

Chapter 351 - 351. Purple golems

Time seemed to slow down as Noah began to analyze Perry's attack.

'I don't sense mental energy so it's a martial art but I can't figure out its element. It's a fast and strong move, I can't block it even with the Second Form.'

Noah concluded, Perry gained speed as it continued to charge toward him.

His martial arts had always focused on speed and precision, his attacks couldn't match a rank 4 martial art that focused on sheer power.

Perry became closer, Noah could feel how the temperature in the area rose due to his seemingly unstoppable charge.

Then, when Perry's horn was about to hit Noah, a shockwave resounded on the battlefield.

Noah activated the Shadow sprint, after he could store solid "Breath" in his mental sphere, the number of usages of his martial art that he was capable of increased drastically, he had more than sixty sprints available at that moment!

The sudden increase in speed made Noah disappear right in front of Perry's eyes, the latter was unable to stop himself, he crashed on the defensive layer that covered the battlefield, making the inscriptions on it flicker to no end.

Perry turned to stare at his opponent, a long cut had appeared on his robe but there was no blood coming out of it, only a white mark was present on his skin.

'His defense also increases when he performs that move, this might be annoying.'

Noah analyzed again.

He had slashed Perry's side when he evaded his attack but the outcome was disappointing, he didn't manage to inflict any damage.

"You are not using the full power of your martial art!"

Perry angrily complained.

"Why would I? I can just continue to dodge until you are exhausted, your martial art suffers against fast opponents."

Noah covered his lies with his analysis of Perry's moves.

It was true that the weakness of his martial art was its scarce maneuverability but Noah's usages of the Shadow sprint were limited.

'At this rate, I will deplete the "Breath" in my mind before I manage to pierce his defenses.'

Noah was trying to contain himself.

Not only that battle was a friendly spar and gravely injuring someone was something to avoid, but Noah was also heavily restricted.

He knew that, in order to win, he had to surprise Perry with his strongest move when he was defenseless.

Luckily for him, he was a rank 3 mage.

His mind was so strong that he could easily ponder about the battle and create tactics as he fought, he had discovered the weakness of Perry's attack after just one move after all.

"It seems that you are underestimating me!"

Perry shouted in anger as he resumed his charging form with his small sword stretched in front of him.

Noah watched the bull-like shape coming at him again and dodged at the last second thanks to his martial art, he slashed toward one of the natural weak points of the human body that time.

His white sabers cut the skin on the frontal part of Perry's elbow, he was satisfied to see that a few red lines had appeared on his weapons.

However, just when he was about to turn to watch Perry land on the defensive layer, a sense of danger hit his mind.

Perry performed another technique, his charge suddenly did a V-shaped turn and aimed toward Noah's new position.

The audience gasped when they saw that Noah was taken by surprise, in their minds, it was impossible for him to avoid that attack from such a short distance.

BOOM!

A loud sound resounded in the area.

Perry crashed on the defensive layer again, no sign of Noah could be seen in front of him or on the ground.

"I have to admit, I didn't think it was possible to make such a sharp turn with your speed and frame. Tell me the truth, that move pushes your body to the limit so you can't use it often, right?"

Noah's voice resounded in the arena but Perry couldn't find him anywhere.

Yet, when he looked toward the audience, he saw that they were staring at a point mid-air.

Only then did he raise his head and found his opponent.

Noah had a calm expression as two pairs of wings behind his back flapped rhythmically, his feet would kick the air from time to time to activate the Shadow step spell that kept him flying.

Perry didn't answer Noah's question, his eyes sharpened when he realized that his opponent could fly.

Generally speaking, only cultivators in the heroic ranks or specific spells of rank 3 cultivators could allow someone to fight in the air.

That's why most martial arts and spells in the lower ranks had flying opponents as a weakness, they simply weren't created to face such enemies.

That was one of the reasons why Noah didn't let go of Echo to create a new blood companion with his inscription method, he valued his ability to fly more than any other little increase in strength.

"You don't have a way to hit me up here, do you? Do you want to give up?"

Noah nonchalantly asked, he only wanted the merit points so that he could return to his cave to cultivate, that battle was a complete waste of time in his mind.

However, Perry snorted at his proposal and placed the sharp side of his sword on the palm of his hand.

Then, he retracted it with a fast gesture.

Noah became interested, he sensed that mental energy was being used, Perry was finally using a spell!

Drops of blood fell on the ground, his palm bled from the cut created during the previous gesture.

'It doesn't heal like the other injuries. Also, I feel that some sort of connection has been created between his palm and the ground.'

Noah analyzed everything, nothing could escape the probing of his mind.

The ground began to shake, small boulders started to come out of the terrain which morphed as they reached the surface.

Purple humanoid figures about one meter tall appeared on the surface and began to surround Perry, in just a few seconds, more than twenty golems were formed.

Chapter 352 - 352. Caring

'Earth element!'

At the sight of the purple golems, Noah understood Perry's aptitude.

'The terrain here comes from the surface, it's not part of the exoskeleton of the Purple corals.'

Perry's spell made Noah realize that the battlefield was created on top of the exoskeleton and wasn't a part of it.

'It makes sense, the sect probably wanted to create a fair environment where its disciples could challenge themselves.'

The environment could affect a cultivator's battle prowess.

Fighting underwater would be detrimental for cultivators of the fire element while it would favor those with a water aptitude.

In the same way, a cultivator of the earth element would have heavy restrictions if it could not control the terrain around him.

The exoskeleton of the Purple coral was a quasi-rank 6 material while Perry was only a rank 2 mage, it was impossible for him to affect it.

The golems around Perry began to move, they created a trampoline with their arms which pushed the golems that jumped on it in the air.

Noah saw how three golems flew in the air toward him, their movements were clunky, giving them a funny aura.

However, there was nothing funny in the power that they held.

Noah felt a dangerous sensation coming from the golems that were nearing him, they were slow but they seemed heavy, facing them wasn't the smart approach.

That's why he simply dodged, they couldn't fly after all, they had no way to follow Noah as he flew toward another part of the battlefield.

Yet, just as he dodged the first jumping golem, it detonated, creating a shockwave so loud that even Noah's balance was affected.

Noah didn't have time to adjust his position when two other explosions happened.

BOOM BOOM!

The audience was protected by the protective layer but the weaker disciples on the stages had to cover their ears to protect themselves from the loud sound.

Noah's balance was in chaos, he couldn't control his wings anymore and he could only use the Shadow step spell to land safely on the ground.

Perry didn't let go of that chance, he charged as soon as he discerned Noah's landing spot.

Yet, when Perry was about to hit him, twenty ethereal sabers surrounded Noah's figure, they slashed recklessly at Perry, covering his body with injuries as Noah dodged again.

Perry crashed on the defensive layer, his eyes showed his surprise as he turned to look at Noah.

He saw how black veins had appeared on the white skin of his opponent and a cold aura was radiated from his figure.

First Form of the Ashura!

Liquid "Breath" inside his body!

Two of Noah's abilities were revealed, it seemed that Perry's spell had finally forced Noah to use part of his real power.

'My rank 3 mental sphere can't defend against such a powerful spell by itself, it's time to end this.'

Noah thought about the situation and didn't hesitate to become serious.

Perry was a peak rank 2 cultivator after all, his spells expressed the full power of his level.

On the other hand, Noah was only using his martial arts and relying on his superior battle experience to fight him, without using proper defensive methods, he couldn't defend against the formless shockwaves that the explosions of his puppets created.

Spells could only be blocked by other spells or by techniques on a higher level.

Noah knew that his Demonic form would have been enough to annihilate the purple golems and block Perry's spell once for all but he would probably kill his opponent in the process.

'If I can't defend, I'll simply attack.'

Those were Noah's thoughts as he charged toward Perry.

The latter wasn't surprised, more blood fell from his palm which generated more golems as it came in contact with the ground.

At the same time, the golems that he had left behind ran toward him, Noah found himself encircled by more than thirty golems before he could even reach Perry.

However, he knew that they couldn't explode.

He was too close to Perry, the shockwave would hurt both of them, the golems were there only as a form of obstruction.

The First Form of the Ashura was performed, more than twenty ethereal sabers attacked the golems around Noah, opening a path toward his opponent.

Perry focused on generating more golems, his face paled as more blood was poured on the ground.

'He wants to see who will last longer!'

Noah understood Perry's intentions.

'This spell is probably his strongest attack, I just need to beat it and the battle will be over.'

Noah's intentions were clear, he wanted to destroy all the golems in front of him and reach Perry.

However, no matter how much he cut those puppets, they didn't stop moving, even those cut in half would still crawl toward him to hinder his advance.

Little by little, Noah was forced back.

It was the first time that he was losing due to the numerical disadvantage, his martial arts had always been perfect for those situations but they were still martial arts, they couldn't match the spell of a rank 2 mage.

When Noah was forced to retreat at ten meters of distance from Perry, three of the smallest golems jumped recklessly on him and began to radiate a dangerous aura.

'They are going to explode!'

Noah knew that Perry was using that chance to inflict the final blow.

'How caring of him, he is making sure that I won't die.'

There were bigger golems around him but only the smallest and maimed ones had jumped on him, it was obvious that the power behind their explosions would be lower.

'I guess I'll just show him that he never had a chance from the beginning then.'

Black flames surrounded his body as soon as the first golem exploded.

Then, the other two followed.

An even louder shockwave resounded in the area, the protective layer flickered under the aftereffects of Perry's spell.

A purple cloud was generated in the middle of the encirclement, looking at it, Perry was sure that Noah didn't manage to use one of his sudden acceleration.

Yet, just as he was about to relax, black flames appeared next to him.

One thick saber curved the air as it slashed vertically toward his face, the killing intent behind the weapon was so dense that he found himself unable to move, he could only watch as the blade continued in his upward path.

The tip of the saber seemed to miss him, only a small cut appeared on the point of his nose, a drop of blood fell on the ground as the flames disappeared and Noah's unharmed figure became visible.

Chapter 353 - 353. Factions

Perry was speechless.

Noah stood still, his gaze was fixed on him and the pressure that his mind was capable of was completely unfolded.

Perry couldn't move, his mind worked at full speed to analyze the recent events but he didn't find any mistake in his battle tactic.

The only possible conclusion was that Noah had always been holding back.

'He didn't even use an offensive spell, actually, he only used one spell from the beginning of the battle.'

Those were his thoughts as he slowly understood the situation.

He knew that the attack from earlier didn't miss by chance, Noah had purposely held back and retracted his sabers at the last second, Perry couldn't help but feel beaten under every aspect.

Noah's cold gaze coupled with his suffocating aura was a clear message, Perry knew that he would receive mercy only once in that fight.

His legs lost strength and he fell on his knees, realizing that he could have just died if Noah didn't hold back made him lose any will to fight.

"I... I surrender."

Those soft words reawakened the silent audience, they had been holding their breath since the three golems in the encirclement exploded.

Then, they too understood.

Those in the second and first rank couldn't sense the pressure that Noah was radiating but one thing was clear in their minds: Noah had won, he was the strongest rank 2 cultivator of the sect!

Cheers and loud comments could be heard, Noah was a disciple of the sect after all, the other members were happy to see that the power of the Chasing demon sect had increased once more.

Noah stretched his hand toward Perry, a horned face appeared on his palm as he waited for the latter's reaction.

Perry understood the meaning behind his gesture, his hand reached Noah's one and the two tattoos interacted with each other.

Three thousand merit points were transferred to Noah, he nodded at Perry when the transaction was over and pulled his arm to help him stand up.

Perry had still traces of confusion on his face but a tinge of respect had appeared, he was by no means weak but he had been outclassed in every aspect by the new honorary disciple.

"The sect is lucky to have you."

He performed a polite bow as he said those words, Noah shook his head as he patted his shoulder to console him.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. You are definitely strong for your level, you simply never had a chance to beat me."

Noah was a rank 3 mage, just one of his offensive spells would have been enough to destroy Perry.

Perry seemed to understand something, he was a rank 2 mage nearing the peak of the rank after all, being suppressed by a mage on his same level was impossible.

'Unless... Unless he is a rank 3 mage!'

That realization hit his mind and caused waves of shock.

No matter how impossible it sounded, that was the only conclusion that Perry could come up with.

Noah had always been able to react and to analyze each one of Perry's attack and that last burst of killing intent didn't belong to the world of the rank 2 mages.

His mind was in chaos as he stared at the honorary disciple that had already turned around to leave, Perry suddenly felt glad that he didn't provoke him more than that.

'This is settled, now I can finally test the effects of the Sea snake's tears.'

Noah thought as he walked outside of the arena but he stopped for a few seconds when he felt that a few powerful gazes were trying to probe him.

He turned his head and saw that the rank 3 cultivators in the audience had incredulous expressions as they watched him, they were either amazed by Noah's peculiarity or surprised that he had noticed their gazes.

'Oh well, this is a safe environment, they would have found out about my mental sphere anyway at some point.'

Noah covered his figure in layers of mental energy and left the area to return to his cave, his methods couldn't completely prevent the rank 3 cultivators from understanding his level but they could at least confuse the results of their probing.

Roy appeared in front of him as he entered one of the purple tunnels, he had a satisfied expression as he nodded at Noah.

"You did well, the other disciples will respect you from now on."

Noah shrugged his shoulders at that remark.

"If respect allows me to cultivate in peace, then it is welcome."

Roy sighed at that answer and followed Noah as he continued to return to his cave.

"The other factions have taken interest in you, my next days will be filled by meetings with the other rank 3 cultivators because of you."

Roy's comment made Noah slow his pace, he knew that there were factions inside the sect but he wasn't clear about their areas of interest.

"Can't I just join your faction?"

He asked.

Roy was honest and seemed ready to solve any of his doubts, if Noah could choose, he would rather pick him as his captain.

However, Roy shook his head at that question.

"I handle the recruitment and supervise the human matters inside the sect while answering directly to my mother. Also, I'm forbidden from creating a faction: I have the backing of a cultivator in the heroic ranks after all, how could the other factions compete with mine if I were to form one?"

Noah listened to his words and understood a few things.

The first one was that every faction had a rank 3 cultivator in charge, those in the heroic ranks couldn't influence or help in human matters.

The second one was that he would be forced to join a faction at some point, Noah knew that the missions in the building were just the most basic occupations inside the sect, the real gains had to be where the powerful cultivators were.

"Could you tell me more about the factions?"

Chapter 354 - 354. Meeting

Noah was in his cave, a deep wound was on his waist as he cultivated the Dantian's opening technique.

"Breath" of the darkness element was attracted inside the dark vortex, entering his dantian and enlarging its form.

That was the second time that week that he cultivated, only three days had passed since his last training session.

After a few hours, he stopped, injecting the liquid "Breath" in the membrane around his heart inside his circulatory system to heal his injuries.

In about ten minutes, all his wounds were healed.

Then, he took a bottle containing a dense azure liquid from his space-ring and drank half of its contents.

A cold sensation filled his low waist, Noah focused his mental energy on that spot to inspect the effects of the potion.

His dantian, which seemed perfectly healthy before, showed signs of further healing.

The scars created after Noah's unorthodox cultivation technique slowly disappeared and the walls of the organ seemed to assume a metallic nature under the nourishment of the potion.

After half an hour, the cold sensation disappeared and Noah heaved a sigh of relief.

'This potion is indeed perfect for my situation, my dantian feels stronger already.'

Noah thought as he retracted the mental energy from his body.

That was the third time that he used the Sea snake's tears and he could clearly feel the positive effects that it had on his center of power.

Not even two weeks had passed since his battle with Perry and had exited his cave only once in that period.

The reason for that was because he wanted to spend his merit points to purchase more potions.

'Each bottle is enough for two treatments. This is my second bottle and half of its contents are gone, considering that I still have nine bottles left, I can cultivate peacefully for nine weeks and a half.'

With the help of the potion, Noah resolved himself to perform the Dantian's opening twice per week, meaning that he would expend one bottle of the Sea snake's tears each week.

'A bit more than two months, I will be forced to complete more missions after that.'

After testing the effects of the potion, Noah didn't dare to cultivate without it.

Unorthodox techniques were dangerous, Noah had been forced to train in the Forging of the Seven Hells in the past because the Balvan family didn't give him any other option.

Yet, this time, he was training in a dangerous technique by his own will.

Since his cultivation speed was already fast, he would rather train safely now that he found a method to reduce the aftereffects of his technique.

Also, he had nothing to do in the days between each training session, he could easily use that time to gather merit points.

'Roy should be almost over with the meetings, I wonder if the various leaders will agree to my request.'

The last time that he spoke with Roy, Noah had asked information about the various factions.

Yet, Roy could only give him a general overview of their fields of interest, he wasn't aware of the actual benefits that each faction enjoyed.

He was only a supervisor after all, he had to make sure that there weren't major conflicts inside the sect while recruiting new members, he wouldn't investigate the factions as long as they did their job.

The Chasing demon sect had the Chasing Demon as its leader, that alone was enough to suppress any thought that could harm the sect.

It must be said that there were methods to safely break the restrictions applied by the oaths, a strong power and peculiar practices were needed but it was possible.

Heaven and Earth were fair, if methods to bind people existed, then methods to free them had to exist too.

For the members of the underground organizations, gaining access to those methods wasn't hard.

Both the Hive and the representatives of the continent had them, their interrogations would always be fruitless if the oaths were unbreakable.

Yet, with such a mysterious and fearsome leader, every disciple of the Chasing demon sect was proud of its status, they belonged to one of the strongest organizations of the archipelago after all.

Since Noah couldn't discover much about the factions, he had ultimately asked Roy to set up a meeting with the various leaders or their representatives, he would rather be the one to decide which side he picked.

Another week passed but no traces of Roy could be found.

Noah didn't mind it, he limited himself to cultivate during that period, his dantian was progressing incredibly quickly, Noah guessed that he would reach the peak of the second rank in less than three years.

Then, a buzz hit his mind, Noah stopped practicing his martial art as he picked an inscribed item from his space-ring.

That item had the form of a notebook, it had been given to him by Roy after their last conversation.

Noah opened the notebook to the first page, the name "Roy" could be seen written on it and Noah probed it with his mental energy when he saw that it was shining.

'The meeting is tonight, in the residential area of the cultivators in the third rank. I'll be there as a mediator.'

Roy's words resounded in his mental sphere.

The notebook was a simple inscribed item that could store the mental imprint of a mage, it created a connection between another item of the same kind and allowed for two cultivators to send messages even when they were far apart.

Of course, the communication distance depended on the level of the mage and on the quality of the item, Noah's notebook was only in the first rank, it barely covered the surface of the sect.

Noah closed the notebook and prepared himself, the sect was underground but it wasn't hard to understand what time it was for a cultivator, especially for someone with a rigid schedule like Noah.

A few hours later, he came out of his cave.

A few disciples were sitting on the ground and happily conversing but they stood up and performed a polite bow when they saw the entrance of Noah's cave opening.

"Zach, would you like to join us?"

One of the strongest disciples tried to invite him but Noah shook his head.

"I'm sorry, I have an important matter to handle. Let's do it another time."

Noah's answer was plain but it satisfied the disciple who simply watched him entering one of the purple tunnels to leave the residential area.

Chapter 355 - 355. Clarifications

The residential area of the rank 3 cultivators was placed near the center of the sect, the matrixes in that area led to the islands that were more important to the sect or toward those that were more valued by the representatives of the continent.

Rank 3 cultivators were the most powerful asset in the human ranks, of course they would be assigned in the areas connected to the high-value zones.

Noah had only gone once in that area when Roy accompanied him on the tour of the sect.

The density of the "Breath" there was far higher, it even surpassed that of Noah's cave when his "Breath" blessing was placed on the ground.

'I bet that the concentration of "Breath" inside the caves surpasses even that generated by the big boulder that I found in the Royal Inheritance... If only I could train here.'

Noah's mind wandered as he thought about that.

That area was specifically created for cultivators in the third rank, their dantian was stronger, they could withstand such density.

Noah had personally tested the aftereffects of cultivating in an area unsuitable for his cultivation level: he had to take a long period of rest after the events in the Royal Inheritance and his dantian was so stressed that his breakthrough to the second rank had been delayed because of that.

'Now that I think about it, I've really been reckless at that time. If I hadn't shared that "Breath" between my body and dantian, I might have had harsher repercussions.'

Noah thought as he reviewed those past events.

'Well, I was still in the same nation of the Balvan family, I needed to become stronger as fast as I could. Now I'm doing the same but at least I'm learning to control myself.'

Noah desired power over everything, his entire life was built on that pure pursuit.

That's why he found it hard to control himself whenever a chance to accelerate his growth appeared, methods to quickly improve the cultivation level were everyone's dream and Noah wasn't an exception, he yearned for those even more than other cultivators.

Yet, as time passed, he learned that there weren't shortcuts when it came to the cultivation journey.

Heaven and Earth were fair, they would always place a price next to such methods.

Even if Noah was to obtain a cave in the residential area of the cultivators in the third rank, he would probably avoid cultivating there, he won't use it as a stable training spot at least.

A stable growth was always the best option, unorthodox techniques pushed their practitioners to the limit already, anything that surpassed them would only create more harm than good.

Noah spotted Roy as soon as he entered the residential area, he waved his hand, gesturing to near him.

An open cave was behind him, Noah could sense that there were other people inside it but he couldn't understand their cultivation level.

'Rank 3 mages.'

He immediately reached that conclusion, the only beings that could hide from his investigation were mages with a stronger mental sphere than his and he didn't believe that cultivators in the heroic ranks would be interested in him.

Roy entered the cave when Noah reached him, he waited for him to enter before closing the entrance.

The outside light was blocked but the same purple halo illuminated the insides of the cave, Noah could clearly make out the contents of the large room that filled the main hall.

The cave was large and had many rooms, it was far more luxurious than Noah's one.

A few beds and a large table were placed on the ground, six cultivators could be seen sitting around the table and they began to inspect Noah as soon as he became visible.

Noah didn't falter under those powerful gazes, his mental waves fought the probing of the external forces, managing to hide some of his power.

The cultivators' eyes widened before they nodded enthusiastically, their interest rose when they saw that Noah could really defend against their minds.

Roy pointed a chair and Noah followed his silent order, he sat there, on the opposite side of the other cultivators.

Then, Roy sat between him and the others, he was acting as a mediator, his position on the table was a sign of that status.

"Let's start with a few clarifications."

Roy began to speak as a few servants bought wine and food, he continued only after they left.

"This is my cave, we are on neutral ground so your status can't be used to suppress the representatives of the other factions."

He eyed the other cultivators before he pointed at Noah.

"Zach is a cultivator in the solid stage of the second rank but also a rank 3 mage. This achievement alone speaks for his talent so obtaining him will surely add a rank 3 cultivator to the ranks of your faction in the future."

Noah listened to Roy's words and analyzed them as he gazed at the reactions of the representatives.

'They were willing to set up a meeting only because they were sure that I will enter the third rank of the dantian, I don't believe that they would go through this process with every member of their faction.'

The biggest obstacle in the breakthroughs between ranks was the control that a cultivator had on the process.

To succeed, the cultivator had to contain the impurities expelled by the solid "Breath" and use them to improve its dantian, a great amount of concentration was needed.

If the dantian didn't manage to improve its qualitative form because too many impurities escaped its walls, then the breakthrough would fail, heavily injuring the cultivator in the process.

However, Noah's mind was far stronger than his dantian, there was virtually no chance that he would fail in the breakthrough.

That's why the envoys and Roy were so sure that he would enter the third rank in the future and that it was better to make him join a faction now rather than then.

"Zach, however, isn't his real name. His real identity is that of Noah Balvan, I'm sure that some of you are already aware of that name."

Roy suddenly revealed that information, Noah could feel six surprised gazes staring at him with even more intensity than before.

Chapter 356 - 356. Introductions

Information about Noah had been on the archipelago for a few months by then.

The Chasing demon sect, as an underground organization, was aware of the reports sent by the continent.

Criminals and traitors could be used in many ways by the Hive, it was normal to have at least a general overview of those individuals.

"I'm sorry but it seems that my faction can't take him, he is too renown."

One of the representatives on the other side of the table spoke.

"I know, Holly, but I believe you will still be interested in which faction he joins."

Roy replied to her and she nodded in answer before moving her gaze back on Noah.

"My faction handles the gathering of information throughout the archipelago. Our members are usually asked to join legal organizations to pass information to us. I believe you can understand why I can't use you."

Holly briefly explained her situation, Noah could only nod in understanding at that.

'I can't really become a spy, not only I won't like to go undercover, my identity would be at risk in those missions.'

Noah concluded in his mind.

He was still a fugitive, preventing his identity from being exposed was still on top of his list, he felt glad that Holly had refused him before he could do it.

He was facing influent cultivators of the sect after all, he had to make sure that none of them would feel offended by his decision.

"Let's start with the introductions then."

Roy stood up as he said those words, he waved his hand toward each cultivator while describing its identity.

"Holly is the leader of the faction in charge of the investigations, the intel of the sect comes from her hard work and impeccable management. Most of our missions are possible only thanks to the reports that she provides."

"Byron's faction handles the basic needs of the sect. He makes sure that every disciple has access to food and basic services. We would be forced to eat on the surface if it wasn't for his excellent work."

"Joel is the envoy sent by Edgar, the leader of the faction that handles the defenses of the sect. His faction is the first line of defense of the sect and the one suppressing any possible threat on the surface, if we managed to survive for all this time is also thanks to their amazing services."

"Marcia is the head of the inventory. Her faction handles the many items that our missions provide and makes sure that our disciples are well equipped. The merit points' system was her creation which helped in bringing the sect to a new height!"

"Linus is the envoy sent by Kate, the leader of the faction that handles the inscribed items and manages the teleportation matrixes. Everyone in her faction studies formations or inscriptions and it's pointless to express the importance of her services."

"Seth is the envoy sent by Bruce, the leader of the faction that handles the raids on the resources that the continent sends to its representatives here. His faction makes sure that our sect doesn't lack cultivation resources or techniques, allowing us to continue to nurture promising disciples."

The last of the cultivators was introduced and Roy sat again, taking short sips from the cup in front of him as waited for Noah's reaction.

Noah, on the other hand, was still sorting the information just obtained, his mind worked at full speed to decide which faction was better for his situation.

'Holly, Byron, and Marcia's factions are definitely a no. Holly needs cultivators with a clean record to turn into spies while Byron's work is just boring. As for Marcia, her faction seems to be quite remunerative but I don't want to be stuck in the inventory for long periods.'

Noah discarded three factions immediately, he wanted to join a group that could value his strongest qualities.

'Edgar's faction is interesting, the defense of the sect would surely earn the respect of the other disciples and would make my battle prowess shine. Yet, do I even want respect?'

Defending the sect was a noble job but Noah wanted to find methods to become stronger, the remaining two factions seemed a better match for him.

"Could I know more about Kate and Bruce's factions?"

Noah's words caused the appearance of displeased looks on the representatives of the other three factions, only Holly remained impassive as she memorized the events in the meeting.

It must be said that Kate and Bruce didn't come personally but had sent envoys, Byron and Marcia in the specific didn't like being discarded without even having the chance to speak.

However, when they felt Roy's stern gaze on them, they soon calmed down.

What angered them was Noah's lack of consideration rather than the actual loss of a future rank 3 cultivator, they felt as if their factions weren't equally valued by the man in front of them.

Linus and Seth smiled, they were happy that Noah had taken interest in them and gladly explained more about their work.

"Kate is a genius when it comes to formations, she makes sure that our connections with the surface remain hidden to the continent's investigations. The member of our factions can study under her or under other inscription masters. Also, they have free access to the research facilities of the sect where precious materials and peculiar environments are provided."

Linus was the first to speak, he had a calm demeanor as he described his faction.

'My ability in the Elemental forging method would further improve if I was to join them. Yet, I can't use normal inscription methods, those masters wouldn't be able to teach me much.'

Noah sorted the information in his mind, evaluating the pros and cons.

"We are thieves. We raid the precious shipments that arrive from the continent or attack the secret inventories that the legal organizations set up on the islands. Our work is not exactly safe but we are the ones who provide the cultivation resources to the sect, which means that we are allowed to keep a few of them for ourselves."

Seth spoke and Noah's eyes lit up.

Chapter 357 - 357. Idiots

Noah was immediately interested in Bruce's faction.

Raiding inventories and stealing the cultivation resources belonging to the representatives of the continent was, by itself, a double victory.

On one hand, the Chasing demon sect would grow stronger thanks to the new resources.

On the other, the legal organizations in the archipelago would be weakened since they would find it hard to nurture their members.

After all, the most important requirements to advance in the cultivation journey were resources and techniques, being able to steal them from your enemy could be considered the best possible option.

"Does your faction assign merit points with each successful mission?"

Noah asked Seth, it was clear that he was more oriented in choosing his faction.

"Of course, we might be attacking our enemy but we are still doing it for the sect's interest, any valuable deed is rewarded with merit points."

Seth answered with a smile on his face, he had understood that Noah had been captivated by his previous words.

'Kate might help in improving my ability in the Elemental forging method but that's something that will happen anyway as I continue forging. Instead, resources and techniques are irreplaceable, I don't think I'll find a better opportunity than this.'

Noah quickly cleared the last bit of indecision in his mind and stood up when he reached a conclusion.

He performed a polite bow toward Seth as he spoke a few words.

"It would be my honor to join Bruce's faction."

Displeased looks appeared on the other four cultivators, only Holly seemed disinterested.

Seth stood up and laughed as he walked on the other side of the table to straighten Noah.

"No need to be so formal, my faction is quite open-minded about ranks and cultivation level. Come, I'll lead you to your captain, he will explain more about our work."

Seth began to lead Noah outside of Roy's cave.

Noah turned his gaze toward Roy but the latter only nodded with a slight smile, he was trying to reassure Noah with that gesture.

The entrance of the cave opened and Seth hurriedly pushed Noah outside it, the sound of the wall closing again after they left could be heard behind their backs.

"Why such a hurry?"

Noah couldn't help but ask that question seeing that Seth wouldn't let go of his shoulder.

Seth showed an awkward smile but he didn't stop dragging Noah along the way.

"You know, cultivators can be petty and our faction has a bad reputation, I didn't want you to question your decision."

"Bad reputation?"

Noah couldn't understand Seth's words, the sect was an underground organization after all, it was obvious that bad rumors were spread about it.

"Well, we are the chaotic group of the sect, we recklessly chase resources and there have been occasions where Edgar's faction was forced to intervene due to some misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding?"

Noah continued to question Seth's words, he didn't like where that conversation was going.

"Look, there was a time when we received a report about a safe house on island seventy-one. The report didn't come from Holly's faction but we were quite sure about its source. When we barged inside the house, we discovered

that the "resources" were instead female slaves intended for the harem of one of the representatives of the continent. We were angry and disappointed so we indulged in that temporary pleasure. You should have seen the faces of the soldiers when they found our whole team naked the following morning."

"Wha-"

Noah didn't have time to question him that he resumed speaking about the misadventures of his faction.

"Another time, we raided a ship that was supposed to have some slices of miraculous meat. We managed to take all of it but we missed the cooking recipe and sold it to Byron's faction. All the disciples below the second rank weren't able to exit their caves for two entire weeks at that time."

"Wai-"

"Oh! There was a time when a batch of rank 3 inscribed weapons arrived in the archipelago. We immediately raided the building that contained it but we didn't gather enough information and we found ourselves against an entire troop made of rank 3 cultivators. The sect was forced to hide for a few months after that matter."

'I understand! They are mindless idiots!'

Noah gave up on trying to question Seth for fear to discover more misadventures.

'It seems that I need to be careful about my captain too.'

Seth continued to speak as he dragged Noah through the passages between each area.

Apparently, there was also a time when they ended up in a trap and unleashed destruction upon that island to ensure their escape.

Noah's mood became gloomy as the number of misadventures piled up, he couldn't help but reconsider his previous decision.

Seth led Noah to a peculiar training area where a few dozens of disciples were sitting on the ground.

They sat in small circles and each group seemed focused on a different activity.

"Hey, you cheated! No "Breath" allowed when gambling!"

"Who are you to accuse me of cheating!?"

"I'm your father! I took pity on your mother long ago and gave her my heroic essence!"

"What did you say about my mother!?"

BOOM BOOM!

A series of attacks were launched after that brief bickering, the two disciples arguing seemed drunk or under the effect of some medicine.

"You bunch of worthless scoundrels, can't you see that your vice-leader has arrived?"

Seth shouted and his voice filled the large training area.

Only then did the disciples notice that Seth had arrived and that he wasn't alone.

Their eyes lit up when they saw Noah, some of them immediately stood up and wore the widest smiles that Noah had ever seen.

"Oh, mighty vice-captain, who is he? Is he a new recruit?"

"Why don't you leave him with us? We will surely give him a tour of our exalted quarters."

"Yes, yes. We will take good care of him."

The chaotic behavior from earlier disappeared in an instant only to be replaced by a peaceful and trustworthy one.

Seth sighed at that sight and turned his head to warn Noah.

"Never trust any of them unless you are in a mission, I wouldn't dare to shake their hands when we are in the sect."

Chapter 358 - 358. Alison

Noah stared at the expression of the disciples in front of him and couldn't help but feel that they were somewhat familiar.

'Don't tell me that I had that face when I scammed the guards in Balvan mansion?'

Complaints resounded in the area as soon as Noah had those thoughts.

"Come on, vice-captain, we have talked about this! You agreed to warn the new members only after they a game of card!"

"Or dice!"

"Or a spar with extremely favorable conditions for us!"

The disciples turned toward the one that spoke for last.

"What!?! We have already lost him, I'm allowed to crack some joke at this point."

Noah stared at the disciples' interactions with wide eyes, he cursed his greed when he saw the situation of that faction.

'If I have to speak the truth though, they all seem quite strong.'

Noah analyzed.

Under that messy behavior, Noah could clearly sense that each one of them had a powerful aura.

It wasn't a matter of cultivation level, the students in the area were either in the first or second rank, it was more about the battle experience.

'They all seem experienced warriors, maybe their many misadventures have tempered their character.'

Every cultivator had unusual peculiarities in its personality.

Noah was addicted to cultivating, June was a battle maniac, Roy didn't seem able to lie, these qualities were only enhanced as the level of the cultivator increased.

That's why he didn't feel too strange that the disciples in Bruce's faction were like that.

They were thieves after all, their missions were dangerous, it was normal for them to relax as much as they could when they were inside the sect.

"Shut up, he is a special case. Is Alison in her usual spot?"

As soon as Seth said those words, the disciples were silenced and only the bravest among them managed to nod to answer his question.

"Come, I'll take you to your captain."

Seth grabbed Noah's shoulder again and dragged him across the training area, the disciples that they crossed shot pitiful gazes at him as they watched him disappear in the distance.

"Poor guy, he has just joined our faction only to be sent in that hag's clutches."

"We couldn't even take one Credit from him, what a waste."

"Hey, who wants to play cards?"

Noah listened to those whispers and moved his attention away when heard that they had resumed in their gambling activities.

"Is this Alison that bad?"

He asked Seth.

"No, she actually is one of the strongest captains in our ranks."

"Then, why were the other disciples speaking as if I was going to die?"

"..."

Seth was speechless for a moment, he had momentarily forgotten that Noah was a rank 3 mage and that he could clearly hear the whispers of the disciples behind him.

"Let's say that you should be careful. She is the oldest among the rank 3 cultivators in the faction but her cultivation technique allows her to appear to us in the form that we like the most."

"I still don't see what's so bad about it."

Noah complained when he saw that Seth didn't explain further.

"I hope you won't see her bad side, just don't trust your eyes, too many good disciples have been traumatized."

Seth led Noah toward the end of that training area where a series of caves could be seen.

"Does your faction live here? Why don't they use the residential areas?"

Noah saw that the area was inhabited, there were many mats and pillows on the ground along the road.

"Well, the disciples here have tried to scam those belonging to other factions or caused some mess. Edgar's faction forces them to live here because they disturb the environment of the sect."

'This is basically exile!'

Noah was astonished.

He had joined Bruce's faction because of the evident advantages but he had only seen the bad traits of its members until now.

They arrived in front of an open cave, an awful smell was exuded by it which seemed able to affect the purple halo radiated by the exoskeleton of the coral.

"Alison, I have a new member for your team."

Silence reined after Seth spoke, he and Noah stood firmly in front of the entrance, waiting for any reaction.

"MHHHH! Seth, my date yesterday went pretty bad, I want to be alone."

A loud grunt followed by words spoken in a guttural tone came out of the dark cave.

"This new member is good-looking."

Seth replied and shook his head to reassure Noah, yet, his hand forced him to stay still with even more strength than before.

Noises resounded in the cave and a gracious figure came out of it after a few minutes.

It was a woman with dark skin and silver hair, Noah couldn't help but think that her facial features resembled June in some way.

"Oh my, he is indeed good."

The woman spoke with a young voice, the guttural one from before was nowhere to be found.

'So that's what he meant with a form that we like the most.'

Noah thought, repressing any kind of self-analysis about his tastes, Alison's figure seemed a mixture between Nina and June's features after all.

He didn't have time to analyze himself because his mind sent warnings about Alison, Noah felt as if he was in danger even at that distance.

He forced himself to bow at her but his focus never wavered, he really couldn't understand the cause of that unsettling feeling.

"He is so formal! I like a guy that knows his manners, why don't you come inside and tell your story to aunt Alison?"

Seth let go of Noah's shoulder and began to retreat.

"I'll leave you two be then, welcome to our faction Zach, I hope you enjoy your stay."

Noah wanted to shoot a cold gaze at Seth but Alison began to near him, increasing the dangerous feeling in his mind.

"I refuse, I need to return to my cave."

"Oh, don't be so shy. I'm your captain now, I'm more than happy to share my bed with you."

Alison replied to Noah's refusal, she continued to get close to him as she spoke.

She stretched her hand toward him and the dangerous sensation reached its peak, Noah sensed some sort of invisible gas nearing him at fast speed.

He instinctively activated his Demonic form, black smoke came out of his figure and devoured the incoming threat before dispersing in the air.

A change occurred after that.

Noah's spell seemed to counter the illusion created by Alison, her appearance changed right before his eyes, revealing an elderly woman whose skin was filled with pulsating pimples.

Noah's Demonic form seemed to have opposed the hallucinations that Alison's gas caused.

Noah became able to clearly see her true form as well as the cause of her strange power.

The pulsating pimples all over her skin seemed ready to explode but there were small pores on them from where the strange gas came out.

Noah could see how the entire area around her figure was covered in the secretions of her pimples, he had been previously affected because he had breathed them.

Yet, when he had activated the partial Demonic form, the previous effects were dispelled, allowing Noah to see what was really happening.

Noah's eyes darted between the many pimples and the invisible gas that caused the dangerous feeling in his mind, he couldn't help but retreat at that sight.

Alison noticed the changes in Noah's gaze, she stared at him in confusion before understanding what was going on.

"You, you can see me!"

She loudly exclaimed and traces of anger began to appear on her expression.

Seth was already far behind but he sighed when he heard her words, a small notebook appeared in his hands and he used his mental energy to send a message to one of the mental imprints on it.

Noah didn't understand that turn of event, he simply continued to retreat at the sight of the extremely repulsing old woman nearing him.

"No one can see my true form! Come here! Let me affect you!"

Alison continued to shout but Noah had no intention of ever coming close to her again.

'What the hell is even happening!? Why is my tattoo not reacting to this threat? And what kind of cultivation technique is that? It seems to work alongside her body but it also uses mental energy to create the hallucinogenic gas.'

Noah inspected Alison's peculiar state and was surprised to see that her technique seemed to use all three of her centers of power.

'It is quite interesting.'

When he understood that her cultivation technique seemed to form a connection between her centers of power, Noah became extremely interested.

However, he had to put those thoughts in the back of his mind since Alison jumped on him using the full power that her body was capable of.

Noah activated the Shadow sprint, a shockwave was generated after he stomped his foot twice, creating a sudden acceleration that made him dodge Alison's charge.

"Don't run! I just want to fix your sight!"

"What fix! Keep that damned gas away from me!"

Noah replied to Alison's complaints as he kept retreating.

Alison didn't give up though, she continued to pursue Noah with all her strength but he always managed to dodge with impeccable timing.

From time to time, Noah's vision would become affected again by the hallucinogenic properties of her gas but he would promptly create strands of black smoke to fight it.

Like that, they returned in the central zone of the training area where the other members of Bruce's faction were uncaringly gambling and drinking.

Noah landed in the middle of a group of disciples, crashing a rolling dice that those in the group were staring with hopeful expressions.

"Noooo! You destroyed the dice!"

"It was definitely even!"

"What are you saying? I swear on my mother that it was going to be odd!"

"Do you want to hear the story of your mother again?"

The disciples began to bicker but they soon redirected their anger toward Noah who was uncaringly continuing to escape.

"Hey, newbie! Come back here!"

"The price for disrupting a round is to pay back all its participants!"

"Yes! And my mother was a good woman!"

However, they were soon surprised to see that another figure appeared between them.

Their attention was immediately attracted by her figure, Alison's gas made her appear as the most beautiful person according to each of their tastes.

'It affects even women! What a powerful ability.'

Noah analyzed the situation behind him as he continued to retreat.

He saw that even the women seemed affected, the invisible gas entered their lungs and caused their vision to change.

"You are all so cute but aunt Alison has something to do first, I'll play with you later."

Alison spoke to the disciples around her but her polite words only awakened the strongest of them.

"Wait, it's captain Alison!"

"Run! Run while you are still able to think!"

"Josh block her for a while! You have already become immune to her mind control"

"No way! I don't want to get close to her ever again!"

'Immunity?'

Noah listened to the disciples' words and began to think about the recent events.

'Maybe, the tattoo didn't work before because Alison's ability isn't harmful. It just affects the mind of a cultivator but Alison herself doesn't have bad intentions.'

Noah turned to watch how Alison had started to bicker with the disciples around her, she really seemed to hate anyone who knew about her true form.

'No, someone with that body shouldn't get close to anyone, the sect should make a special oath just for her.'

Noah looked at the pulsating pimples and had those thoughts, he really felt bad about that Josh.

Then, an immense pressure appeared behind him, he felt as if all his centers of power were being suppressed by that suffocating atmosphere.

He turned his head with difficulty only to see that giant man was behind him.

"Are you the cause of this mess?"

The man spoke and his words made Noah's mental sphere tremble, it was with extreme difficulty that he regained control of his body to back away from him.

Yet, a hand appeared on his shoulder as he tried to escape, Noah felt completely powerless in that situation.

"Leader, it's not his fault. Alison was already in a bad mood and he managed to dispel her hallucination, I couldn't control the following events."

Seth appeared next to the giant man, his stature paled when he was next to the more than two meters tall Leader.

"Oh, did he fight Alison's gas so soon? Is he the new member of my faction?"

Chapter 360 - 360. Bruce

'My faction!?'

Noah listened to those words and understood the identity of the man that was keeping him still.

'Is he Bruce?'

"I told you that he was a special case but you were busy with your stupid rumors. We were lucky that you arrived before he changed idea about our faction."

Seth rebuked Bruce, he seemed really annoyed by his behavior.

Bruce made an awkward laugh while scratching the side of his head.

"The source this time seemed accurate, it's a pity that he was just a drunkard looking for booze..."

Seth shook his head and pointed toward the mess at the center of the training area.

"Could you at least handle this situation?"

Only then did Bruce remember that Alison was still chasing the other disciples and he nodded as he lifted Noah with both hands to hand him to Seth.

"Keep him here until I come back, we can't give him to the other factions."

Seth grabbed Noah and placed him on the ground, his expression showed tinges of shame as he tidied Noah's clothes.

"I'm so sorry, the leader is an idiot but he is really reliable in battle. He can't control his power very well so he rarely interacts with rank 2 cultivators, I believe you can understand why."

Noah listened to Seth's words and his cold gaze was slightly eased, the recent events had put him in a complete battle mindset and Bruce's suppression had almost made him decide to change faction.

"ALISON!"

A loud shout resounded in the training area, the disciples that were escaping from Alison felt as if their heads were going to explode while those in the first rank directly fainted.

Alison stopped her tracks, she turned slowly, a wide smile was on her face as she faced Bruce's arrival.

"Leader! This is all a misunderstanding! I wanted to, ehm, know the new member but he was so impolite, I had to teach him a lesson!"

Alison lied but Bruce's stern gaze forced her to retreat.

"Please Leader. I'm just a young woman stuck in this horrible body, don't I deserve to find love too?"

Alison pleaded but Bruce's gaze was unmoving.

"What did I say about getting too close rank 2 cultivators? The last time you brought someone to your cave it took us two months to make him forget that trauma."

A few disciples patted Josh's shoulders when they heard Bruce speak, a few tears could be seen running down Josh's face as he remembered those events.

"But, but!"

"No buts, go back in your cave, today's events made you lose the new member."

Alison tried to complain but Bruce had already turned, she could only stomp her foot in irritation as she went back to her cave.

"Bring the injured to Byron and undo this mess."

Bruce ordered and Seth bowed, he immediately picked his notebook and began to send messages to some of his contacts.

"You, come with me."

Bruce's words made Noah's sea of consciousness tremble, he closed his eyes to resist that pressure before following him.

They crossed the entirety of the training area before reaching its deepest parts, Noah was surprised to see that the density of "Breath" in there was so high that drops of liquid "Breath" could be seen on the purple walls.

'This is indeed worthy to be the habitation of a rank 3 expert.'

An entrance appeared on the purple walls, a large cave made of only a single room unfolded in front of Noah's eyes.

"Come, sit, let's talk."

Bruce spoke, creating again the intense pressure on Noah's mind.

"Ehm, Leader, could you please control your mental waves when you speak?"

Noah couldn't hold back anymore, the series of events that had happened since he joined the faction had really pushed his patience to its limits.

Bruce turned and seemed to remember something, he closed his eyes and knitted his brows, he seemed really focused on what he was doing.

"Is this better?"

He spoke again, Noah could still feel a bit of pressure on his mind but it was way more bearable than before, he nodded at him when the pressure disappeared.

"Good. I'm sorry for everything that has happened since you arrived. Seth usually handles these things well but he can't control Alison's mood, more and more members are leaving her group to join other captains lately."

'That's quite obvious.'

Noah could clearly understand the behavior of those disciples, not even an hour had passed and he wanted to leave her group too.

"Also, as you saw, we are a bunch of messy people when we are inside the sect. Our faction does the riskiest work inside the sect but this is what allows us to have the best rewards, it's normal for our members to have extreme personalities."

Noah nodded at his words, the behavior of the disciples had surprised him but it wasn't that different from those of the guards in Balvan mansion.

The more a work puts you closer to death, the more extreme your activities will be when you need to relax, that's how it worked in most cases.

"As for me, I find it hard to control myself so I usually don't go near the areas where the weak disciples are. I'm almost at the peak of the third rank, I fear that I might kill one of them if I'm careless."

Noah continued to nod, he had personally endured Bruce's power.

'A rank 2 mage wouldn't be able to talk with him for more than a minute before suffering an injury, I could continue to listen to him only because my mind is in the third rank.'

"So, what now? Just to be clear, I'll never join Alison's group."

Noah spoke, he expressed his thoughts without holding back.

"She isn't that bad, her cultivation technique can't really harm anyone, it just renders those affected by the gas more benevolent toward her. You will soon develop an immunity toward it but I advise you to allow your vision to be affected at least, you don't want to see that body every day after all."

Bruce explained but Noah's expression remained cold, he was set on not joining her group.

Bruce sighed before he continued to speak.

"Seth is busy with the management of the faction and the other captains are either on missions or have enough members in their teams. It seems that you will be joining me, young man."