

Chapter 481 - 481. Middle tier

The clouds that had been formed by Heaven and Earth dispersed, releasing the "Breath" that they contained in the air.

Noah took a deep breath, the dense energy still lingering in the air converged in his position and entered his body to become its nourishment.

The "Breath" contained by the clouds was meant to deal with cultivators aiming to reach the fourth rank of the dantian, it held a power fit for that level of strength.

When it entered his body, it was dismantled and turned into pure energy that Noah naturally absorbed, he felt the liquid "Breath" inside his body being refilled before he underwent some changes.

His skin thickened, it had absorbed the capabilities of the scales of the Cursed dragon becoming extremely hard, the lightning bolt form before had barely scratched it after all.

His muscles bulged before compressing, their density increased by a whole level when the process was over.

His bones experienced the same procedure, they became sturdier and denser, it was as if their quality had reached a superior level.

Even his internal organs underwent a similar enhancement, especially the lungs and heart which also became slightly bigger.

Noah had closed his eyes to analyze the changes of his body, that was a feeling that he hadn't experienced for a very long time.

'Rank 4 body in the middle tier!'

Noah exclaimed in his mind when the process was over.

He had been at the peak of the lower tier for more than ten years by then, seeing his level raise again made him feel completely satisfied.

That was because his body-nourishing method was working flawlessly and he knew that it would accompany him for the entirety of his cultivation journey!

Noah roared at the sky when the breakthrough was over, the power filling his body and his victory over Heaven and Earth made him reach new levels of happiness.

His dragon part had waited for this moment for too long, the hatred that was rooted in its bloodline was finally appeased, part of it at least.

An even stronger hunger followed the breakthrough though.

Noah turned his head in the direction of the Granite Abyss, his reptilian eyes seemed to make out the shapes of the many dragons inhabiting that danger zone.

Yet, he forced himself to calm down as he gulped the saliva that his mouth was producing.

'I've created a mess here, I can't remain any longer.'

Noah thought as he wore a tight robe and turned to fly in the direction of the Hive's encampment.

The main advantage of being a hybrid was the human mind ruling that powerful body.

Obtaining the power of a magical beast would be useless if the cultivator then acted like one, reasoning and planning had to come before instincts and hunger.

Also, even though Noah had obtained an incredibly powerful body, he had lost one of his main fighting methods.

The Three Forms of the Ashura was the martial art that had accompanied him since he had joined the academy but, now, he was simply unable to perform it.

His body was too strong, it couldn't use the little physical energy needed for that martial art, Noah guessed that he would meet the same problem even with other martial arts meant for humans.

'My list of stuff to create is increasing: There is the cultivation technique, an offensive martial art, and Demonic swords fit for my new body. Also, I should start finding ways to create spells, I'm continuously losing fighting methods since my power is increasing too quickly.'

Noah thought as he flew at full speed in the direction of the encampment.

There were two big issues in the cultivation journey.

The first one was the absence of techniques and methods, those in the fifth rank were already incredibly rare, it could be even said that those in the sixth rank were basically non-existent.

The second one concerned martial arts and spells.

One could be a mighty heroic cultivator but its battle prowess wouldn't be able to express its power if it didn't have arts and spells that matched its rank.

The same applied to Noah.

He had become a rank 4 mage a short time ago, the spells up to the third rank that he had learnt became almost useless at that point, leaving him with few offensive methods that could express his true power.

Now, he had even lost his martial art, limiting his offense to the Demonic form spell, the Ghostly claws spell, the Death area spell, and the Mental tremor spell.

That offense was still extremely good, especially considering his newly obtained flames, yet, Noah didn't want to see his battle prowess lower as his level increased.

Martial arts and spells suffered from a fate similar to methods and techniques, they would become rarer as their rank increased, especially those with offensive power.

'My expertise with the saber should allow me to quickly create a new martial art tuned around my body but my priority must be the cultivation technique, I can't be always dragged down by my dantian.'

Noah thought as he ate a small pill that contained "Breath" of the darkness element to refill his dantian.

His last attack against the black clouds had almost depleted the entirety of the liquid "Breath" inside his dantian, leaving that center of power basically empty.

It couldn't be helped, he had used his strongest spell while setting its power in the heroic ranks, simple rank 3 "Breath" couldn't fuel such an attack for more than a few instants.

Luckily for him though, he now had something that other cultivators didn't have: A powerful body!

Noah knew that his physical strength could be used as a deadly weapon and his flames were an excellent offensive method since the liquid "Breath" inside his body was refilled autonomously.

A small piece of the female Cursed dragon's skin appeared in his hands before Noah directly threw it inside his mouth, his teeth easily munched the scaled skin, they had fused with the fangs of a dragon after all.

Just like that, Noah continued to fly toward the encampment of the Hive inside the area of influence of the Shandal Empire, eating the body parts of the magical beasts inside his space-ring from time to time.

Chapter 482 - 482. Evan

Noah's worries weren't groundless.

The three big nations weren't powerful just in name: They controlled almost the entirety of the continent and had the highest share of heroic cultivators.

Also, their areas of influence featured spies or soldiers, especially in those dire times.

After the Coral archipelago obtained its independence, many other nations had begun to strive for the same goal, the only weakness of the big nations had been revealed after all.

That forced the hand of the big nations, they redirected part of their power to suppress and manage the revolts happening everywhere in their domains.

Of course, special attention was given to anything concerning the Hive.

That organization was backed by a rank 6 existence and was formed by the joint power of forces that had freely ruled on the islands for many years, it could be said that the Hive was the strongest organization of the continent after the three big nation.

Also, their peculiar geographical position and the copying technique made those islands virtually unbreachable, having such solid defenses would surely lead to a stable growth.

That's why the three big nations had silently decided to focus on their attempts to create footholds on the continent.

The only weakness that the archipelago had was the need for connections with the mainland to secure a constant stream of cultivation resources, their encampments in specific nations were somewhat expected.

The big nations knew that it would have been impossible to send spies to the archipelago, every recruit would be forced to swear an oath of some sort before being teleported there.

Yet, that didn't prevent those spies from sending reports before officially joining the Hive.

It was enough to mask them as cultivators who had barely managed to escape from an area of influence to make them the perfect target of the Hive which desperately needed manpower.

Just like that, by sacrificing weak cultivators, the three big nations managed to receive a decent stream of information concerning the encampments of the Hive.

Of course, the Hive had expected that something like that would happen but it wasn't too interested in it as long as it continued to increase its human assets, even a spy was just another pawn in its grasp after it swore an oath.

What it didn't expect was that such an approach would have ultimately put Noah in danger.

In the Utra nation, inside a dark bas.e.m.e.nt that seemed to be used as a prison, a few hours after Noah had left the encampment near the mountain chain to reach the Granite Abyss.

A middle-aged man sat on the floor, runes shone over his skin, they affected the area around him with their brilliance and absorbed "Breath" from the matter that surrounded his figure.

The floor and the walls around him seemed to age as he cultivated, that process clearly showed that he was a cultivator in the heroic ranks.

Then, footsteps resounded in the basement, Thaddeus Elbas appeared from the stairs connected to the upper floors.

He was wearing his usual smile but traces of coldness could be seen in his eyes as he began to speak.

"Evan, are you enjoying the new horizons that the Royal family has opened for you?"

Evan opened his eyes and interrupted his cultivation to kneel toward Thaddeus, his tone was polite as he replied to him.

"I will be eternally grateful for this chance, Your Majesty."

Thaddeus nodded seeing his reaction and took a small sheet from his sleeve before unfolding it in front of the kneeling man.

"Do you know what this is?"

Evan raised his head when he heard those words, his sea of consciousness began to enlarge as soon as his eyes looked at the rune drawn on the sheet.

"The fourth Kesier rune! Your Maj-"

However, before he could finish his phrase, Thaddeus folded the sheet and put it back inside his sleeve.

"I have a mission for you, complete it and the rune will be yours. You will be finally able to become a true heroic cultivator with it."

Evan knelt again at Thaddeus's words and replied to him while keeping his head lowered.

"Anything His Majesty asks."

Thaddeus stared at him for some time at that point before taking a scroll from his space-ring.

The scroll depicted a young Noah and a series of information was written under it.

"This criminal can't be left alive one instant longer, who knows how many problems will he cause if not. Even my disciple has suffered by his hands, her resolve to cultivate seems to have crumbled after their meeting."

Thaddeus spoke as he heaved a sigh, he seemed to really care about Ruth's mental state.

"This criminal has left Afria nation and is moving alongside the mountain chain that divides our area of influence with that of the Empire toward the eastern coastline. We don't know his destination but he must return to the Afria nation if he wants to head back to the Coral archipelago. Ambush him there."

As he spoke those words, Thaddeus left the scroll containing Noah's information and left the bas.e.m.e.nt.

Only then did Evan raise his head to study the scroll, his eyes radiated a dark light as he looked at Noah's face.

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Noah was unaware that the Royal had prepared a trap for him while he was busy fusing with the Cursed dragon, he was focusing on returning to the encampment in Afria nation so that he could begin to fix his battle prowess.

His centers of power had returned to their peak form: His mind had quickly recovered after battling with the black clouds and he had eaten pieces of the

magical beasts inside his ring from time to time, his body was only growing stronger thanks to that.

The only issue was with his dantian.

Noah was cultivating as he flew but part of the "Breath" absorbed was being redirected to his mental sphere.

He needed it to utilize the Shadow sprint martial art which was his best movement method in battle, he couldn't allow himself to be powerless after having caused such a mess.

The journey back to the encampment seemed to be smooth but, when the borders of the Afria nation appeared in his field of view, a sudden dangerous feeling hit his consciousness.

Hundreds of brown arrows were sensed by his consciousness, at once Noah knew that someone was attacking him.

Chapter 483 - 483. Arrows

The arrows flew toward Noah from many directions, they tried to encircle him and to cut away any path of retreat.

Yet, Noah was in the air, he could move more freely than simple arrows.

A shockwave spread under his feet as he shot higher in the sky, removing himself from the trajectory of the attack.

However, right before the arrows were about to converge and crash in his previous position, they made a sharp change of direction, following Noah in his escaping route.

'This is a martial art mixed with a spell!'

Noah realized as the torrent of arrows reached from below him at a high speed.

It took him only a few seconds to understand the nature of the attack, the arrows had been shot while performing a martial art but their trajectory was controlled through a spell.

Also, the fact that his sea of consciousness labeled them as a potential danger made him sure of another detail.

'Their power surpasses the human ranks!'

A sudden ambush and a mighty power, Noah's confusion mounted as he stared at the incoming arrows.

Yet, some irritation rose inside him, his mind was calm but his instincts were screaming.

He was a dragon that had just reclaimed his rightful place in the sky and defeated the Tribulation sent by Heaven and Earth, how could someone dare to attempt to take him down?

Noah's consciousness spread as his body turned ethereal, the arrows pierced him before exploding inside his incorporeal figure.

A series of explosions filled the sky, hundreds of arrows reached for Noah and self-destructed when he entered in their range, Noah waited patiently inside the smoke created by the blast as he analyzed that attack.

'Their weight seems off, I can feel some pressure even when using the Ethereal form spell but they can't hurt me like this, not with my new body.'

The rank 5 Cursed dragon had been able to injure him through his ethereal form but this attack was weaker and his body had simply improved too much since then.

Meanwhile, his consciousness searched for traces of his attacker, his heavy mental waves swept the area around and below him as they tried to find the cultivator responsible for the ambush.

'Found you.'

Noah's reptilian eyes shone with a cold light when his consciousness found a cultivator hiding in the trees below him.

The mental energy of the cultivator used to conceal his presence couldn't do anything against Noah's investigatory capabilities, his power was completely revealed to him

'Rank 4 body in the upper tier, rank 4 dantian in the gaseous stage, earth aptitude, and rank 3 mental sphere... He doesn't seem a lone cultivator.'

Noah's attention went on the runes that covered his body and that acted as a magnet for the "Breath" around him, such a cultivation technique seemed too complex to be the creation of a cultivator on that level.

Also, the ambush had happened right before he reached the encampment in Afria nation, the timing was too perfect for it to be the act of an individual without any backing.

'I should be able to safely reach the encampment but I don't really want to let go of this chance to fight a heroic cultivator. I'm even quite hungry.'

Noah thought as he waited to return material, many possibilities were played in his mind in those seconds.

The encampment of the Hive had an elder guarding it, Noah would be safe once reached its perimeter.

Yet, that would only delay the issue and not solve it, he wanted to deal a blow to the force that had sent that cultivator.

Even his instincts were screaming to kill the offender and ravage his body, one shouldn't attack a dragon without being certain of killing it after all!

Noah returned material inside the smoke released by the explosions of the arrows and focused on a position behind the ambusher before his body was covered in black flames.

Evan had read the file that listed Noah's abilities, the scroll containing his information had been updated after the battles on the islands, Noah's profile was quite complete and detailed.

That's why Evan directly turned as soon as he sensed a fluctuation on the "Breath" behind him, his hands moved inhumanely fast as they nocked and released tens of brown arrows in the inscribed bow that he wielded toward the black flames that had appeared mid-air.

'He has been informed about my abilities.'

Noah realized that when he saw that the assassin had been able to exploit the weakness of the Warp spell as soon as he had used it.

A black sphere formed in front of Noah as he came out of the black flames, the "Breath" and mental energy contained in the arrows were absorbed by the Black hole spell, turning those powerful items in simple metal sticks.

Also, the "Breath" that had been redirected to Noah's body was dismantled and absorbed by him, Noah felt that the energy of a heroic cultivator nourished his body better than the magical beasts inside his space-ring.

The arrows then crashed on him as he came out of the black flames, metal sounds resounded as the pointy tips of the arrows broke when they came in contact with Noah's skin, they were unable to even leave a mark on it.

"Who sent you?"

Noah asked as red veins spread over the sclera of his eyes.

Evan had been momentarily surprised by the defensive power of his body, he knew the power and the constitution of his arrows and was left completely stunned when he saw that they broke without even denting Noah's skin.

Yet, when he saw the red veins around Noah's vertical pupils, he awakened from his stupor and shot another arrow with his bow.

The arrow exploded as soon as it left the bow, dense "Breath" and mental energy were released, affecting the trajectory of the Mental tremor spell than Noah had launched.

Evan retreated behind a tree to safely prepare more arrow but a sudden sense of danger made him jump away from that spot.

He turned his head only to see that Noah had chased behind him and kicked the tree, directly eradicating it from the ground and breaking its trunk in half.

Chapter 484 - 484. Dantian

A strength that surpassed the realm of the magical beasts was contained in a small body, Noah's physical power was simply immense!

Evan felt fear for the first time since the fight had begun.

He was a mighty heroic cultivator while his target was only in the third rank and the liquid stage even, the assassination should have been smooth and easy.

Yet, Noah had sensed his attack far before it was able to reach him and had found his hiding position in an instant.

Also, his reaction time was incredible, it didn't matter how many arrows Evan shot, Noah was always able to counter them and gain the initiative in the battle.

Noah's abilities had been described in detail in the scroll that Thaddeus had given him, Evan knew that his target was a genius when the sea of consciousness was concerned.

That's why, even though he was extremely stupefied and slightly doubtful, he understood the fact that Noah's mind had surpassed the human ranks.

That discovery made him unable to realize the power held by Noah's body, he had the aspect of a human after all, his mental sphere was a center of power far more threatening.

On the other hand, Noah felt troubled.

He was using his full power to defend against the offensive of a heroic cultivator, holding back only on the abilities that would reveal his dragon side.

The power held by the arrows shot by the assailant was simply too high, he was using a martial art fueled by rank 4 "Breath" after all, Noah had to use the power of his mental sphere to match it.

Yet, doing that took a heavy toll on his dantian which could only provide liquid "Breath", Noah felt his reserves depleting after the usage of a few spells.

Martial arts were weaker than spells but they also depleted less "Breath" and mental energy, that was one of the reasons why Noah had continued to use them even if he had more powerful methods.

'I need to rely on my body.'

Noah thought as his eyes sharpened, a shockwave expanded under his feet as he shot toward the escaping cultivator.

Evan didn't hesitate to release more arrows when he saw that Noah was set on chasing him, his hands nocked and released them at an incredible speed, Noah soon found more than thirty threatening darts aiming at him.

However, he was done testing his enemy's power, he needed to end the battle quickly and retreat in the safety of the encampment.

Heilong came out of his body and clashed with the arrows, the weapons exploded when they came in contact with the blood companion, shattering its body in thousands of pieces, even the defenses of a rank 4 middle tier creature couldn't do anything against the attack of a rank 4 cultivator.

Heilong's half-transparent figure inside Noah's mind was covered in cracks due to the attack that it had just endured, Noah suppressed the waves of pain released inside his mental sphere as he stomped the ground to sprint once again toward Evan.

Noah managed to reach Evan less than an instant after the latter shot another arrow, Noah saw the sharp arrowhead aiming for his heart as he was at less than a meter of distance from the cultivator.

It was at that point that Noah released a wave of gray flames.

The flames weren't enough to stop the flight of the arrow but they covered a wider area and their power depleted part of the arrow's strength.

Evan was surprised by that sudden attack but he quickly manipulated the terrain below him to create a thick and sturdy defensive wall.

Yet, while he was busy defending from the flames, he felt a series of claws piercing his body and tearing his internal organs.

At the same time, Noah dodged the incoming arrow and kicked the wall that had barely managed to stop his flames, Evan wasn't able to make the arrow detonate since the Ghostly claws spell had broken his focus.

The wall was a defensive spell cast by a rank 3 mage, it had been able to momentarily stop Noah's flames but it couldn't endure the power behind Noah's body.

Pieces of terrain shot in every direction as Noah destroyed the wall and swung his hand toward the cultivator hiding behind it, his stretched fingers resembled the claws of a beast as they reached for Evan's chest.

Evan was unable to do anything, he could only place his inscribed bow in the trajectory of Noah's hand.

However, the bow was only a peak rank 3 weapon, it immediately broke under Noah's physical power, unable to even slow down the threatening hand that aimed for him.

Then, Noah's blow hit Evan on his chest.

Evan had a rank 4 body in the upper tier but his rib cage was pierced as if it was butter, Noah's hand stabbed his chest and came out from the back of the incredulous cultivator.

Noah then retracted his hand until he was able to squeeze Evan's heart with his grip, his cold reptilian eyes released a primordial pressure as he spoke to the man.

"Who sent you?"

Noah tightened his grip as he asked that question, blood came out of Evan's mouth when his vital organ was being held hostage.

Nevertheless, he didn't answer, he simply closed his eyes as he focused on his dantian.

Noah felt that something was becoming unstable inside the low-waist of the assailant, his free hand stabbed him in that place only to retract it immediately after while carrying something in its grasp.

Evan continued to cough blood as his gaze went on Noah's hand, a minute but shining sphere stood in his bloodied palm among other pieces of internal organs.

Noah revealed a smirk as he ate the shining sphere, a seemingly endless amount of "Breath" filled him before his body automatically turned it into its nourishment.

Noah felt the power of his body increase once again, all his tissues became stronger and denser as he solidified his power inside the middle tier.

"You lost your dantian and I have your heart, tell me who you serve with so much zeal to make you willing to self-destruct."

Noah asked for the third time but Evan simply smiled before closing his eyes, it was clear that he had no intention to answer.

Noah looked at that gesture and sighed internally before closing the hand inside the cultivator's chest, Evan's heart was reduced to a pulp, finally ending his life.

Chapter 485 - 485. Blood

Evan died without revealing anything, the only clues about his origin were the runes on his skin.

Noah looked at the corpse below him, the two holes on his body soon stopped spurting blood, he couldn't help but feel satisfied as he analyzed them.

'A mighty heroic cultivator has died by my hand, I'm more than halfway into that realm.'

Noah thought as he reviewed the battle in his mind.

The assassin had a rank 4 body in the upper tier, Noah guessed that its ability was connected to the fast movement of his hands.

Yet, even if the rank of Evan's body was higher, it couldn't compare to Noah's one.

Also, Evan was limited in his attack methods.

His rank 4 dantian made his martial art extremely threatening but his spells were lacking, they had only been able to repel Noah's flames while being unable to withstand his physical strength.

However, it was mainly thanks to his body that Noah had been able to defeat him, the liquid "Breath" inside his dantian simply didn't allow him to slowly destroy his defenses which had been prepared according to his most dangerous attacks.

'The Mental tremor spell and the Ghostly claws spells are awesome but they can be countered if a cultivator has made enough preparation, I was only able to hit him with the ethereal claws when I hid them inside my flames.'

Analyzing his battles had always made Noah able to see the weaknesses of his battle style and, right now, his most troublesome flaw was the lack of a powerful "Breath" to fuel his abilities.

While Noah was immersed in his thoughts, a powerful consciousness swept his position.

Noah felt it and recognized it, he turned in its direction while performing a bow and speaking through his mind.

"Greetings, Elder Amber, I'm sorry for this mess."

Elder Amber was the heroic cultivator stationed by the Hive in the encampment in Afria nation, Noah had already spoken with her when he had teleported from the archipelago.

"I sensed a huge discharge of rank 4 "Breath" but I didn't know it was you the one battling with it, I would have come sooner otherwise."

Elder Amber descended from the sky as she answered Noah, she wore a long blue robe with golden tentacles embroidered on its sleeves, that color matched her long golden hair that slowly fluttered in the wind.

Noah simply shook his head as he accepted her explanation.

"Your main concern is to keep the encampment safe, there was no need to expose your presence for this small matter."

Noah words made Elder Amber's eyebrow arc, she stared at the reptilian eyes of the man in front of her with an expressionless face for a while before she gave voice to her thoughts.

"Defeating a heroic cultivator, even if not a complete one, definitely isn't a small matter. The power of your mind is stupefying as always, Prince, and it seems that the resources of the Hive have finally managed to produce results, the Patriarch was right in trusting in your potential."

Elder Amber analyzed Noah's body as she spoke, she felt some sort of primordial danger being radiated by him.

Noah understood that the Elder had realized something when he felt her gaze all over his body but he didn't do anything to hide it, he simply felt no reason to do so.

Rather than hiding his power, Noah was mostly interested in finding out who had sent the assassin.

"Elder, do you recognize these runes?"

Noah spoke as he pointed at the skin of the maimed corpse next to him.

"These runes should belong to some cultivation technique created in the Royal academy but I'm not completely sure. Also, they might have been used on purpose to mask the origin of the cultivator... Prince, who would be willing to send a heroic cultivator to kill you?"

Elder Amber spoke, confirming part of Noah's suspects.

The assassin had Noah's profile, he knew about the encampment, and had a rank 4 dantian, only a big nation could have the means to prepare such an ambush.

Among the big nations, the only one that hated and feared Noah to the point of using someone in the heroic ranks was the Ultra nation.

"Probably the Elbas family, they must be really scared about losing the Royal Inheritance."

Noah spoke without restraints, the elders of the Hive were aware of the Royal Inheritance after all.

Elder Amber nodded, she had a similar opinion about the matter.

"Do you mind if I take the corpse? I might not be able to obtain anything but I'm sure that the Patriarch can force them to pay us."

Noah turned his head toward the corpse when he heard those words.

He had already eaten the most nourishing part of the cultivator and the runes on his body had stopped working when Evan died.

Also, the body of a cultivator contained far less "Breath" than a magical beast on its same rank, Noah decided that it was more important as a bargaining chip rather than as a quick meal.

Noah's mental waves enveloped the finger of the assassin where his space-ring was and lifted the storage device in the air, making it land directly in Noah's grasp.

Then, he gestured to the elder to take the corpse, Evan's body disappeared as soon as Elder Amber waved her hand.

"We can't isolate ourselves but we can't even create a stable foothold on the continent. The encampments will remain operational for a few more months

before we will be forced to retreat, only time will tell if the Coral archipelago can aim to become the fourth big nation."

Elder Amber sighed as she spoke those words, she seemed to treat Noah as her equal as she rose in the air and waited for him to follow her.

"I'm currently unable to fly, Elder, the battle has injured my puppet."

Elder Amber nodded when she heard Noah's words and simply flew above him as he moved on foot back to the encampment.

Just before reaching the encampment though, Elder Amber turned her head and pointed at Noah's face.

"Clean the blood from your face before meeting the human assets at least."

Only then did Noah realize that traces of blood were still on his mouth from when he ate Evan's dantian.

Chapter 486 - 486. Hunger

The news that Noah had been able to defeat a cultivator with a rank 4 dantian was kept a secret among the elders of the Hive, they didn't want the forces of the continent to learn more about their power after all.

Of course, the Elbas family was aware that their assassin had died, even though it didn't know the exact details behind his death.

Evan was a soldier that had been nurtured till the heroic ranks, his value inside the ranks of the Royals was high, he was meant to lead the army of criminals one day.

Yet, he died in an insignificant nation, fighting a cultivator in the human ranks.

Also, Chasing Demon began to contact them in secret, asking for explanations and, eventually, compensations.

The Elbas family simply rejected any affiliation with the assassin and even offered to send an expert to examine the runes on Evan's body, there didn't seem to be hope in extorting a better deal with the Utra nation.

However, the branch of the Royal family that handled the creation of a secret army clearly understood one thing: Noah Balvan could only be killed by complete heroic cultivators!

The Royals didn't believe that Noah had defeated the assassin by himself, he was only a rank 3 cultivator in the gaseous stage during the battle for the independence of the archipelago after all.

Yet, the truth was that one of their promising heroic assets had died, implying that Noah was most likely heavily protected.

That forced the Elbas family to completely give up on killing Noah for the time being, all the heroic cultivator in the Utra nation were either part of the Royals or of the noble families, deploying those forces would be a public breach in the treaties signed after the Hive won the war, the Elbas family simply couldn't do that.

The first big nation that broke those treaties would create the excuse needed for the cooperation between the other two big nations which would be further aided by the Hive, it was simply too dangerous to act in that way.

Meanwhile, Noah had returned to the Coral archipelago.

The encampment in Efrana nation had been disbanded and his mansion had been brought back on island nineteen where he was currently resting.

Noah knew that the force that had sent the assassin was now aware that he could fight cultivators with a rank 4 dantian or that he had some sort of protection that had allowed him to survive, meaning that the next assassin would probably be a complete heroic cultivator.

He didn't have the power to fight a being with that power, he had been able to deal with a martial art fueled by rank 4 "Breath" but he would have had just died against a cultivator that could also match the power of his spells.

That's why he had decided to temporarily return to the archipelago to focus on his battle prowess and to find a solution to his precarious situation.

Evan's space-ring didn't contain much, only a few drugs and a seemingly endless stash of arrows, everything inside was useless to Noah.

Heilong's half-transparent figure inside his mind was rapidly healing thanks to the nourishment of the dense mental energy below it, it wouldn't take long before it returned to its peak form.

Noah finally had time to properly test the growth of his new body: He had reached the middle tier after absorbing the "Breath" contained in the black clouds but Evan's dantian hadn't been able to make him reach another tier, it had only solidified his position in the middle tier.

Also, even the small pieces of the magical beasts' corpses inside his space-ring didn't seem to increase his power that much, Noah soon began to evaluate the amount of nourishment that each resource gave him according to its rank.

'Magical beasts have a stronger body than cultivators but they also need more "Breath" to grow. It must be considered that I'm a hybrid, meaning that I would need an even higher amount of "Breath" since my power surpasses both races... I'd say that only the dantians of heroic cultivators and magical beasts of a higher tier can significantly make me improve. There is to consider the lifespan of the magical beasts too, age is an important aspect in their world.'

Noah could randomly eat anything containing "Breath" like a magical beast but he knew that such behavior would eventually put him in some trouble.

That's why he decided that, unless he was completely sure that no one was watching, he would only eat what would give him a substantial nourishment.

As for his hunger, he had a better use for it.

Becoming a hybrid made him realize that he lacked something vital in the creation of an item through the Elemental forging method: A proper will!

His ambition had been enough to fuse him with a magical beast but the forging of a rank 4 item required something more specific, something that truly expressed the purpose of his creation.

Noah didn't consider his body as his first inscribed item in the fourth rank, its level was the consequence of the material that he had used.

That's why, in his mind, he still thought that he hadn't been able to cross the human ranks with his forging ability.

The creation of his martial art could wait, it would be useless to create an offensive method that could be only fueled with liquid "Breath".

After all, martial arts needed a balance between the physical strength and the "Breath" used while performing the forms of the art, the consumption of the Shadow sprint martial art had increased due to the power of his body.

His dantian was barely able to fuel a few spells and one martial art, adding other offensive methods wouldn't solve the core of the issue, Noah needed to create a cultivation method and become a complete heroic cultivator!

The "Breath" blessings had continued to accumulate inside his space-ring, Noah had had enough resources to experiment in that field again for a long time.

What he had lacked was a meaning to imbue his creations with.

His endless hunger gave him the idea that he needed.

Magical beasts were always hungry, they would go crazy when starving or in front of an appealing resource.

Such endless hunger, such desire to devour anything that contained "Breath", such implacable greed, there was no better meaning to add to an item meant to absorb "Breath".

Chapter 487 - 487. Cracks

There was one aspect of his body on which Noah could focus while resuming the experiments for the creation of a cultivation technique: His flames!

Cursed dragons could endlessly empower their flames by absorbing the "Breath" contained in the light around them, that ability was now in Noah's hands, meaning that he had to take care of their growth.

He soon discovered though that it took time to improve the state of his lungs, their color remained gray even if he had begun absorbing the light in the room where he was experimenting, it would take a large amount of "Breath" for his flames to reach the power that the rank 5 dragon in the Granite Abyss had.

On the other hand, his experiments were managing to produce some results.

His endless hunger was the perfect meaning to refine his "Breath" with, the condensed "Breath" blessings that he forged resembled a thick black vortex able to continuously attract and absorb the "Breath" of the darkness element from the environment, even though they still weren't able to cross the human ranks.

Of course, solving an issue only created more problems for Noah.

The forged "Breath" blessings continuously absorbed "Breath", their power rose as the process kept going since they could only contain it inside their composition.

There was once a time when Noah had to forcibly destroy his creation because its power started to affect the "Breath" inside the matter, it was threatening to become an uncontrollable rank 4 inscribed item!

'This won't do, I need something stable, I can't put inside my dantian an actual Black hole!'

Those were Noah's thoughts as he struggled with that issue.

He knew that he would be able to create something in the heroic ranks soon since his expertise was increasing but that would be useless if he didn't find a way to control it.

After all, if his cultivation technique went out of control while being inside his dantian, he would most likely lose that center of power forever!

There was one aspect of his creations that left him happily surprised though.

The compressed "Breath" blessings were created through the Elemental forging method, his will dictated their functioning.

That will naturally conflicted with that of Heaven and Earth, the latter was removed during the absorption process, leaving only non-refined "Breath" inside the inscribed items.

That discovery left Noah completely surprised, perfecting his cultivation technique would give him access to an almost endless stash of non-refined "Breath" after all which he could use for his martial arts and spells!

While Noah was secluded inside his mansion, busy with his experiments, a peculiar event attracted the attention of the high-level cultivators of the continent.

At many kilometers from the southwestern coastline, a faint crack appeared in the sky.

The crack was almost unnoticeable if not for the fact that an extremely pure "Breath" came out of it, it seemed as if the crack was connected to a place where the "Breath" was far more abundant.

Before the crack could be thoroughly investigated though, it expanded, becoming longer and splitting in many directions.

The area covered by the fissure enlarged day by day, it didn't take much before the powerhouses of the concerned nations decided to act, ignoring the political situation of the continent.

In the sky, in a spot above the clouds.

Three figures stared at the spreading cracks that had created something similar to a spider's web in the azure sky.

They were the powerhouses of the Utra nation, of the Shandal Empire, and of the Hive.

Chasing Demon stared at the other two powerful cultivators next to him, they were both rank 6 cultivators but their power couldn't be compared to his, he had just reached the sixth rank after all.

"Seniors, I wonder if you've ever witnessed a similar event."

Chasing Demon politely spoke to the other two cultivators, he was completely aware that he was inferior to them.

The other two existences were a man and a woman, they didn't move their gazes away from the cracks as they sorted their thoughts.

The woman wore a simple red robe with the large emblem of the Empire sewed on its back, her brown hair and shining green eyes gave her a youthful appearance but the depths contained in her gaze carried the experiences of thousands of years of struggles.

The man had silver hair and golden eyes, he had the appearance of a middle-aged man and traces of arrogance were radiated by his expression.

A golden crown was on his head and a large golden robe with large sleeves gave him a noble demeanor as he inspected the sky, looking for clues.

Those three powerful existences had chosen to investigate the matter since the fissure threatened to reach the sky above the continent, where their nations and areas of influence were, which was the reason why the powerhouse of the Papral nation was absent.

Then, the man wearing the crown moved his gaze away from the sky and turned toward the woman on his right before speaking in a plain tone.

"My Elbas family is relatively new, our records don't concern events that have happened more than three thousand years ago. I wonder if God's Left Hand can provide us with a detailed explanation."

The woman's eyes sharpened when she heard her name, she gave a quick look to the smug face of the crowned man next to her before inspecting the sky again while speaking a few words.

"The Almighty is aware of this event, King Elbas. This matter concerns the Immortal Lands and it's something that we can't affect that much, our role is to prevent the cracks from reaching the continent."

Chasing Demon listened to their dialogue in silence, those cultivators were speaking about gods and affecting the sky, he didn't even know how to join that conversation.

It was at that point that shards began to separate from the cracks and fall toward the sea below it, a rain of shining azure crystals soon filled the air in front of the three powerhouses.

The sky was shattering, the azure crystals falling into the sea radiated dense "Breath" that soon filled the area before they dispersed in the water below.

The three powerhouses didn't have time to seize those crystals because an even more incredible event followed the shattering of the sky.

The many fissures in the sky widened and connected, forming an uneven rectangular area where the shards kept falling.

Then, the surface of the sky completely broke and an immense boulder fell from that huge hole.

The three powerhouses saw the event but felt powerless to stop it, the boulder had a width slightly smaller than the continent, even their mighty power wasn't enough to stop the descent of that huge landmass.

"Almighty!"

God's Left Hand shouted as she turned her gaze to look at a place somewhere at the center of the Shandal Empire.

Meanwhile, Chasing Demon and King Elbas simply retreated as they stared at the falling boulder in disbelief.

It looked as if an immense mountain was falling from the sky, its lower surface soon began to heat up as it gained speed.

What once started as a simple fissure had now turned into a meteorite threatening to extinguish all the lifeforms of the continent!

It was at that point that a blue light filled the surface of the sea below the falling mountain.

Water rose in the air and turned into ice pillars that launched themselves toward the boulder, white columns formed and clashed against its burning surface.

The size of the columns was incredible, they were as large as an entire nation and stabbed their sharp tips on the falling boulder, slowly affecting its speed.

A reverent gaze appeared on God's Left Hand as she turned and kneeled toward the territories of the Empire while still being mid-air, she knew that her god had decided to help them.

More and more ice pillars rose in the air, the level of the sea lowered as its water was used to fuel that divine spell, it was as if a white mountain had decided to fight the falling azure one to protect the lifeforms of the continent!

The boulder began to slow down when the entirety of the ice mountain crashed on it, ice-shards and azure shards flew in every direction as the two immense objects fought each other.

That event released shockwaves that reached the southwestern coastline of the continent and, of course, the coral archipelago, all the cultivators in the heroic ranks and even some in the human ranks felt that disturbance in the "Breath".

Many powerful existences left their habitation and appeared in the open to witness that colossal event, disbelief was written in their faces when their eyes landed on the white and azure mountains fighting each other.

Noah wasn't an exception, his sea of consciousness and his beast's instincts had begun to scream as soon as the sky was pierced, he quickly left his mansion and flew high in the air to understand what was happening.

Then, he saw it.

The azure sky had a hole in it from which a shining aura was released, it seemed as if an amazing world was hidden behind it.

The boulder almost as big as the continent was continuing in its descent, an azure halo was radiated from its surface, it seemed completely made of a material similar to the "Breath" blessings.

In the end, he saw the white mountain from which pillars continued to rise to stop the advance of the falling continent, its body was pierced as the motion of the latter kept going, it was as if it was trying to envelop that unknown mountain.

The cultivators of the continent held their breaths as they watched the white pillars slowing the fall of the azure mountain until they eventually stopped it completely, an azure continent stood motionlessly over a seemingly endless white plain, a new landmass had appeared where there once was only water.

Yet, the shockwaves radiated by that clash affected the state of the sea below, huge waves rose on its surface and spread in every direction around the new continent.

Chasing Demon, King Elbas, and God's Left Hand awakened from their stupor and disappeared from their position only to reappear on the coastline of their respective countries.

Chasing Demon closed his eyes before many immense walls rose from the seabed next to the islands and faced the incoming tsunami.

The power contained in the waves and their height was great but Chasing Demon was a rank 6 existence and the last line of defense against that natural calamity.

More and more walls rose from the sea and even the tentacles of powerful beasts appeared to repel the huge waves.

Similar scenes played themselves along the southwestern coastline, the powerhouses of the big nations appeared in the air and used their methods to defend the continent from the calamity.

It took some time but, in the end, the sea calmed down, returning to a peaceful state.

The defensive spells used to defend the continent broke or dispersed in the air, revealing once again the changed scenery on the horizon.

Only the powerhouses kept their eyes on the hole in the sky, they were worried that another continent or something scarier would fall from it.

Yet, to their surprise, the sky simply began to reform.

An azure brilliance shone on the edges of the hole, reforming the surface of the sky and quickly filling the vast cavity that connected the Mortal Lands to what seemed a higher plane.

Noah's disbelief had long surpassed what he was able to contain and his mouth hung open on his jaw as he stared at the new continent in the sea.

His gaze then found Chasing Demon who was staring with a serious expression in his same direction.

Noah flew toward the Patriarch of the Hive and many elders did the same, Chasing Demon was the only one in the Coral archipelago who could know more about the event.

There were less than thirty cultivators behind the Patriarch of the Hive as they waited for his explanation.

Chasing Demon sighed before he turned toward the crowd and spoke a few soft words.

"It seems that a piece of the Immortal Lands has fallen in the Mortal ones."

Chapter 489 - 489. Colonization

Chasing Demon spoke, leaving everyone around him too amazed to answer.

Noah wasn't an exception, he replayed the patriarch's words in his mind, trying to give them some sense.

'A piece of the Immortal Lands has fallen? That thing is almost as big as our continent, this is a damned world-level threat!'

Noah had never cared that much about the geography of the world but he had inevitably learnt a few things as he lived there.

The continent where the three big nations ruled was the largest landmass of the planet, some groups of islands and smaller lands were sparsely situated on the surface of the sea which covered most of the planet.

All in all, Noah knew that this planet was bigger than his previous one but there wasn't the same variety of places where to live, the biggest share of the human population lived in one of the areas of influence of the forces of continent.

Also, since it had never been conquered in its entirety by a single force, the continent remained nameless, no organization could ever claim the right to name it.

The continent, the other smaller landmasses, the islands, and the sea were labeled as Mortal Lands.

They were "mortal" due to the beings that inhabited them and to the "Breath" found there, it wasn't an environment fit for deities.

As for the Immortal Lands, Noah only knew that they were somewhere above the sky but the information about them was restricted to peak heroic cultivator who had started researching about their ascension, he simply didn't have the power needed to gain access to that intelligence.

"Patriarch, how can parts of the Immortal Lands fall?"

One of the elders around Chasing Demon asked, interrupting Noah's thoughts and raising the interest of the cultivators in the air.

Their curiosity was understandable, the new continent had once been part of the Immortal Lands, a place that only deities could reach!

That was supposedly the final destination of the cultivation journey, it was normal for those heroic cultivators to want to learn more about it.

Of course, the only entity of the Hive who could know something about it was Chasing Demon.

A pensive expression appeared on Chasing Demon's sharp face, he turned his gaze back on the azure landmass placed over the stratum of ice and sorted his thoughts before explaining what he knew.

"I remember something that my master, Divine Demon, said about the Immortal Lands."

A moment of silence followed those words, Chasing Demon's expression seemed to soften when he mentioned his master.

"The lands above the sky are richer of "Breath", capable of sustaining the cultivation process of many divine lifeforms. Yet, they aren't eternal, even the dense "Breath" contained in those places will eventually be depleted if too many deities affect it."

Noah and the elders next to him listened to his words with utmost attention, that was probably the first real information about the Immortal Lands after all!

"When an area in the Immortal Lands loses too much "Breath", it will separate and fall into the Mortal Lands since it can't meet the required standards of that higher plane. This is all I know and it's even a supposition, I can't be sure of the actual reason behind this event."

Chasing Demon fell silent after he provided his explanation, his gaze probed the new land with interest and even some eagerness, countless possibilities were evaluated in his mind in those short seconds.

"Does it mean that there might be divine beings there?"

At that time, it was Noah's turn to speak.

He had been fascinated by Chasing Demon's explanation and stunned by the spell that had blocked the meteorite but there was something that bothered him since he had discovered that the new continent had come from the Immortal Lands.

The gazes of the elders went on him, some of them realized the meaning behind his words and turned toward the patriarch as they waited for an answer.

According to Noah's reasoning, the Immortal Lands were inhabited by divine beings, meaning that there could be a divine-level threat inside the new continent.

"It is very unlikely, nothing ever comes back from the Immortal Lands unless its level isn't fit for them anymore, Heaven and Earth closely handle them after all. I suggest we wait a few days just to be sure before planning our next move."

Chasing Demon answered, reassuring the cultivators around him.

'There might not be an actual god there but there might be resources of a similar level too, magical beasts and cultivators will do anything in their power to seize them. It seems that the equilibrium of the continent will shift once again.'

Noah thought as he fixed his eyes on the horizon, the new continent gave him a strange sensation, his beast's instincts told him that danger was hidden in that azure environment.

Yet, where there was danger, there were also potential gains!

"Patriarch, when you said next move, did you mean what I'm thinking?"

Another elder expressed his concerns but traces of greed could be seen in its eyes, its intentions could be clearly understood by the others.

A new land coming from a higher plane, an environment probably at the peak of the heroic ranks.

That meant the possibility of finding resources and lifeforms in the heroic ranks, secrets about the Immortal Lands, leftovers of the divine beings that had walked on that area, there could be literally anything there.

Most importantly, if the new continent was found to be more valuable than the old one, the areas of influence of the three big nations would just lose importance since a better goal would be placed in front of those three dominant forces.

The goal would be the colonization of that better land!

Chasing Demon nodded and revealed a smile as he turned toward that elder.

"Yes, we will leave the first exploration to the three big nations of the continent, they can face the dangers hidden there for us. Meanwhile, we will decide if it's better to join the colonization of the new land or if it's time to finally strike our continent."

Chapter 490 - 490. Limits

Chasing Demon's words resounded in the sky above the islands, expectant gazes appeared on the faces of the elders when they realized the number of gains that this chance could bring.

Heroic cultivators were constantly looking for techniques and spells that could increase their power and, maybe, enlighten them on the creation of methods to improve their cultivation level.

Cultivation techniques and body-nourishing methods in the sixth rank were basically non-existent and carried limitations since they had been created by

other cultivators, even the sixth Kesier rune was considered an extremely rare resource.

Without methods to increase their ranks, the cultivation of those mighty cultivators would stagnate, only a small percentage of them was somewhat skilled in inscription methods and even those struggled to create techniques.

Those old monsters viewed the new continent as the answer that they needed to advance in their cultivation journey, that land came directly from a place where deities lived after all!

Of course, Noah had similar feelings but he was rather conflicted about them.

He knew that either colonizing the new land or creating a foothold in the old one would greatly benefit the Hive as an organization and the cultivators in it.

Yet, there was a problem that he couldn't avoid no matter which approaches the Hive decided to take.

The problem concerned his personal power.

Both creating a foothold and colonizing the new continent required power in the heroic ranks, he was on his way toward that realm but reaching it didn't mean being on the same level of the other heroic cultivators.

He wasn't even thirty-three while the other heroic cultivators had lived for decades, even centuries, he knew that all his battle experience would be worthless in front of those entities.

'Even if I become a complete heroic cultivator, I can't match those that have accumulated experience and tuned their battle prowess for years, I would just be the weakest of the bunch.'

Noah thought as he analyzed the heated gazes of the elders around him.

That situation seemed similar to when Divine Demon's inheritance was discovered but, in reality, it was completely different.

In the human ranks, Noah could fully exploit his constant training, his battle experience, and his aptitude to overwhelm his enemies, most of them lacked fighting methods and had spent way too much time in seclusion anyway.

Instead, the heroic ranks were filled by monsters who had lived for many lifespans and had accumulated fighting methods through their long lives, Noah would only be a talented kid in their eyes.

'How can I join this fight? How can I make my power match theirs in a short amount of time?'

Noah thought deeply on the matter while remaining in the air, the elders slowly began to fly back to their habitation, probably to prepare themselves for the imminent chaos.

'I can't.'

That conclusion hit Noah's mind as the group dispersed.

The heroic ranks were on a completely different level, there wasn't a quick way to obtain a battle prowess that matched those old monsters even with all the methods and advantages that Noah had.

"Don't afflict yourself too much, the speed of your growth is already something unheard of, don't try to enter this world if you don't have the power to affect it."

Chasing Demon spoke as he turned and patted Noah's shoulder before leaving that place too, he had clearly understood what Noah was thinking and had decided to warn him.

The elders still there nodded toward Noah as they returned toward the islands, they already considered Noah as their equal but the truth was stronger than feelings, he simply didn't have the power to affect the imminent clash.

Only Noah remained in the air with his gaze still fixed on the new continent, his dense mental energy continuously fueled the Divine deduction technique as he tried to think of a way to sharply increase his power.

Ideas rose and crumbled inside his mind, Noah was rich and talented but there was a set limit to how much he could do at the moment.

Anything that he could think of was simply reckless or too dangerous and it mainly concerned his body since it was the only real advantage that he would have over other heroic cultivators.

Then, an idea took form and, no matter how he analyzed it, it didn't crumble but only became denser and more concrete.

'Secret arts push one center of power to its limits to achieve a temporary but huge boost of power, the center of power in question though would end up heavily injured and could even be completely wasted.'

Noah reviewed the definition of the secret arts that he had studied after Sarah's events, he had always been interested in those offensive methods but he had chosen not to learn them because they were too dangerous.

Yet, there was one of his centers of power that had drastically changed: His body!

'I'm a hybrid now, what is considered as limits in the secret arts can't be applied to my body, I'm not bound by the same limitations.'

Magical beasts' bodies were far stronger than the humans' ones and hybrids surpassed both species in that field!

'Secret arts that push a body to its limits shouldn't have any drawback on me since my body is simply on another level. Also, I could couple my new martial art with this temporary boost of power to obtain amazing results.'

Martial arts used body and "Breath" as their foundation, meaning that their effect would be stronger if their foundation was more powerful.

Yet, what if someone was to perform a martial art while using a secret art that empowered its body?

Noah knew the answer to that question: Larger quantities of "Breath" would be expended to match the improved power of the body but more powerful effects would be produced too.

'This might actually push a martial art in the realm of the spells and even surpass them if the cultivator wields a powerful inscribed weapon. This can work! I just need to solve the issue with my dantian first!'

Once he reached that conclusion, Noah turned and flew back to his mansion to complete his cultivation technique.