

Chapter 91 - 91. Prey

Noah dug a hole in the rocky corridor.

He made it two cubic meters large to be comfortable, he didn't plan on to leave it any time soon.

He resumed his usual training schedule, waiting in the darkness of the hole for a bat to pass by.

When the night arrived and the leader sent the order, the hundreds of rank 1 and rank 2 beasts of its pack left the central area and moved to the surface.

One of the rank 2 specimens felt its body being squeezed and was dragged into one of the cavities of the corridor.

Noah directly stabbed the beast on its chest, killing it on the spot, no one of its pack noticed its disappearance.

Noah carefully looked at the bat, giving importance to the details of its body.

He took out Uriah's diary and opened it where the sketches were.

After evaluating a bit in his mind, he began to draw on the ground the image of the dead bat in front of him.

He continued to draw during the whole night and when the pack came back and went to sleep, he came out of his cavity to have a better vision of the biggest bat at the center of the group.

He drew its form on the ground and repeated the process until the night came again.

He spent one week practicing in the figure of the bat in order to be ready to start the procedure as soon as he gathered the materials from its body.

On the eighth day, he was ready.

He waited for the pack to go in its hunting and exited the hole he made.

The two silver sabers were held tightly in his hands.

His torso was already uncovered and the image of a snake moved freely on its chest.

On the ceiling of the large underground room, tens of rank 2 bats were still in guard around the three big specimens of their pack.

Noah ingress in the area alerted the group which began to launch sound attacks to him.

He immediately deployed Assea around him to weaken the vibrations of the attack.

Their shockwaves couldn't pass the ethereal body of the snake and were blocked.

The bats screeched seeing that their offensive had no effect but they were stopped by tens of black wind slashes that came toward them.

Corpses and injured bodies fell from the ceiling, creating a noise that woke up the three bigger specimens.

The three screeched loudly aiming for the black snake.

Assea's body cracked in many points and some vibration hit Noah that began to bleed from his ears.

However, instead of being angry about the damage that he suffered, his expression appeared incredibly happy.

'Two rank 3 upper tier and one peak stage!'

He had confirmed that the bigger bat was precisely what he was in need of.

'Demonic form.'

Assea's body returned inside his body showing a fiendish figure from which black smoke was constantly released.

Noah shot more slashes covered in smoke.

The blows hit more beasts on the ceiling and released the corrosive smoke in the upper area of the underground room.

The pack began to scream in pain and its members were forced to descend on the ground to escape the toxic cloud.

Noah didn't waste any time and jumped at the three rank 3 bats that flew down.

One of the smaller ones was directly stabbed by him, the black smoke expanded from where the saber was and devoured its body in a few seconds.

A beast in the upper tier of rank 3 was killed in few instants!

The pack went crazy seeing that one of their group died so easily and began to disperse, however, their speed was inferior to Noah in the Demonic form.

He was already over the other rank 3 bat as he slashed at him.

The head of the bat was divided in two and its upper body was consumed by the smoke that his sabers released.

The leader understood that it could not escape and turned to send another powerful screech in his direction.

The armor made of smoke trembled but absorbed the vibrations, only some slight damage was done to his internal organs.

Noah jumped and pressed his body on the bat.

The beast screamed in pain as the smoke surrounding him consumed its body.

However, the smoke retracted almost instantly and the figure of a young human was visible tightly hanging on its body.

The bat was about to attack but it found out that it could not make a sound, a blade was deeply stabbed in its throat.

The beast was hovering in the air and fell on the ground after a few violent struggles.

As life left its body, Noah put it in the empty space-ring and ran away from the underground cavern.

Once on the surface, he continued to run until he found a large tree with a big hole in its trunk.

The insides were six meters large and tall three, Noah nodded seeing the place and took out the bat corpse.

He put a large bowl under its throat and took out the blade from it.

Blood began to flow, filling the bowl.

A bottle then appeared in front of him and Noah directly drank it.

The mental energy that he expended in the battle was being refilled at high speed!

'As expected, Lena's potions are of top quality!'

When the bowl surpassed the amount of blood required for the procedure by one-fold, Noah opened the bat's chest.

He took out the heart of the beast and put it inside the space-ring together with the body.

He then sat on the ground to concentrate on filling the blood in the bowl with his "Breath".

As he was in the liquid stage, the process took less than the last time and in only half a day the blood had reached the required standards.

He smiled seeing the dense dark liquid and put it in the space-ring too.

He was eager to create a new blood companion but he had to make room for one first.

Chapter 92 - 92. Echo

Inside Noah's sea of consciousness.

Noah's half-transparent figure had one hand over Assea's cracked image.

His eyes were closed and his brows were knitted, he seemed immersed in a complex process.

Shards of Assea's image began to detach from its figure and feel in the sea.

Little by little, the snake form in Noah's mental sphere crumbled until there was nothing left in its place.

Noah opened his eyes and the snake tattoo on his chest rejected the blood of the Horned snake, expelling it from the body.

Of his blood companion, only a wound remained.

Noah took out a bottle and a pill from his space-ring, one helped to restore his mental energy while the other increased the healing speed of his injuries.

He had suffered some damage from the bat pack and the process of killing the blood companion left him in a tired state.

He meditated to help the medicines do their work and noticed that his mind was clearer than ever.

Without the drawback of the spell from the Assea family, his sea of consciousness felt extremely light.

'It won't last much longer.'

Noah thought and picked a cask full of water from his space-ring.

He washed neatly to prevent any contamination and then put everything away, taking out the bowl full of dense blood.

It was time to begin!

He focused and immersed his saber in the bowl and started drawing on his chest the outline of the rank 3 bat.

Then it was time for the details: four fangs, pointy ears, four clawed paws, two eyes on the sides of the head with one in the middle, and two pairs of wings.

A sort of pressure exuded from the drawing while Noah nodded in satisfaction.

A small heart appeared in his hand, it was the size of one and a half fists.

The rank 3 bat was smaller than the Horned snake, it was only three meters tall so it was natural for its organs to be tinier.

Noah took two rapid bites and swallowed the heart, the drawing's temperature began to rise till Noah felt his chest burning.

This time though he was prepared.

His eyes were already closed and focusing on his sea of consciousness.

His ethereal figure had his eyes opened waiting for the bat image to appear.

When it materialized, it acted in the same way as the Horned snake the previous time: it went berserk and moved at high speed toward the sphere with the intention of breaking it.

However, the first Kesier rune hummed, followed by the faint form of the second one.

The beast fell on the sea screeching in pain and Noah followed it.

In a few minutes, the figure of the bat formed over the sea at the center of the sphere.

The pressure generated by the sharing of their senses returned and pressed on the walls of the sea of consciousness.

Noah was about to exit his mental sphere when the roots wrapped around the first Kesier rune shot out and entangled themselves around the bat.

'I knew it!'

He could feel from his connection with the new blood companion that it could enter the Demonic form without rejections!

He opened his material eyes and stood up, the tattoo of the bat moved a bit over his body to then stop on his back.

'It seems more alive than Assea, does it depend on the fact that we are of the same element?'

He summoned it in front of him.

The bat was quite lifelike, it had the same size as the original beast which reassured Noah on the success of the process.

'Attack me.'

As usual, Noah wanted to test its abilities.

The bat didn't hesitate and screeched in his direction, Noah spat out a mouthful of blood while his liquid "Breath" was consumed to fuel the ability.

He hastily made it stop and stared with wide eyes at his new companion.

'It can use its innate abilities? But that wasn't specified in Uriah's diary.'

He sat on the floor and focused on healing his injuries, the sound attack had hurt him internally.

He didn't use the potions this time as he wasn't in a hurry, previously he had used them afraid that the ingredients for the spell could have been wasted.

He tested some more times and confirmed that the bat could use all the abilities that he had when it was alive.

'Is it because my element is the same? It makes sense after all, only the body changed while its instincts and its "Breath" remained the same. Anyway, it definitely kept the strength of a peak rank 3 beast.'

He tested some more and activated the Demonic form on it.

Black smoke was released from its body and its power rose visibly but Noah's mental energy was depleted at an even higher speed than when he used that spell for himself.

'However, its weakness is removed when it enters that form.'

Since the bat was smaller than Assea, it could just cover an area of a few meters around Noah.

However, when it activated the Demonic form, the black smoke would work as a connection between Noah's body and the blood companion, vastly increasing its area of action.

'So this is the true power of the Body-inscription spell, wonderful, my battle prowess increased again.'

He looked at the bat for a while and then nodded.

'I'll call you Echo, now let's see if you can make me fly.'

Flying not only was extremely useful to travel, but it could also be used as a way to run away from a dangerous situation.

If he had had that ability back in Twilboia Cliff, he would have never faced the rank 5 snake.

His expectations were not met as he discovered that he could at best use Echo's body to float and not properly fly.

Black smoke covered again the companion's body and Noah entered it.

This time it could fly for a period but its speed was nothing special and the expenditure of mental energy was immense.

'It seems that the body created through the spell is flawed in this aspect, or maybe it's because my "Breath" is only in the liquid stage, or probably because bat-type magical beasts aren't that skillful in flight in general. I'll do more tests later on, now I should rest.'

He decided to return to the empty trunk and slept.

Chapter 93 - 93. Wings

Noah was standing on the ground with his eyes closed.

His torso was naked and, on his back, two pairs of black wings were opened wide.

Then, black smoke engulfed the wings and they began to flap at an even rhythm.

Noah's body slowly rose in the air until it reached five meters of altitude.

Noah stayed in the air for a while before carefully alighting back on the ground.

He heaved a long breath while retracting the wings.

'This is as much as I can do for now, humans don't seem too fit for flight.'

In this period of time, he stopped his trip to continue testing his ability to fly.

However, even if he managed to rise in the air, his aerial control was lacking.

Humans were beings that walked on the ground, the sky wasn't their domain.

They didn't have the innate instincts of a flying beast so Noah could only put more training in that field to solve the issue.

'There is also the problem of the mental energy's consumption. Damn, if I hadn't lost more than one year of training stuck in the inner circle now things would be smoother.'

He shook his head and returned to his position on the tree branch.

Since he could not obtain back his wasted time he would just train more!

His mental energy had become his main focus since his strongest spell heavily depended on it.

Noah decided to resume his travel with an even harder training schedule.

His nights were completely devoted to the cultivation technique, while during the morning he pushed his limits on the second Kesier rune.

He would then sleep for a few hours and train his flight as he woke up.

He spent the rest of the time marching toward Shelfan Mountain.

More weeks passed.

Noah's escape had occurred almost two months ago by then as he arrived at the base of the mountain.

In this month and a half of strenuous training, all his centers of power except for the body had become stronger.

He exuded a cold and sharp aura which seemed denser in contrast to his previous state.

He chose to put his weapons inside the space-ring in order to prevent any resemblance with his former figure from being displayed.

His head was covered with a black hood as he gazed at the rocky slope of the mountain.

'On the other side, there is Ebonrest city. The peak of the mountain is classified as a danger zone but its path is inhabited by small villages that live of mining precious minerals. There should be even a public market along the way, maybe I should accumulate some money before arriving at the city.'

He stood still, reviewing the knowledge he accumulated when he set his escape routes.

He possessed a lot of weapons that he had no use of and since he never had to worry about buying anything, he had no idea about the prices of this world.

He began to climb the mountain.

As Noah moved along its path, many simple houses began to appear in the environment.

The inhabitants were mostly men with a skinny complexion, they seemed to be on the verge of starving to death as they carried heavy pickaxes on their shoulders.

Noah ignored them and they did the same with him, there wasn't much cordiality around that place.

He encountered many of these settlements as he continued to move forward and the situation of the residents was the same every time.

'I guess that they are exploited by the family managing the market, I don't sense any cultivator among them so they can only be used for manual labor. I believe that many of them won't survive for much longer.'

The society worked in the same way as the noble families: weak people were exploited to enrich the already powerful ones.

When he was nearing the market, he saw with his mental energy that some of the healthier men stared at him whispering between themselves.

'Considering my luck, this will lead to trouble.'

Of course, he was right.

As soon as he moved for a few kilometers away from the last village he passed through, a group of men with some rusty weapons blocked his path.

Noah recognized one of the villagers among the group and noticed a couple of cultivators between them.

However, he felt no sense of danger at all looking at them.

The man in the middle of the group was tall and wielded a big hammer with both his hands.

He stepped forward toward Noah and spoke with an intimidating voice.

"You, leave all the valuable items in your possession and we will let you live."

Noah sighed and shook his head, he put his hand inside his clothes and materialized one of the weapons of the Lansay family.

After taking it out, he raised it in the air in front of him to show it to the thieves.

"Hey, I've been meaning to ask, how much is this one worth?"

The men were a bit surprised by his young voice but then their eyes lit up seeing the good manufacture of the weapon.

"Haha! That's a good blade! What else do you have?"

'Are they stupid or simply blinded by their hunger?'

How could be possible that a young man traveled alone in this part of the mountain during this period of time?

'I thought that they would have understood something from my voice at least.'

He shook his head again.

"Listen, I need a guide for the market. I can promise some rewards if you do a good job so why don't you drop this act? With your meager strength, you could at best defeat a rank 2 magical beast."

The men's eyes widened again hearing his words.

Laughter began to spread in the group but the cultivators exchanged a concerned stare between each other.

Noah had evaluated their battle prowess quite accurately and that put the cultivators on guard of the young man.

They stared at Noah in silence trying to decide their course of action.

Noah, however, was already at the limits of his patience.

If it was a normal situation, he wouldn't have hesitated to teach these weaklings a memorable lesson but he was doing his best to avoid creating any trace of his passage.

He focused and a pressure began to radiate from his figure which silenced the thieves who raised their weapons in fear.

Chapter 94 - 94. Toottac town

The group of thieves was hesitating and only then they linked Noah's unusual presence with the academy's entrance test.

They weren't sure that they could gain anything using forceful methods.

The cultivator that seemed in the lead stepped further and slightly bowed.

"If you can give my brothers fifteen pieces of gold, I will gladly be your guide."

'So, they finally understood something.'

Noah oscillated his weapon in the air and pointed at it with his free hand.

"You still have to tell me how much this is worth."

The leader looked at it from the distance for a bit and then answered.

"I'm not an expert, but its value should be around five pieces of gold."

'I have more than thirty of these which makes it one hundred and fifty gold.'

He thought for a few seconds and then nodded.

The leader was about to cheer when Noah continued.

"However, you will receive the payment after you help me sell my items."

The leader complained but Noah jumped at high speed and appeared in front of him.

No one of the men saw him moving, his speed was too fast for these common people.

He tossed the weapon to one of the men nearby.

"Take this as a warranty. You, let's move."

Noah pointed at the leader and moved past the blockage.

The men looked at each other for a moment and then the leader followed behind the young man.

They walked for three days, resting only at night.

In the afternoon of the third day, they reached the market area on the mountain.

"This is Toottac town, young master. The market is the main form of sustenance of the city and many merchants had set up their stands in this period due to the academy's test. You might not know but many nobles will make a trip here before the test begins."

In the previous days, Noah had briefly spoken with the tall man in order to learn more information about that area and to set some rules for their interaction.

The man's name was Grant and Noah didn't reveal anything about his situation but simply ordered to be referred to as "young master".

Grant also explained the general situation of the area, focusing on the large-size noble family that ruled Ebonrest city.

The family was called Voydol and apparently, it had a really amicable relationship with the Elbas dynasty, which was the reason why one of the test areas was there.

"Why didn't they put their stands directly in Ebonrest city? This is just a peripheral city after all, how could they attract the noble families here?"

Grant's answer was immediate.

"Young master, Ebonrest city will be completely reserved for the preparations of the Royal family. In this period of time, all the main shops in the city had moved here. It is common knowledge among the noble houses by now."

Grant then realized that he might have inadvertently offended him but it seemed that the young man didn't even listen to him.

'Nobles... I bet that many of them will create problems for the lonely cultivators like me.'

The test was a matter of personal ability but that wouldn't stop the families behind the participants to scheme before its beginning.

He was familiar with the mindset of the nobles so he could vaguely imagine the methods that they would use to increase the advantages of their descendants.

'I bet that they will at least try to eliminate as many variables as they can. I don't believe that they will simply let someone with no status take the first place in the trial. They would lose too much face.'

Noah turned toward Grant.

"Am I right to assume that even the families that will buy their ingress will send their descendants into the trial?"

Grant nodded.

"Yes, not only they will spare an immense quantity of resources if the heir succeeds, but they would also want to show the strength of their new generations. It is a demonstration of the future power of their family after all."

Noah returned to look at the town.

Its perimeter was empty, with just some lazy guard drinking wine on tables near the path.

However, Noah could sense the liveliness of the city in its insides.

"Let's go."

He stopped thinking about things he could not control and moved along the path, Grant hastily followed behind.

When they were about to enter the boundary though, one of the guards yelled from his seat.

"Hey, you two! The ingress to the town is one piece of gold each! Don't make me st-"

His words were interrupted by a metallic item that crashed on the table and directly broke it in pieces.

All the guards there stood up scared and looked at the weapon.

It was an ax of excellent manufacture, they knew that its value surpassed five pieces of gold.

They turned to look at the two men walking down the city path.

The hooded one was already walking past the entrance while the tall one was awkwardly scratching his head, making a bow in excuse.

"I'm sorry but the young master is tired, I hope that the ax can cover for the damage and our ingress."

One of the guards slowly nodded, a cold drop of sweat ran down his forehead.

Grant bowed again and followed Noah that was already far ahead in the city.

The guards looked at each other and whispered.

"I think we should go easy on the wine in this period."

"Agreed, if we offend someone with an even worse temper, I believe that we could really get unlucky."

"Yes, yes, wise words. If we are drunk and a noble gets annoyed by us, we are done for."

From that day onward, the guards of Toottac town were never found drunk again.

Meanwhile, Noah continued to walk rapidly toward the stands that became visible in the distance.

He threw the weapon as a show of strength, he knew that there would usually be an inspection every time a stranger entered a town so he decided to act as an irritated noble.

As for the money loss, he really couldn't care less if that granted him anonymity.

Chapter 95 - 95. Obsidian Credits

After walking the main road of the city for a while, Noah began to see the various stands.

There were tens of merchants with flashy banners on top of their stalls and even more people around them looking at their items.

Noah looked around for a bit and noticed something strange: the customers used two different types of currencies.

He turned to face Grant and pointed at the gems that some of the customers were using.

"What are those?"

Grant looked where he was pointing and showed a confused expression.

"You mean the Obsidian Credits?"

Noah shrugged his shoulders and replied.

"If that's what they are called. What value do they have?"

Grant's eyes widened as he continued to stare at Noah.

"What?"

It took a while for Grant to really believe that Noah didn't know anything about it.

"Aren't you a cultivator?"

Noah replied with a bit of annoyance in his voice.

"Stop asking questions and explain."

Grant cleared his voice and began to speak.

"The Obsidian Credits, or commonly called Credits, are the currency mainly used by cultivators. It's a peculiar crystal that is filled with "Breath" so it has more value in the cultivator's minds. Anything regarding cultivation can only be bought with Credits, no one will ever accept gold for it."

Noah focused again on the gems, they resembled the one that Virginia used to power up the inheritance ground, only less shining.

'To think that I wasn't aware of such things...'

"Do they come only in that form?"

Grant nodded and explained more.

"Form? Yes. Value? No. Based on their brilliance, which is the quantity of "Breath" stored inside, they have more value. The ones that you see here are worth one Credit but there are crystals valued ten, fifty, and even one hundred Credits!"

Noah turned to Grant and could not help but ask:

"Why do you want to be paid in gold then?"

Grant smiled awkwardly.

"Well, I am a simple rank 1 cultivator with a rank 2 body, I don't even have a martial art. I just want to feed my family and the ones of my brothers."

'So, selling the weapons can only give me money to buy food and a place to rest. I have the Surging river spell which should be worth some Credits but I don't know if it's better to sell it now or to keep it for a better use in the academy.'

He didn't know enough to decide the best course of action so he just chose to inspect the market further.

"Bring me to someone that can buy the weapons that I showed you."

Grant took the lead position and they moved slowly around the city.

Noah soon noted that calling it "city" was a bit of a stretch.

The city itself consisted of a few buildings with two taverns and ten hostels, all the other structures were simply subsidiary shops that opened while Ebonrest city was busy with the preparations for the test.

In the end, they arrived at a small wooden house with the picture of a sword and a shield as a banner.

Grant entered and loudly greeted the bald man behind the cash desk.

"Kirk! I brought you a customer!"

Kirk snorted and replied with a rough voice.

"You only bring them when you gain something out of it."

Grant laughed awkwardly and scratched the side of his head.

Noah couldn't be bothered to watch them argue and stepped toward the desk laying a blade on it.

"I'm here to sell, how much for this?"

Kirk was surprisingly quite professional as he picked the weapon and carefully examined it.

He even slid his palm along the blade twice to check if there was any dent on it.

When the process was over, he nodded in satisfaction.

"Not bad, not bad. I can give you six pieces of gold for this one."

Noah nodded and continued.

"What if I have more than thirty of the same manufacture?"

The two men's eyes widened when they heard the number of weapons in his possession.

Kirk coughed a bit and then cleared his voice.

"I would need to inspect each one of them."

Noah made a gesture with his hand and the thirty or so weapons appeared on the ground.

In his space-ring, the weapons that remained were his two pairs of sabers, the descendants' inscribed weapons, and the lance that Trevor obtained from the second stage.

Kirk stared at him for a few instants before he started examining the items.

'It's not his first time seeing a space-ring.'

Noah thought and then began to think of how to dispose of his remaining goods.

'I should wait with the spell, maybe the academy can give me something more valuable than money for it. The noble's weapons have to remain hidden so they are better in the space-ring than wielded by someone. Lena's potions are useful so I should just keep them. The Earth pill and the reagent are necessary for my cultivation so it's not even worth mentioning them. My old sabers can be a clue for my identity so it's best to keep them. I'd rather not sell techniques that I currently use, so Dark vortex and Body-inscription are excluded. That leaves me with the lance and Echo's previous body.'

He faced Grant and asked with a plain voice.

"Is it possible to sell magical beast's bodies here?"

Grant nodded and smiled.

"I can bring you to a friend of mine that will buy it for a good price. If it is adequately intact, he might even pay you with Credits."

'He will pay me in gold then.'

Noah was sure that the body of the rank 3 beast was far from the standards of Grant's friend.

Kirk had, by then, finished his inspection and had put and hand under his chin, he was immersed in his thoughts.

Then he spoke without changing his posture.

"Thirty-three weapons of high quality. Sadly, more than twenty of them had been used previously so their price will lower. What do you think of one hundred and sixty gold for all the goods?"

Noah didn't hesitate.

"Deal."

Kirk hurriedly opened a secret compartment and took out three bags from it.

He handed them to Noah who simply inspected them with his mental energy before storing them.

Kirk was all smiles after the transaction was over and had his hands clasped together when he spoke with Noah.

"Tell me if I can be useful with anything else."

Noah thought briefly and then replied.

"Do you know of a place that might buy an inscribed weapon?"

Chapter 96 - 96. Solomon

Noah was walking on the streets of Toottac town playing with two shining crystals in his hand.

'To think that he would actually give me two Credits for the three-eyed bat's body. Hunting rank 3 magical beasts can be quite lucrative.'

Grant had taken him to someone that traded in magical beast's body parts and Noah not only learnt the species of his blood companion but he also made some gains.

'He gave me two Credits for its fangs and its third eye, added to three hundred gold for the rest of the body. He said that a completely intact body of a rank 3

beast can be worth between twenty to fifty Credits depending on the type. I might really think about gaining money that way.'

Noah had no difficulty in hunting rank 3 beasts, the only problem was keeping their corpses intact.

'I will think about that once inside the academy, now I should first sell the spear.'

He had already sent Grant away and gave him his pay.

Not even a day has passed but Noah had already disregarded the value of the pieces of gold.

As a cultivator, accumulating that currency was simply too easy.

Noah first bought some provisions to refill the ones that he used during his escape and then went to the shop that Kirk mentioned.

When he arrived at the pointed area, a two-story wooden building presented itself in front of Noah.

'Solomon's inscription shop'

'This Solomon is, apparently, an inscription master from the Voydol family. He opened a shop to increase the status of his noble family and to gain their acceptance. He should be an outsider and not a family member.'

Kirk mentioned that this illustrious man had graduated from the academy where he learnt the art of inscriptions and then joined the Voydol family to have a stable foothold for his work.

Noah moved toward the entrance door of the shop but two guards blocked his entrance.

They were both cultivators and Noah sensed that they were on the same level as Kevin.

"Five pieces of gold to enter."

'They really are from a large-size noble family to have this kind of guards to stand in front of a subsidiary store.'

Noah smiled from behind his hood and took out the sum.

"No problem at all, but may I know why is there an ingress tax?"

The guards became more amicable once they saw that he had a space-ring and explained briefly while leaving open the passage.

"Non-cultivators are interested in the items useful to cultivators. If Lord Solomon didn't put a price for the entrance, there would have been a crowd of peasants admiring the goods."

Noah nodded, he agreed with their explanation, and then entered the shop.

Inside, many different inscribed items were exposed but no other customer was present.

There weren't only weapons, but also pendants, scrolls, armors, and so on.

Noah immediately understood that this was the right place, yet his eyes could not help but widen when he saw the prices of the goods.

'Three hundred Credits is the lowest price that I can see! And that armor is priced ten thousand Credits!'

"Sir, may I help you?"

A lovely female voice rang out from behind him.

Noah turned and saw a young woman wearing a tight red dress that greatly emphasized her curves.

'Did they put this beauty here to confuse the customers?'

He shook his head internally and replied shortly.

"I'm here to sell a weapon."

The smile of the attendant diminished in brilliance but it was still kept on her face.

"I would have to inspect the weapon before suggesting a price. The shop will try to make the best possible offer but we will take five percent of the total sum as a payment for our service."

Noah simply took out the spear from the space-ring and handed it to the woman.

As she inspected the weapon, he inspected her.

'Is she stronger than me? I feel that her "Breath" is more concentrated. Maybe she reached the solid stage, I wonder if I could fight against a solid stage cultivator in my Demonic form.'

The attendant misjudged his attentions and her smile widened a little but then it froze as she continued to examine the spear.

She stood up and cleared her throat.

"I need to call my Master, the quality of these inscriptions quite surpasses my ability."

Noah nodded and waited patiently for the woman to climb the stairs to the first floor.

She came back after a few minutes accompanied by a middle-aged man with no beard and long curly hair.

Her gaze was lowered and Noah remembered that he had to show some respect to the cultivator.

He politely bowed and greeted him.

"It's an honor to meet Master Solomon."

Solomon nodded and his expression became more friendly.

He picked up the lance that had been left on the desk and began to examine it.

Sometimes he would mumble with himself while he looked at the lines inscribed.

When he was done, he raised his head to look at the hooded young man.

"Where did you get this?"

Noah shrugged his shoulders and replied casually.

"Somewhere, I don't remember specifically."

Solomon didn't mind his answer too much and lowered his gaze again on the weapon.

"Are you sure you don't want to exchange it? I have a lot of protective items on sale, you might need them during the entrance test."

'Oh, what a smart man.'

Noah was a bit surprised.

His voice was still the one of a young man so it wasn't impossible to deduce his purpose in the city.

'I feel that he is even stronger than Kevin, are there that many strong people in this world? I really need to enter the academy.'

However, he shook his head at Solomon's offer.

"I'm sorry, but I'm still not sure of what I'm in need right now. I'd rather take the Credits and think about it. In the future, I will surely spend them here to buy Master Solomon's products."

The woman was surprised to see such courtesy by him.

After all, Noah continuously exuded a cold aura due to the imposing presence of his mental sphere.

All mages had a peculiar aura around them.

Solomon's one, for example, was casual and uncaring and became focused only when he inspected the item.

Solomon nodded and smiled.

"Good answer! I can give you one thousand Credits for this weapon."

Chapter 97 - 97. Seclusion

'One thousand!?'

Noah noticed how the attendant's eyes widened before she lowered her head again, he understood that it was a big sum.

"I agree."

Solomon smiled seeing that Noah accepted his offer and waved his hand.

Twenty shining crystals appeared on the desk, their brilliance far surpassed that of Noah's Credits.

Noah picked one up and examined it with interest.

Solomon noticed his action and spoke casually.

"They are worth fifty Credits each. Careful on your actions, someone might exploit your inexperience."

He seemed in a good mood after he obtained the spear.

Noah put the Credits in his space-ring and bowed.

"Does Master Solomon have some advice for the academy test?"

Solomon laughed.

"Haha, as soon as you saw some goodwill you tried to take advantage of it! You remind me in my old days."

Solomon shook his head a bit before speaking again.

"The test changes every time so all the knowledge is dated, just go to Ebonrest city and follow the line of youths like you. Maybe you should be careful on the road to the city though."

Noah nodded and bowed again before exiting the shop.

Inside it, the woman turned her head toward her master and asked in a confused voice.

"Master, if you knew that he was inexperienced why didn't you lower the price?"

Solomon replied.

"He won't be inexperienced for long. If I had tricked him, he would have never returned to sell more of these good weapons. And you never know, he might actually become the next talent of the academy."

The attendant looked in the direction where Noah went and fell in thought.

'He is surely weaker than me. However, why do I feel that if I had to fight him, things would be dangerous?'

Meanwhile, Noah went to the poorer looking hostel that he could find and entered it.

Behind the reception desk, there was a woman with almost no teeth in her mouth and oily and dirty hair.

The main hall of the hostel had only a couple of cracked wooden desks with drunkards sleeping on them.

The smell of puke and piss filled the room.

'This is perfect.'

However, Noah chose this place exactly because of the poor state in which it was handled.

Solomon's words had confirmed his worries about the noble families so he decided to be as low-key as possible.

Living in a smelly place for a while was not a problem if that helped him arrive at Ebonrest city safe.

Noah faced the old woman on the desk and spoke resolutely before she could say anything.

"I need a single room for one month and a half, possibly a silent one. There will be no need to bring me any food, just be sure to leave a bucket full of clean water twice a day in front of my door."

The woman smiled showing her ugly mouth and spoke a single sentence.

"Thirty pieces of gold."

Noah put his hand inside his clothes and when it came out, thirty pieces of gold were in his palm.

He put the money on the desk and the woman hurriedly picked a big rusty key and passed it to him.

"Last floor, at the end of the corridor, the one on the left."

The hostel was a three-story building so Noah went directly to the last floor.

At the end of the corridor, he opened the designated door and entered it.

The room was small, with only a simple bed and no other furniture in it.

To Noah that had spent the last two months in a forest though, it was more than enough.

Noah sat on the floor and thought for a little.

'Two months before the test and Ebonrest city is at three days of travel from here. I will train hard for this month and a half and then move.'

It was deep in the night when he reached the hostel so he began to meditate in the cultivation technique.

His legs were crossed and a vortex appeared between his joint hands.

Days passed, and then weeks.

The environment of Toottac town became even more lively as luxurious carriages entered its borders and joined the marked area.

Many noble families from different domains arrived and enjoyed the services offered by the city to important people.

There were large-size, medium-size, and even small-size families, all gathering for the test of the academy.

Noah didn't join the commotion and simply remained in his room to cultivate.

He knew that the families from the Shosti domain wouldn't come there since there was another test area at one month of travel from Mossgrove city, he had chosen this place carefully after all.

Sometimes he would come out of his room to gather some information from the desk woman about recent events and to buy more provisions.

Many of the stories that she told him were just rumors but some of them alerted Noah, raising his caution.

'A group of bandits appeared in the forest between Toottac town and Ebonrest city. They are assaulting noble caravans, killing or gravely injuring their younger members. The bandit's faces are completely covered so it's impossible to know their origins.'

'Bandits so strong that they can target noble families? It seems that they are not even trying to hide their actions.'

As he had suspected, the nobles had begun to scheme against the participants of the test.

'I didn't imagine that they would have targeted other noble families too. The spot in the academy really is coveted.'

His eyes shined slightly as he thought of that.

'One more reason to enter it! Echo!'

The tattoo of the three-eyed bat released a soft sound inaudible to humans.

Immediately, an image of a circular area of one hundred meters with Noah as its center appeared in his mind.

There weren't many details as the scene was created from the vibrations of the objects that the sound met but it was more than enough to know if there was someone spying on him nearby.

'Nothing suspicious today too, it seems that I really have no one following me.'

He had been careful in the city but there were still times when he had to expose something about himself.

For example, Solomon knew that he was in possession of one thousand Credits, yet no one came searching for him in this period.

'That's really good. Now it's time to prepare. In one week, I will go to Ebonrest city!'

Chapter 98 - 98. Chase

Eventually, time passed until there were only two weeks left before the entrance test.

Noah swiftly exited the hostel and went for the path that led to Ebonrest city.

Toottac town was still crowded but the atmosphere was tense and many groups of armored people stared warily at their surroundings.

'So many.'

Noah had never exited the hostel in this period and could not help but be surprised at the number of people inside the market area.

Echo continuously sent sound waves giving him a clearer picture of his surroundings and he always chose to cross the less crowded streets to reach the forest.

His exit from the city was uneventful and the scenery of the forest illuminated by the daylight showed itself to Noah.

He had decided to move during the morning as there were fewer chances to meet the bandits or more of spotting them and escape.

He was wearing his usual black clothes and a hood covered his face.

On his back, a big hump was present: Echo's head had come out of his body to be more precise in its inspection of the environment.

Noah entered the forest and ran at full speed in the direction of the city.

He used the branches of the trees as footholds like he was used to when he had to move stealthily.

Ebonrest city was at three days of travel.

That meant that if he traveled without sleeping, he would reach his destination in one day and a half!

That was precisely what he planned to do, the more he stayed in the forest the more problems might arise.

It was only half a day later that a scream entered his ears.

Noah didn't stop but he could sense that a battle was occurring in an area a few hundred meters in front of him.

A faint sense of danger was radiated from that place.

Noah's eyes became resolute as he hastened his pace.

When he neared the battleground, a violent scene unfolded in front of his eyes.

A caravan composed of four carriages was being sieged by more than thirty hooded men dressed in long black outfits.

The guards of the caravan were strenuously resisting the assault but to no avail as the bandits were more numerous and were gaining ground.

Noah sensed that their level was way above his own and chose to take advantage of the situation to pass through them.

A known danger is less scary than an unknown one.

Noah could have avoided the place but that would have meant facing the unknown.

What if there were more bandit gangs?

What if that new gang wasn't busy dealing with another enemy?

'My best bet is to pass right through them!'

He rushed across the trees running right above the battlefield.

Some of the bandits noticed his presence and decided to go after him since the outcome of the combat on the caravan seemed set.

Noah didn't look back but Echo was constantly sending images of his pursuers.

'Three of them and they are all faster than me. Fuck! Demonic form!'

Smoke enveloped his legs and his speed rose drastically surprising the hooded men behind him.

However, that only made them more resolved on catching him.

After all, they were only pretending to be bandits, their real purpose was to reduce the competition in the incoming test and his increase of pace made him a dangerous contender.

Noah ran releasing more smoke on the path he was crossing.

Every branch he passed would break after being corroded by his spell and some lingering smoke remained in their spots.

The men were surprised by the deadliness of the spell and were slowed to counter its effects.

Noah seemed to finally gain some ground when one of the three nodded to the other two and made a hand gesture.

Wind began to blow which carried at high speed the man in Noah's direction.

'Wind mage!'

Noah saw through Echo that the bandit was flying in the air and that he would reach his position in a few minutes.

His flight didn't seem that stable though which made Noah think of a plan.

Echo senses expanded and Noah's liquid "Breath" depleted rapidly as a large area around him was pictured in his mind.

The area had a diameter of four hundred meters and was the limit of Echo's scanning ability.

However, that was enough for Noah!

He abruptly cut diagonally and moved toward a certain region in the forest.

The mage changed his direction too even if with a bit of difficulty, losing some ground.

His speed though was still higher than Noah and resumed his process of shortening the distance with him.

When he was at less than fifty meters from him, he heard a sharp sound that slightly disrupted his balance, slowing him again.

He resumed his chase immediately but more and more sound attacks came in his direction.

There was no surprise effect those times and, even if he had to defend from Echo's screeches, he still had a faster pace than Noah.

'Almost there!'

After less than one hundred meters, the trees became scarcer and a big empty area unfolded in front of them.

There were more than one hundred meters from the last tree to the next one and Noah forcefully jumped once he reached that point.

The mage smirked internally thinking that Noah had lost his mind trying to perform a leap of that length and changed his direction toward the ground, ready to intercept him while he was falling.

Noah was mid-air with his senses focused on his pursuer.

'Not yet!'

Only when the mage was about to touch the ground did Noah act.

Two pairs of black wings pierced the clothes on his back and began to flap with great might.

Smoke was released from the wings that, paired with his fuming legs and his black outfit, gave Noah the appearance of a wicked magical beast rather than a human.

The mage had no time to be surprised as tens of fuming wind slashes crashed in his position.

BOOOM!

Noah didn't even look at the results of his attack and stored his just wielded sabers back in the space-ring.

He continued to fly toward the distant tree until he landed on one of its branches and resumed his march toward Ebonrest city.

No one was after him from that moment onward.

Chapter 99 - 99. Muwlos family

In the treeless area of the forest.

A big cloud made of black smoke created a death zone twenty meters large.

At some point, the wind blew and forcefully carried the dark cloud along with it.

On the ground, an almost naked middle-aged man looked in the direction of Ebonrest city.

There was only one wound on his body, a small cut on his shoulder, but it was already healing at high speed.

Two hooded men arrived in the place and looked at the messy scene.

The ground was leveled and no trace of life remained in that area.

One of them spoke toward the naked man.

"Lord Abel wh-"

However, before he could finish his sentence, a wind slash passed right on the side of his cheek creating a small cut on it.

Abel turned and scolded the other bandit.

"Never use our real names in this mission! I'm Number Three!"

Both the bandits bowed asking for forgiveness while Abel simply waved his hand in irritation.

"Number Three did you catch him?"

Abel looked at the still bowing man under him and shook his head.

The bandits were surprised.

"But he was clearly only a rank 1 cultivator while you have a rank 2 dantian and a rank 4 body!"

Abel became more irritated and replied loudly.

"I know, ok? I have misjudged his strength and made a mistake. I will personally report this matter to the Boss. Just notify the young master that there is a dangerous individual that uses sound attacks and black corrosive smoke to fight."

At the same time.

Noah was still speeding in the forest.

The chase had lasted for less than one hour but he didn't dare to lower his pace until he reached the borders of the woods.

His legs were still releasing smoke that destroyed everything it touched and his mental energy was depleting rapidly.

However, after spending almost four months completely focused on training, some signs of progress were finally showing themselves.

Since he had always had a blood companion, his mental sphere had never stopped enlarging even if by just a small amount.

Now that he could couple it with the second Kesier rune though, his training speed vastly surpassed the pace of normal cultivators.

'A strong mind, the pressure from the Body-inscription spell, the Kesier rune. I might become a rank 2 mage before I turn eighteen.'

If William knew that his disciple was aiming to reach the level of a rank 2 mage in only three years of training, he would be coughing blood from the irritation.

The time it took to break through ranks grew exponentially as it grew the level of the cultivator.

The average for a talented person was six years for rank 1 mage and eight for rank 2.

Noah though spent two years and a half to reach the first rank and had stayed for almost two years locked in the mansion with the blood companion exerting pressure on his mental sphere.

With his accumulated time in there, the advantage of his rebirth, the stability of his mental sphere, his new blood companion, and his workaholic personality, becoming a rank 2 mage in less than three years was totally doable.

It must be remembered that Noah was not even thirteen when he became a mage!

'If I don't use the full transformation, the consumption of mental energy is bearable for longer times. Uff, if only those fucking nobles had let me train freely.'

He continued to run for some more hours until he finally was out of the forest.

A vast green plain extended in front of him and an enormous defensive wall made of massive rocky bricks was in its center.

'Ebonrest city!'

There was still time before the beginning of the test but Noah felt that it was safer to arrive earlier.

He changed his clothes and wore a simple black tight robe with no hood.

He tied again his hair in a ponytail and moved toward the city walls.

There was only one gate along the walls and when Noah reached it, he could see the magnitude of the event.

There were hundreds of people in line in front of the eight meters tall gate, with caravans and guards that formed a large and messy row.

Near the gate, tens of soldiers with shiny green armors were sorting the people that wanted to enter the city.

'I suppose it will take a while to enter.'

Noah walked till the end of the crowd and waited patiently, he closed his eyes to pay more attention to his surroundings and moved whenever there was more space in front of him.

Most of the people there were nobles and it wasn't smart to provoke them.

However, many had noticed his arrival and began to whisper between themselves, sometimes sneering, sometimes snorting.

"Another foolish kid, what do they teach commoners these days?"

"Hmph, they are just here to fill the empty spots, it's not like they have any chance to win. They just hope that someone might have a good impression of them and then be recruited in their families."

"If they survive the test, haha!"

Many of these voices entered Noah's ears but he didn't mind it.

He was specifically looking for something.

Then, Echo sent an image to his mind.

A guard on one of the most luxurious carriages neared a young man with long hair and whispered something in his ear.

The guard pointed at the forest and then at Noah at which the noble nodded.

The guard bowed and went away from their group but the noble stared at the end of the line for more time.

'It's his family then.'

Noah was the only one in the last part of the line that was moving alone.

He had suspected that the bandits would have reported the accident in the forest to their leader and he was the one that fitted the most the description of the man that had escaped the wind mage.

'If no one else arrives alone after me, they will pretty much be certain of some of my abilities.'

There were merchants along the row of people waiting, trying to make some business before the entrance test.

Noah opened his eyes and signaled to one of them to get close.

As the merchant arrived, Noah showed him ten pieces of gold and spoke.

"If you tell me to which family that youth with long blond hair belongs to, these are yours."

The merchant gave a quick look to the carriage in the distance and replied with no hesitation.

"Large-size noble family, Muwlos family."

'The test hasn't even started and I have already made some enemies, my luck is always awesome.'

Noah turned toward the merchant.

"What else do you sell?"

The man smiled and took out a bag from his back, opening it in front of Noah.

"Oh, I sell many things, young master! From special weapons to wonderful talismans. Also, I have a lot of drugs that will help you greatly during the test."

Noah looked at the goods but he couldn't see anything valuable.

He shook his head and sent away the merchant, then he resumed his inspection of the surroundings with closed eyes.

As time passed, more people arrived behind him and silently put themselves in line.

The young noble from the Muwlos family continued to look in his direction and Noah felt his gaze on him.

However, he simply ignored him and moved along with the line.

Caravans arrived unceasingly, increasing the size of the crowd in front of the city gates.

After more than half a day of waiting, Noah finally managed to arrive at the entrance of the city.

"Name and purpose for the visit."

A guard in green armor spoke to him as he arrived at the edge of the line.

"Vance, I want to join the academy's entrance test."

The guard took an inscribed marble tablet and showed it to Noah.

"Place your hand on this, we need to confirm your age."

Noah followed his order but the tablet remained unresponsive after he touched it.

The guard nodded and gave him a medallion with his name written on it.

"Follow the signs for your lodgings and don't lose the pendant or you won't be able to participate in the test."

Then, the soldier let him pass.

Noah put the medallion in his space-ring and entered the city.

He was quite surprised by the magnitude of the buildings, it was his first time inside a big city of that world after all.

There were many three-story houses and, in the distance toward the center of the town, some six-stories structures were visible.

'It is almost as if I'm back to my previous world.'

Large insignias stood in the middle of the paved main road, indicating different locations and their direction.

'Test participants area'

Noah followed the direction of the sign and arrived in twenty minutes at a large district full of three-story manors.

Another guard blocked his path.

"Show me the medallion and a room will be assigned to you."

Noah took out the pendant and the guard handed him a small wooden card with a rune written on it.

"Mansion E, room 14. The test will take place in fifteen days. Someone from the city troops will lead all the applicants to the examination area on that day. Good luck."

Noah nodded and entered the district.

Many youths were grouping and chatting on the yards of their villas but they all turned their heads to look at Noah walking along the central road.

It was clear that he didn't belong to any noble family as his clothes were shabby and untidy.

Most of them felt superior to him and began to make jokes about his appearance but the strongest among them felt only danger from his figure.

'There is someone worthy of my attention.'

When he arrived at the mansion with a big "E" painted on it, a tall youth about the same age as Noah stood in front of the entrance door with a smirk on his face.

"This mansion is reserved for nobles. A commoner like you can simply sleep on the courtyard. You have no problems with that, right?"

'I really hope that killing is allowed in the test.'

That was Noah's thought as he stared fixedly at the youth in his eyes.

He focused all his mental pressure on him and the young man paled instantly facing the might of Noah's sea of consciousness.

He began to sweat profusely and then he fainted on the spot.

Noah simply stepped over him and opened the door under everyone's gaze.

The insides of the mansion were clean and tidy, with a large living room and many doors with numbers drawn on them.

He stepped on the stairs for the first floor and walked on the corridor until he found the door with a "14" written on it.

The wooden card appeared in his hand and he neared it to the handling of the door.

However, nothing happened and the door remained locked.

"You need to put some "Breath" in the tablet to make it work."

Noah turned and saw a girl of about sixteen years old on the other end of the corridor.

She had long red hair and a cute face, her eyes shined with a green color.

Noah followed her instructions and transferred a bit of "Breath" from his body inside the tablet.

CLACK!

A metallic sound rang from the room and when Noah grabbed the handle, the door opened smoothly.

He did a slight nod toward her and directly entered the room, closing the door behind him.

"Why did you help him, sis? He would have figured it out by himself anyway."

A tall man with short red hair appeared from behind the girl still standing on the corridor.

"Mh, I have the faint sensation that we should be friendly with him."

She put a pensive expression as she stared at the room 14.

"Usually your instincts are right, the Patriarch had said that you are a natural talent in understanding the flow of the "Breath" after all."

The girl nodded and replied with a bit of sarcasm.

"Yes, yes, I will become the inscription master of the family elevating our status to a medium-size noble family."

The man behind her just patted her head and returned to the room.

Inside Noah's room.

Noah was already sitting cross-legged looking at the second Kesier rune.

It was daytime and since there were still two weeks before the test, he would use that time to train a bit more.

The room was quite luxurious but he was too focused on raising his strength as much as he could to notice it.

The weeks passed with him never exiting the room and, in the end, the day of the test arrived.