

The soldiers of the Empire didn't waste much time, they decided to advance when they saw that no more attacks came.

Formations lit up on their passage but the Instabilities linked to them weren't able to inflict many damages, those rank 3 soldiers were simply too prepared for Noah's weapons.

However, when they reached a certain point, they felt as if a weight had been added to their bodies.

The lines of a formation appeared on their bodies, which seemed some kind of restrictive trap that affected their movements.

Noah saw that they had fallen for Kate's trap and stood up, his orders resounded in the minds of the captains hiding on the island.

"Charge."

Chapter 437 - 437. Old foe

Kate was extremely talented in the formations' field.

She was a solid stage cultivator in the third rank who had spent most of her life studying the formations that the sect managed to save in its escape from the Papral nation, she could be considered an expert in the field.

She and Noah had worked together to set traps throughout the most valuable islands but Noah had only provided the Instabilities and explained how they worked, everything else had been handled by Kate.

The first formations would act as a trigger for the Instabilities, the "Breath" contained in the Credits that powered the formations would be used to trigger the explosion of the disposable weapons, but that wasn't their only purpose.

The explosions would disperse the materials that composed the formations in the battlefield, said materials would then attach themselves to the unaware invaders and could be used by other mechanisms.

The materials resembled dust which the invaders couldn't bother to clean from their clothes in that tense situation, they didn't expect for said dust to be used to restrain them.

The lines of a formation shone on the soldiers' bodies, they resonated with the area, lighting up other formations on the ground.

All of sudden, a large area was filled with shining lines, affecting the cultivators that had been tainted by the dust with effects similar to Noah's Death area spell.

The soldiers from the Empire felt their movements being affected, they anxiously turned toward their leaders, hoping for orders or solutions to that troublesome situation.

Yet, the cultivators of the Hive arrived before they could decide anything.

A series of spells followed by the appearance of the hiding cultivators forced the soldiers of the Empire to put the matter about the formation on hold and focus on defending.

Noah analyzed the battlefield, his forces were less numerous than the enemies but, with the help of the formation, that advantage was affected, almost bringing the two armies on the same power.

His mind deduced at high speed, he wanted to take the course of action that would affect the battle the most.

'It's useless to keep the strongest of them busy in this situation, there are simply too many of them.'

The tactic used during the conquest of the islands wouldn't have the same effects with armies so big and being another rank 3 cultivator fighting among the crowd wouldn't affect the outcome of the battle that much.

Also, there was a high chance to hurt those on his side unless he decided to not use the Demonic form.

'I should just take care of the ants.'

After he thought of that, Noah jumped from the building in a spot filled by rank 2 soldiers, a black dragon was next to him when he landed.

Twenty ethereal sabers were created around him, the First Form was performed in the middle of the enemy's army.

Usually, rank 3 cultivators wouldn't lower themselves to take care of those in the second rank but Noah didn't care for honor and pride, he only cared about victory.

His sabers released a black corrosive smoke as they slashed at the powerless rank 2 cultivators around him.

Those soldiers did their best, they deployed defensive spells, martial arts, and even some protective inscribed items.

Yet, against Noah's First Form backed by his gaseous "Breath", his Demonic swords, and the partial Demonic form, those defensive measures were pierced as if they were paper.

Soldiers immediately died under Noah's offensive, Heilong trashed its body on the crowd, uncaring of the attacks that landed on its scales.

Noah swung his sabers relentlessly, no one could escape nor defend against his attacks.

Casualties mounted on the Empire's side, not even a minute had passed but Noah had already killed more than fifty rank 2 cultivators, the power of the third rank couldn't be underestimated.

Then, Noah felt a dangerous sensation coming from above him, he instinctively retracted Heilong and deployed it in that position to block the incoming attack.

Heilong was hit by a spear made of compressed air, its scales were pierced but they managed to deviate the spell, allowing Noah to simply sidestep it to dodge it.

His eyes went in the sky, he saw an old cultivator with long white hair and a short black bear, Noah was able to recognize him, he was the rank 3 cultivator that had tried to assassinate him on the battlefield in Odrea nation!

Yet, his cultivation level wasn't in the gaseous stage anymore, what was standing in the air was a rank 3 cultivator in the liquid stage!

"We have a matter to settle, Hooded devil."

There was no arrogance in his tone, only a pure battle intent was radiated by his words.

Noah looked at him with cold eyes, the soldiers around him didn't dare to attack him, they simply retreated as they shot grateful gazes at the man in the air.

Heilong silently entered Noah's body and a pair of wings appeared behind his n.a.k.e.d back.

The wings flapped, Noah slowly rose into the air, his gaze never left the elderly man.

He couldn't continue to slaughter the weak soldiers if a rank 3 cultivator attacked him, it was better to take care of the biggest threat first.

"I've reached the liquid stage in these years while you directly reached the third rank, I don't feel that much shame anymore seeing how talented you are."

The man spoke when Noah reached his height, Noah guessed that he was speaking about the assassination attempt in the past.

The battle continued below them, cultivators that could fight in the air before the heroic ranks were rare and they usually had some restriction that accompanied that ability.

The man in front of Noah was standing on a platform made of air, it was a spell of the wind element that allowed him to move in the sky but that was different from flying.

Two spears appeared on the man's hands, they were the spell that the man usually used to fight but Noah was sure that he had some kind of hidden ace.

However, he wasn't the same cultivator that he had tried to assassinate in the past, he was the heir of Divine Demon, as well as the Demon Prince of the Chasing Demon sect.

His legs kicked the air, a shockwave resounded under his feet when they hit the black cloud that propelled his speed.

The man saw Noah's sudden acceleration and prepared himself for the imminent clash.

Chapter 438 - 438. Improvements

Noah was too fast, the man couldn't find a chance to throw his spears since Noah reached his position in an instant.

The Third Form was executed, six sabers became one and slashed at the man with a downward vertical attack.

Danger!

The man was a rank 3 mage, he instinctively knew that he would die if he let that attack hit him.

He crossed his spears above his head in a defensive gesture before Noah's extremely fast saber clashed with them.

Surprise appeared in the man's eyes when he saw that Noah's attack was cutting its way through his spears, those weapons were created by a spell after all, he couldn't believe that a simple martial art was able to pierce them.

His eyes shone with resolve as he controlled one of his spears and made it detonate, Noah was flung back due to the explosion but the man suddenly realized that something was amiss: The spell that he was using as a foothold was breaking apart, the ethereal capabilities of the Third Form had cut the platform in two and the black smoke released by the attack had further destabilized its composition.

Noah didn't target the liquid stage cultivator but his foothold!

The man began to fall, a sort of layer of air enveloped his figure, preventing from the black smoke to reach his skin.

Noah managed to stop himself only after a dozen meters, his body had been covered by Heilong to resist the explosion but some blood could be seen coming out from his mouth and ears, Heilong's defense wasn't able to completely block the shockwaves created.

Yet, the liquid "Breath" was already inside his circulatory system, those wounds were healing at high speed while Noah focused on the falling man.

'He wasn't injured by the explosion, is it because of that protective layer?'

Instants were perceived like minutes by Noah, his mental energy entered the inscriptions on the walls of his sphere and improved his analyzing abilities through the Divine deduction technique.

Not even a second passed but Noah had already evaluated many different possibilities and found the most likely one.

'Wind can't damage that layer but my attacks can, otherwise he wouldn't have bothered to defend. I just need to press on then.'

Noah kicked the air when he reached that conclusion, he directly flew toward the falling cultivator while raising a finger in his direction.

A black ray shot from his finger and landed on the defenseless liquid stage man, the latter was focusing on activating his flying spell again and couldn't block that fast attack.

The Dark ray spell had good piercing capabilities, it penetrated the layer of wind that surrounded the man and stabbed his skin.

Its power and speed though were depleted to surpass that defensive spell, Noah's attack wasn't able to inflict much damage since the man was able to avoid a fatal damage rotating his body to make the ray hit the right side of his waist, only a superficial cut appeared on his skin.

Then, he threw his other spear toward the nearing winged man.

Noah completely disregarded the spell and accelerated, his body became ethereal when the spear reached him, allowing him to safely cross the spell without changing direction.

The man's eyes widened at that sight and focused even more on restoring his flying spell, he couldn't face Noah in the air without it.

A small platform formed under his feet just before Noah reached him, the man didn't have time to create more spears and was forced to detonate the layer of air around his figure to stop Noah's attack.

The layer had the liquid stage cultivator as its center, its explosion created shockwaves all around him, it left him defenseless but it prevented anyone from attacking him.

Yet, Noah wasn't anyone.

Noah knew that he had to press on, the lower level of his dantian didn't allow him to take the slow and safe path.

Also, he didn't want to give the man enough time to restore his defenses, that was the perfect moment to inflict a fatal blow.

The Ethereal form spell couldn't be cast repeatedly, the body needed a short amount of time to stabilize itself after each usage of the spell.

Thus, Noah resorted to his Blood companion.

A fuming Heilong appeared and enveloped Noah's figure as it charged through the shockwaves created in the detonation of the defensive layer.

The scales of its body were shattered but the black smoke exuded by its figure was able to reduce part of the pressure applied by the explosion.

Noah felt as if his body was going to break inside that dangerous area, he was sure that he wouldn't be able to withstand those shockwaves without the help of his companion.

Yet, the regenerative capabilities of his body continuously healed him and Heilong's protection prevented any fatal attack from landing on Noah.

The liquid stage man felt hopeless when he saw the almost destroyed dragon crossing the threatening area created by the detonation of his defensive spell and pouncing at him with its maws open.

The man had just recovered his foothold, he wanted to cast again the defensive layer before Noah arrived but the latter didn't give him that chance.

The man's battle intent surged, since the opponent didn't give him time to prepare his defenses, he would simply attack!

Air compressed around him as three spears slowly formed, the man was doing his best to repel the incoming dragon.

However, he suddenly felt a series of hands clenching around his heart, blood came out of his mouth as his concentration broke, the almost formed spears dispersed the air they were accumulating back in the world as they disappeared completely.

A human figure quickly came out of the dragon's body when the spear disappeared, Noah had blood coming out of his mouth and ears but his eyes were colder than ever as he stared the defenseless man.

What followed happened in less than a second.

Heilong bit the man's torso and Noah slashed horizontally at his waist, the liquid stage cultivator was cut into two halves and the black smoke exuded by Heilong's interiors consumed the traces of life left in his upper body.

The battle lasted only for a few exchanges but Noah had never been in a passive position for the whole time!

Not even a year had passed since the events in the separate dimension but Noah was already able to face liquid stage cultivators and kill them without exhausting himself!

Chapter 439 - 439. First victory

A normal cultivator, even one in the third rank, would have only that many spells at its disposal.

That was something that varied according to the cultivator's origin and status but it was generally rare for any cultivator to have more than four spells that matched its level.

The man in the liquid stage that had just died had used three different spells which covered offense, movement, and defense, it could be said that his set of abilities was good for someone without any lofty status.

Yet, Noah had completely overwhelmed him using his many methods and a bit of recklessness.

Five different spells, two rank 4 martial arts and a little help from the Divine deduction technique allowed him to force a flaw in the man's defense, which he then exploited sacrificing his body.

Noah would gladly suffer a few wounds if that allowed him to inflict a fatal blow to his enemies, he had chosen the Yin body as a body-nourishing method in the past for that reason too, it matched his combat style too well.

'He didn't use a martial art either, I wonder why so many cultivators think that they can overpower me with their spells.'

Noah thought as he turned his gaze on the battlefield below him.

The cultivators with whom he had fought lately didn't resort to martial arts during the battle, they only relied on their spells to fight.

Noah guessed that they used their most powerful methods to deal with him since he was a troublesome opponent but he still thought that there was something else.

'Maybe it's related to their level, spells are simply stronger than martial arts, wasting "Breath" in the latter might appear useless when they are rank 3 mages.'

There was also another possibility.

Noah had never given up on his martial arts because his darkness element made them a bit stronger than the others and because his abilities paired perfectly with them.

The Elemental forging method allowed him to create extremely threatening weapons and the partial Demonic form empowered all his attacks, using a martial art allowed Noah to have a relentless offensive that didn't deplete much energy.

For someone with a darkness aptitude, finding ways to preserve "Breath" and mental energy was a must.

The battlefield was chaotic, the troops of the Empire were weakened by Kate's formation but they were more than the cultivators of the Hive, they managed to hold their ground even in that unfavorable situation.

Casualties mounted on both sides, it was clear that the archipelago would be greatly weakened after that first battle.

Noah decided to resume his slaughter of rank 2 cultivators, he only needed to use the First Form and Heilong to deal with them, he could keep fighting them even if he had just killed a cultivator in the liquid stage.

As soon as Noah dove back into the battlefield, some pressure was relieved from the rank 2 cultivators on his side.

That allowed them to help those in the third rank, they might be far weaker but they could still force the rank 3 soldiers in a passive position if they joined their forces.

A mosquito was clearly weaker than a dragon but a million of them might be able to pierce its scales.

The same could be applied to cultivators, no rank 2 cultivator was able to defeat someone in the third rank but hundreds of them could force the soldiers in the third rank to focus on defense.

Little by little, the soldiers of the Empire began to be pushed back as more and more rank 2 cultivators could freely focus them.

Noah continued his solitary slaughter, the soldiers in the second rank did their best to escape but casualties were inevitable against someone in the third rank.

The losses of the Empire increased, the number of soldiers slowly matched the cultivators of the Hive until they became even less than them.

"Retreat!"

An order was shouted from the group of rank 3 soldiers.

"Retreat!"

"Retreat!"

Other soldiers echoed that order, the troops of the Empire quickly left the battlefield to return to their safe position on the inscribed sh.i.p.s.

The cultivators of the Hive did their best to kill as many retreating soldiers as possible and managed to further diminish their numbers before they reached the sh.i.p.s, the battle on that island ended with a victory for the forces of the underground organizations.

The cultivators didn't dare to chase the soldiers on the sh.i.p.s, the territorial advantage was what led them to victory, they wouldn't risk assaulting the sh.i.p.s and give that advantage to their enemies.

"Regroup, help the wounded, restore the traps! There is nothing to celebrate, this is just one battle! Bring me a report with the situation of the other islands!"

Noah's orders resounded on the shore, suppressing the victorious cries of the cultivators around him.

The battle had been harsh and they had suffered many losses, there was no point on celebrating since the invaders were still docked on their shores.

'We forced them to retreat on the first battle, we might be able to make them return to the continent in the second or third one. We won't be able to survive another wave of reinforcements.'

Noah was expressionless as he inspected the losses on his side.

He knew that, with the territorial advantage, the Hive might be able to defend against that first wave of reinforcements.

However, it would come out of the war extremely weakened, it wouldn't have any chance against another attack from the continent.

The joint power of the underground organizations could match the Royals or the Council in the past but the trials of the Inheritance ground and the conquest of the peripheral islands had almost halved their forces, putting them far below the central powers of those countries.

A report was quickly delivered in Noah's hands, it described the outcome of that battle and the situation on the other islands.

'More than one hundred rank 2 cultivators and about twenty-five in the third rank died on this island while the enemy has lost far more than us.'

Noah read through the contents of the sheets in his hands before sending mental messages through his notebook, there were still ongoing battles on some of the other islands, Noah was going to send reinforcements to seal the outcome of those fights.

Chapter 440 - 440. Reorganizing

The underground organizations managed to survive the battles during the first day and successfully defended the peripheral islands.

Reorganizing the troops though was a problem, the three islands where the forces of the continent had attacked had seen harsh battles with a high number of casualties on both sides, but the biggest issue came from the other battlefields.

The Hive controlled about ninety islands, that number was needed to completely isolate the archipelago, not even an island could be lost or the setting of the copying technique would be hindered.

The cultivators on those other islands had to face the assault of the legal organizations, the Hive had far more human assets than them but they also had more enemies to face.

Considering that about two hundred and fifty rank 3 cultivators had to be deployed to face the forces of the continent, there weren't many powerful troops available for the other islands.

Yet, with the many traps laid by the joint forces of the Hive and the cautious nature of the legal organizations, those islands were successfully defended.

The continent and the legal organizations had no idea that the Chasing Demon sect had gained access to the copying technique, they were even unaware that a technique that defied common sense as that one existed!

That's why they would rather take the slow and safe approach than going for a full power offensive, the Hive had fewer troops and couldn't hope in

reinforcements, the continent thought that it could slowly drain the Hive's forces and eventually wait for more reinforcements if it was still unable to reclaim the captured islands.

Noah stared with cold eyes at the sh.i.p.s at some distance from the shore, the atmosphere on the island was tense, especially after the elders' orders.

A week had passed since the last battle, the human assets of the Hive had worked at full speed to reorganize themselves and fix or deploy traps and formations, they didn't know when the next attack would come so it was better to be ready at any time.

'We are left with less than forty rank 3 cultivators to defend this side, the next battle will leave us powerless.'

Noah thought as he analyzed the remaining forces on the island that he was appointed to defend.

Many cultivators in the third rank had died in the first wave of attacks, leaving many islands in a defenseless situation.

Cultivators had to be deployed there to cover those battlefields but the Hive was already using all its human assets, it could only relocate the cultivators deployed in the three important battlefields to refill the ranks of the other islands.

Of course, that relocation weakened the forces that had to face the troops of the continent, forcing the various underground organizations to take drastic measures to improve their battle prowess.

Noah turned his head toward the hundreds of stiff youths in the distance behind him, they were rank 1 cultivators who had a rank 1 sea of consciousness, the Hive had decided to deploy even its weakest assets to slightly boost the defenses on the islands.

Also, the Chasing Demon sect had willingly revealed the large number of inscribed weapons that Noah had retrieved from the separate dimension.

Noah didn't know what kind of agreement the elders of the various branches of the Hive had reached, but he could see that most cultivators wielded brand new inscribed weapons, it didn't seem to matter from which organization they came from.

'Hoping that an army of well-equipped ants might bring us to victory is a bit too desperate, I guess the copying technique is nearing completion at least.'

That was the only reason that Noah could think of when he saw the weapons that he had left in the inventory being freely wielded by cultivators belonging to different organizations.

'War and corpses are the foundation of a country, the Hive will experience a rebirth if it survives this tribulation.'

Noah closed his eyes as he sighed internally, he remembered the struggles that he had endured when he was a simple rank 1 cultivator, he knew the feeling of being powerless against the decisions of those controlling you.

That's why securing the archipelago was so important in his mind, the world was filled by monsters and amazing beings, there was a limit to how much one could escape their gaze.

'Not for love, nor respect, nor honor, nor belonging. I must fight this battle for myself, to lay my foundation toward higher ranks.'

Noah steeled his determination with that reminder.

It wasn't that he didn't like the Chasing Demon sect, he had progressed incredibly quickly in its environment and he was also able to retrieve the Inheritance of Divine Demon thanks to it.

Yet, Noah had always put his personal power above everything, pursuing strength had been the strongest drive of his second life, he would think about the well-being of his sect only after he had secured his position.

Another week passed, an eerie silence filled the peripheral islands of the archipelago as the forces of the Hive waited for the next assault of the continent and the legal organizations, only Noah felt glad of each second that passed without signs of attacks.

Then, a buzzing sound reached his mind, a message saying that the sh.i.p.s near the shore were closing in resounded inside his mental sphere.

Noah didn't cultivate in those days, he wanted to be at his peak form before the battle.

He had sat still in a cross-legged position with his eyes closed, he used that time to sharpen his thoughts as much as he could and decide which role would he play in the next battle.

The sh.i.p.s reached the purple shore and Noah opened his eyes before standing up and sending orders through his notebook.

"Attack the sh.i.p.s."

Noah's order echoed in the minds of the cultivators in the island, a torrent of multicolored lights shot from the ground and landed on the docked sh.i.p.s.

The inscriptions on the hulls lit up and shone with a silver color, forming large silver layers around the sh.i.p.s.

The spells of the cultivators of the Hive could only land on those protective layers, the silver light radiated by those shields repelled the attacks uncaringly of how numerous they were.

'Pointless, as expected.'

Noah thought as he ordered to stop the long-distance assault and wait for the frontal clash, the second battle for the control of the archipelago had started.