

Chapter 61 - 61. Sea

When Noah woke up, Assea was still on his side with just its head sticking out of his body.

He felt completely rested, both mentally and physically, but he knew that the "Breath" in his body could sustain his companion for one entire night only because of the "Breath"'s density in this place.

'Now it's time for the really dangerous stuff. Uriah's diary said that the passage to the surface is on the other side of the valley but it should also be where the King sleeps since the concentration of "Breath" keeps on rising in that direction.'

A stern expression was on his face as he ate and looked randomly in front of him still deep in his thoughts.

After some time, when he had finished his meal, he sighed and shook his head.

'If it's death that waits for me than so be it, no reason to hesitate.'

He stood up and a cold determination was exuded from him.

Mages had a mind so strong they could affect some of the environment around them, Noah wasn't on that level yet, but he still radiated a sort of pressure depending on his state of mind.

What he was spreading then was a pure resolution to do anything in his power to survive.

With his mind focused and his body rested, Noah moved out of the cavity.

His advance was slow, he was wary of anything that moved outside of his perception and he would stop every time to carefully inspect the area in front of him.

'I'm not gonna make another mistake like the one with the roots on the wall, and with this pace, I can even raise the level of my body a little before reaching the other side.'

Noah would take any chance to increase his strength before going into such a precarious situation.

However, something unusual came to his attention during the trip.

'There is not even a single magical beast.'

No snakes were present in this area of the valley, it was completely void of any beast's life forms despite the density of "Breath" being way higher than before.

Noah continued his slow voyage full of doubts.

Every time he felt slightly tired he would find a cave and rest, only to move again when his strength was at its peak.

Four days passed without him encountering any threat.

'Maybe I'm lucky and all the magical beasts are somewhere busy with something.'

Of course, that was not the case.

When he neared the end of the valley and the wall of its other side was visible, Noah saw a scene that almost made him lose hope.

The last part of the canyon was large with a waving sea in it and a small white mountain at its center.

Nevertheless, the sea was not made of water but of thousands of slithering bodies.

Noah could only stare astonished at the view.

Thousands of rank 1 snakes, hundreds of rank 2 and about one hundred of rank 3 were all coiled together forming a multicolored sea.

'I'm dead if I go in there, dantian or not there is no way I can survive.'

Noah watched attentively the huge pack trying to find anything that he could use and noticed a few details.

'Why do they seem so malnourished? And what is that thing near the mountain?'

The snakes were incredibly thin, Noah thought he could hear the rumbles of their stomachs but they weren't doing anything about that.

Sometimes a snake would bite a beast near it and continue on its way like it did the most natural thing in the world.

Most shocking thing was that the snake that received the wound would just allow it uncaring of its body being eaten.

There also seemed to be relief in those that were hurt and fear in those who ate!

Noah's conjectures of this world nearly crumbled watching their unnatural behavior.

Near the mountain, at its base, a big yellow pile of what seemed snake's skin was rhythmically emitting soft rays of light.

'What is all of this?'

Noah decided to study the mass of snakes for some time before determining his next action.

Two more days passed with him trying to find some hidden pattern in their conduct to exploit but all he managed to notice was that the pile of snake's skin had accelerated the cadence of the leakage of light.

He had a hypothesis about that event which made him restless.

'Don't tell me that it is a magical beast in hibernation to evolve? But, considering its dimensions, wouldn't that be a rank 4?'

Noah had never fought a rank 4 beast but he was sure that he wasn't its match.

'If it is really like that then it would be better to move before it evolves. The passage should be behind the mountain and since the snakes seem so passive I might be able to reach it disguised as Assea.'

He resolved himself and summoned his blood companion, entering its body.

He was about to go out in the open to join the sea when the cocoon cracked and a loud hiss resounded in the valley.

A giant yellow snake emerged from the pile of flesh, it was thirty meters long and it raised its body in the air as to show the pack its achievement.

The pack looked at it with a bit of awe as its pressure unfolded in that area of the valley, even Noah was affected and trembled a little inside Assea's body.

At that moment though, a tremor ran through the canyon and rocks began to fall from the walls due to the earthquake.

All the snakes in the pack lowered their heads in fear in the direction of the white mountain.

Even the newly evolved rank 4 beast turned to look at the mountain with reverence as a loud hiss engulfed the valley.

Noah felt pain in his ears as the sound hit him and had to focus completely on them to avoid becoming deaf.

When the noise stopped everything was silent, none of the thousands of snakes were uttering a sound.

Noah looked in the direction of the hill and, in his bewilderment, he saw that the mountain was moving.

#### Chapter 62 - 62. Cruelty

Noah did not move, or to say it better, he could not do that.

The pressure released by the mountain was immense, everyone had to stay still to resist it.

Then, the mountain showed a reptilian head large seven meters that went in front of the rank 4 snake that had just evolved.

Only then Noah could make out the true form of the mountain.

It was a colossal snake more than fifty meters long and its skin was so white that it seemed to shine on its own.

Looking at it, he wondered how it was possible for a being to reach such splendor with a material body.

The snake appeared like some sort of godly existence, surpassing anything Noah had ever seen in his two lives.

The rank 4 snake looked majestic on its own but in front of the King of the valley, it was just another member of its pack.

'W-What is that monster?'

Noah managed to have this sole thought before his mind underwent another shock due to the following events.

The King and the rank 4 stared at each other for a long time before the rank 4 lowered its head in submission.

The King then opened its mouth and laid its head on the ground waiting calmly.

The rank 4 snake looked at it for a moment before entering the King's mouth on its own will!

It was thirty meters long and it took a while before its body entered completely in the King's mouth but the latter just remained still during the whole process.

When the body of the newly evolved snake disappeared, the King closed its mouth and raised its head to look at the pack below it.

It released a soft hiss that made Noah shake in the distance and that set off a change in the behavior of the snakes.

They started to eat each other violently uncaring for their own lives.

Blood flowed endlessly as the epitome of cannibalism unfolded in front of Noah.

It was only when their number was almost halved that the King hissed again to make them stop and coiled on itself to resume its sleep.

The snakes of the pack, having eaten fully, were showing signs of becoming stronger, some specimen seemed even to be on the verge of breaking through a rank.

However, there was no happiness or excitement in the beast's eyes but only helplessness and fear.

Before the King settled again though, Noah noticed a hole in the wall behind its body that had a faint light coming from it.

The snakes resumed their aimlessly slithering and Noah assimilated Assea back in his body as he fell on the ground in his hiding spot.

His hands were shaking and his mind was in turmoil, it took him an entire hour before he managed to calm himself.

'Fuck, fuck, FUCK!'

Countless curses sounded in his mind as he took control of his body again.

'I could only tremble at that thing sight! Its sole presence is almost enough to kill me, and the patriarch of the Assea family fought it? How many monsters like them there are in this world?'

He was quite proud of his achievements in this life, after all, he had trained for less than five years and he was only a bit more than thirteen years old.

That pride though was shattered seeing how meaningless his accomplishments were in front of such might.

When he reviewed the previous scenes in his mind he could only find one word to describe them.

'Cruel.'

He thought.

'The world is incredibly cruel.'

He was calm when he understood the situation in the valley.

'The King forces the snakes in its pack to eat each other and it waits until a rank 4 is born between them. Then it eats it to become stronger and repeats the cycle. I believe that with the concentration of "Breath" in that area and with the forced cannibalism he manages to create one every few decades.'

A feeling of respect appeared inside Noah as he looked again in the direction of the King.

'All of this only to increase its already incredible strength by a little. Even as a beast, its determination in its pursuit of power is commendable.'

He shook his head and a complex smile formed on his face.

'I simply kill everyone in my way while it actively exploits its own kind to reach a higher realm. Our wills are on a completely different level.'

He stood still for some more time until the fire of ambition flared up from his eyes.

'I can't die now! I don't want to die after I saw such an otherworldly strength. I want to reach that level, I want to surpass it!'

He moved his gaze away and entered the closest cave he managed to find.

'First I'll complete the sixth cycle.'

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One month went by.

Noah spent his days meditating to increase the absorption rate of his acupoints.

He also practiced in his usage of the blood companion as he needed to be perfect in his snake form to succeed in his escape.

He had seen the hole in the wall behind the King and that was the only way to the surface that he could think of.

'Uriah wrote that the passage is there and since that one is the only cavity I could see, I have to bet on that.'

The rest of his time was spent looking at the pack of snakes.

There were no changes in their behavior during the month that passed and since they had eaten recently, only some of them had resumed giving small bites to those around them.

He had looked attentively to all the rank 3 in the pack and ascertained that no one of them was ready to evolve.

When he woke up one day, he was happy to find out that his acupoints had stopped working and he felt that his body had reached a familiar limit.

His sixth cycle was complete!

He was ready to leave.

#### Chapter 63 - 63. Death area

Noah reached his usual observation spot and looked toward the pack.

The snakes were doing their typical efforts in resisting the hunger to avoid any increase in their strength, yet their will to live wouldn't allow them to simply starve to death.

Everything looked the same as the other days, so Noah decided that it was time to move.

He could not increase his power any more than that, it was better to move before something unexpected happened.

Noah entered Assea's body and slowly slithered toward the mass of snakes.

The beasts in the pack were a bit surprised to find a new specimen joining them, no one would force himself to undergo their kind of life.

Nevertheless, they did nothing and just watched for a moment as the black ethereal snake entered the coiled crowd.

Noah sank inside the sea of bodies and began to move using his mental energy as a compass to not lose his way.

He had to reach the wall at the end of the valley and he would rather avoid bumping in the King's body in the process.

His advance was slow as he preferred to maintain the same pace of the specimens around him.

Noah's trip across the sea of snakes had begun.

He didn't dare to be on the surface but the presence of the King disturbed his orientation so he had to systematically emerge to understand his position.

Sometimes he would feel a sharp pain due to Assea's sensations as the other snakes around it took small bites of its insubstantial skin.

However, he simply ignored it, he had already considered this situation while formulating his plan.

Every time he was bitten, he would sink deeper into the pack to heal his companion.

Repeating this cycle, he was slowly getting closer to his target.

He was completely immersed in snake's bodies and the King radiated a constant pressure that made him nervous.

Noah felt like suffocating inside the pack but Assea's protection managed to make him keep going.

It took him half a day to crawl across the thousands of beasts and he felt extremely tired due to the constant stress he had to endure.

However, the scene that he saw on the other side was disheartening.

There were no snakes on the back of the King's body, or rather there could not be.

The cavity radiating light was right in front of him but he could not go for it recklessly.

The King had its head pointed in the hole's direction and every time he breathed, pieces of terrain would crumble and the ground would corrode.

Even in its sleep, its breath could kill any weaklings!

Noah saw a rank 2 Two-headed snake slip from the pack and ending in the area in front of the King's head.

Its body was shredded into pieces as soon as the King breathed out!

A conical area of death started from the King's head and ended at the entrance of the passage in the wall.

'Now I know why no beast is escaping, they simply can't.'

The last dilemma that bothered him when he created the plan was solved.

'With its strength, it should be able to subdue snakes more powerful than rank 4. Does it immediately eat them because they might manage to escape?'

The constant pressure it radiated forced the snakes to stay in the pack and its breath closed their only way out.

'The real question is: can I survive till I reach the cavity?'

If Noah entered the area of death from its closest point to the passage the distance would be around one hundred meters.

With his speed and the rate at which the King exhaled, he would need to survive two to three attacks.

'I don't have any other option, I will first replenish my mental energy and then go in.'

The "Breath" in his body was not a problem since he completed the sixth cycle and since the density of "Breath" in this area was the highest of the valley.

However, the mental energy he had to use to move to the other side of the pack was plenty and he needed to refill it before crossing the last hurdle.

'Luckily I only need to give an order and Assea will do that autonomously until I have "Breath" to support its actions.'

One of the strong points of the Body-inscription spell was that the user had to spend only a bit of mental energy when commanding the blood companion, the rest of the time it will just act on its own following the order.

That meant that, apart from the initial expenditure and the pressure from sharing its senses, the mental energy's cost was extremely low.

In a place where the "Breath" was so concentrated the blood companion could work almost endlessly with just a bit of mental energy.

Of course, this was also due to Noah's body-nourishing technique as it absorbed "Breath" on its own without Noah's need to meditate.

Noah chose to rest in the pack of snakes.

He fell asleep inside Assea's body while it quietly moved at the edges of the empty conical area.

The pressure from the King was still there so it took longer for the water level inside Noah's mental sphere to rise till it occupied half of it.

When he woke up, he was met with the familiar scene of snake's bodies coiled on each other.

'Life or death is all in those one hundred meters.'

Assea moved toward the edge of the pack, in the closest place to the cavity.

Noah cut off any useless thoughts from his mind, focusing only on moving forward and enduring any pain that assaulted him.

He stared at the King's head waiting for the moment it exhaled to have the best timing possible.

As the breath smashed on the wall and dissipated, Noah jumped at full speed toward the cavity.

The snakes in the pack saw a black snake moving in the area of death toward the hope that they had long abandoned.

Chapter 64 - 64. Laugh

Assea moved at full speed alongside the wall.

Noah inside it was only looking at the path in front of him, nothing else was worth his attention.

Some of the snakes in the pack started to hiss in his direction as if it was some kind of entertainment.

Then, when he had crossed a bit less than fifty meters, the first blow arrived. What Noah initially felt was an incredible pressure that flung him into the wall. Then, the pain came.

Assea's body was the first line of defense and was shredded into pieces almost immediately!

Noah forced its body to reconstruct but it only delayed the impact on his body for a moment as Assea was wrecked again in just an instant.

He slammed into the wall and many cuts appeared on his skin but, before he suffered any serious injury, he summoned Assea a third time to endure the rest of the attack.

Its body was destroyed till only a silhouette remained but the first blow was successfully blocked!

A huge amount of mental energy was expended because Noah had to withstand the pain Assea felt having its body destroyed three times.

However, as soon as the pain stopped, Noah started to run again, no hesitation was present in his actions.

His eyes were still fixed on the road and he left a trail of blood due to the injuries.

He didn't dare to use the "Breath" to stop the bleeding because all of it was being used for Assea's healing.

The pack of beasts yet had noticed his disguise and began to hiss madly at the sight of the small human hidden in the snake's body.

As if to shut down their noise, the King snorted lightly sending another stream of air in the area in front of it.

Noah had moved for only thirty more meters before the second blow came.

He was once again slammed into the wall and more wounds appeared on his body every time Assea's figure collapsed.

Nevertheless, he held on.

His body was completely red due to the massive blood loss and was excoriated in many parts, but the vitality of a peak rank 2 body gave him the strength to keep running even in that condition.

Noah movements were slower than before but he still managed to cross the last twenty meters entering the mouth of the cavity.

The snakes behind him hissed even more crazily seeing that he had succeeded in reaching the escape route and began to move in its direction as to follow his example.

The King woke up and roared to stop the riot of its pack and a shock wave hit Noah that had just entered the passage.

He hadn't relaxed yet so Assea's body was still covering him.

Its body crumbled at the impact and its figure inside Noah's sea of consciousness cracked.

Noah felt a tremendous pain in his head before getting hit by the roar.

He could not resist even if he tried and his body was sent flying along the passage.

Blood came out from his mouth, ears, and eyes but all he could do was protecting his head to avoid any fatal damage.

He slammed repeatedly on the walls in front of him but the strength of the roar continued to push him forward and he was impotent in front of its might.

Then, he crashed again but this time the rocks of the wall were soft enough for him to dig in them.

His body created a small hole through the stones and finally stopped.

No noise came out of the hole as Noah had fainted due to the last collision.

Two days passed before Noah opened his eyes.

His sight was cloudy and a constant buzz invaded his ears.

It took him a while to remember the situation he was in and a bright smile appeared on his face when he understood that he had survived.

Then he laughed loudly but had to stop quickly because a wave of pain hit him as he moved.

'I don't want to see a snake anymore in my life.'

After he thought that, he fainted again.

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One month later, in an area near Twilboia Cliff.

A field full of shining flowers spanned for two hundred meters.

This place was called Iano field due to the rare flowers that grew there.

The lano flowers had no use to the cultivators but were very appreciated by couples since they had the ability to gather sunlight making their own figure shine.

At night, they resembled the starry giving a romantic vibe to the scenery.

A small-size noble family called Wilford possessed this field and used it as a small form of income, selling the right to spend the night in that place to anyone that could afford it.

A guard of the Wilford family was yawning lazily near the fence that determined the entrance to the field and a line of peasants and rich people was waiting for their moment to get inside.

As the line moved on, the guard raised the price of the ingress arousing the anger of the costumers.

However, any time someone tried to complain, he would proudly show his chest where the emblem of his family was and say arrogantly:

"Are you saying that me, an honored guard of the Wilford family, would dare to profit on lowly commoners?"

This was a line he practiced a lot to shut down the complaints about his attitude, after all a small-size family was still a noble family.

This time though, something unexpected happened as soon as he said that.

A slash made of wind shot out from the ground below of the lano flowers.

A small opening formed showing an intricate passage below the field, illuminated by the shining roots of the flowers.

Noah came out of the opening uncaring of his surroundings.

'To think that the light in the passage was caused by these roots.'

He was almost naked, only some strips of clothes remained on his lower body.

He looked around him and found the guard with his mouth open looking in his direction.

Noah raised the saber in his hand to point at him and spoke in a calm voice.

"Hey you, where is this place?"

Chapter 65 - 65. Rank 5

A carriage with the emblem of the Winford family moved in the direction of Balvan mansion.

When Noah came out of the ground, the guard wanted to obtain a refund for the damage he had caused on the field but it was enough to say the name "Balvan" to receive his apologies and a ride back home.

That and a little threat of course.

The ride was gladly accepted by Noah since he had yet to fully recover from his injuries.

He had decided to go out of the passage in the valley as soon as he was able to move for fear of another roar from the King.

The family even gave him a new set of clothes so he could hide again his space-ring in there.

During the travel, he focused mostly on healing Assea's cracked figure in his sea of consciousness and when he arrived at the mansion he was back at full strength.

Looking at his home he could not help but smile a little.

'I'm finally back!'

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Turning back in time a little, about two weeks after Noah fell in the canyon.

William was reading a report in the guards' building.

As he continued to read, his hands began to shake and an angry expression formed on his face.

Then, the reading stopped and the sheet he was holding disintegrated.

'Fucking nobles, they sent Noah into a trap!'

He hurriedly went outside of the mansion and ran in the direction of Twilboia Cliff.

It took him a week to reach the gorge but all he saw were corpses and remains of the battle.

He searched all the bodies but he could not find Noah's one.

'The report said that the caravan was assaulted here but he is not among the corpses.'

He fell deep in thought as he analyzed the situation.

'It's unlikely that he was taken hostage by the Lansay family, they have no use for him. Where is he though?'

His gaze eventually fell on the cliff and William's eyes widened.

'Don't tell me that he decided to escape in the canyon! That is one of the danger zones of this area.'

He neared the cliff and stared at the space below it, only fog occupied his field of view.

'If you really are down here, may the Heaven have pity on you, my dear disciple.'

He stayed in that position for a whole day praying for Noah's well being.

Then he shook his head and sighed, going back on the road for his mansion.

'It's better to hide this news from his mother.'

Months passed and his worry began to transform in helplessness.

He forbid every guard to speak about the incident but ultimately, some rumors about Noah's situation began to spread.

Many believed that he had escaped and joined the Lansay family in exchange for cultivation resources.

Others that he was taken as a prisoner to trade with the Balvan family.

Lily, however, had a bad feeling about Noah's condition as she noticed a change in Rhys' attitude.

He would visit her less frequently and was less violent during their nights spent together.

Her worries accumulated but she could do nothing but harass William with questions.

Nevertheless, she soon understood that even William knew nothing about her son's situation.

The waiting was becoming suffocating but nothing could be done.

Then, after more than four months from Noah's departure, the happy news came.

Noah had returned to the mansion!

Lily and William ran immediately from their respective buildings to the front gate of the mansion.

William was the first to arrive and stood in place looking at the smiling youth on the carriage of the Wilford family.

The youth had long black hair and shining blue eyes.

He was wearing large clothes that didn't seem fit for his stature and two sabers were sheathed on his back.

A mature look was exuded from him and William could not help but smile radiantly at that sight.

'He has grown.'

Before he could move toward him though, Lily's figure passed him and jumped directly on the smiling youth.

"I told you to be careful and yet you disappear for so long! Don't you know how worried I was? Enough, I'm not letting you out of your room for an entire month, no wait, let's make it two months!"

Lily was half hugging half rebuking her son but it was clear that she was happy from the bottom of her heart to see Noah safe.

It took Noah and an entire day to calm her mother and reassure her, while William could only look from some distance at the family reunion.

Lily fell asleep in Noah's room that day, a smile was present on her sleeping figure.

The next day, he spent all his morning with his mother before going to William's room to deliver a report.

William too was smiling unconsciously but his face became stern when Noah described the environment of the valley.

He said nothing about the Assea family or the spell but he had one doubt since he escaped the canyon.

"Master, which rank the King was?"

William was still digesting Noah's speech when he heard the question and fell deep in thought.

After some hesitation he said in a soft voice:

"Probably rank 5. You said that you opened a passage to the valley on the lano field right? I must warn the Shosti family, they will manage the situation. I'm afraid that this circumstance is too dangerous for a medium-size family to handle.'

Noah became interested.

"Will they kill the King?"

William shook his head.

"A battle with an entity on that level will shake all their area of power, they can't afford that. Also, the valley would probably be destroyed in the process and they would lose the only benefits they could get. They will just secure the passage and make it a forbidden zone.'

Noah felt a bit disappointed since he wanted to see a battle of that might but what William said was reasonable.

Then, he remembered something and smiled shamelessly toward his Master.

"You know, my sixth cycle is complete. We might do the last treatment immediately."

Looking at the smiling kid, a part of William wanted to throw him again in the cliff.

Noah was in the torture room below the guards' building, tied to the metal table.

A black and smelly liquid came out from his body as he absorbed "Breath" in the point where his acupoints once were.

Noah had already predicted that situation so he was calm during the process even though some scream was still yelled from time to time.

Assea's figure was hidden under the clothes on his lower body and was waiting patiently for the process to be over.

A huge amount of "Breath" was being accumulated in Noah's body, strengthening and refining it.

The process lasted for about ten minutes before he could finally form the new acupoints.

These acupoints were crystalline and seemed incredibly sturdy.

They absorbed "Breath" at an unimaginable speed and Noah felt an immense surge of power coming from his body.

He nodded to William that was at his side and he undid the bindings to set Noah free.

A smile was on William's face as he saw that his disciple was finally released from that dangerous technique.

"You really did it."

He patted Noah's shoulder uncaring of the filth on it.

Noah nodded again happily, he wanted to test his new power right away but his mental energy was almost completely depleted and he could not sense things accurately.

However, before he managed to bow to his Master, something unexpected happened.

A strange sensation hit his low waist and a small empty ball formed there.

Noah touched the spot but felt no uneasiness in having this new organ.

William noticed his behavior and inspected the spot where he was pointing.

His mouth opened and his eyes widened, he put one hand on his head and exclaimed in a soft voice.

"That is not possible."

Noah looked at his Master's expression and was confused, then an idea hit his mind and he widened his eyes too.

"Don't tell me?"

William nodded and carefully inspected the spot again.

"Your dantian formed."

Noah was stunned but then he exulted loudly.

A wave of pain was delivered from his tired head which forced him to calm down.

"But Master, I'm only thirteen and a half years old. Last time you spoke about gaining months not a whole year."

William mumbled with himself for a little before answering.

"Rank 1 mage, rank 2 body for most of your growth and now rank 3 body. I told you that the centers of power were linked but I never thought they could be influenced this much."

Noah's thoughts were slow since he had just done the treatment and could not keep up with his Master's reasoning.

He was still inspecting the new organ when he thought of something.

"Does it mean that now I can know my element?"

William nodded but then he shook his head and put a stern expression.

"First, go wash and rest, I'll make the needed preparation in the meantime. Meet me here tomorrow morning."

Noah was a bit unwilling to go and wanted to ask more questions but another wave of pain hit him so he decided to follow his Master's order.

He bowed deeply, there was only gratitude toward the man in front of him.

"It's only thanks to you that I am growing this much. So thank you, Master!"

William looked at the young man covered in filth and memories about him emerged.

The first time he received the command to take him as a disciple he thought that he would be some kind of nanny but Noah surpassed every expectation that he had for him.

He had to admit that his disciple made him proud beyond reason.

William ruffled his dirty hair a bit and smiled.

"Just go now, we will talk more tomorrow."

Noah left and the happy expression on William's face transformed into a worried one.

'This time I really can't cover you.'

When Noah woke up the next day he could clearly feel the changes in his body.

He felt an incredible vitality coming from it and when he checked the amount of "Breath" he had he was astonished.

'This is enough for more than one hundred attacks!'

Then he remembered the dantian event and his excitement built up.

'I wonder how the training will work and there is even the question about my element.'

He hurriedly went into the guards' building and then in the underground prison.

William was waiting for him with a small book and a transparent stone as big as a fist.

"Read this, it is a rank 1 cultivation technique for the dantian, it has no limitation to the element of the user so it's perfect to determine the cultivator's aptitude. Every family uses it."

Noah took the book and hastily read it.

It was a simple respiration method to be done in a fixed position, with his status as a rank 1 mage he memorized it instantly.

"Ready?"

William asked and Noah nodded in response.

William then gave the stone to Noah and explained.

"This is a Pharos stone. It has the peculiar characteristic of changing color based on the element of the "Breath" that passes through it. Put it on your waist and start meditating in the cultivation technique, your body will naturally absorb the element of your aptitude, changing its color.'

Noah didn't waste any time and sat on the ground in the cross-legged position indicated in the technique.

He put the stone on his waist and began to practice.

The "Breath" moved toward his body and entered the small empty dantian, filling it with a gaseous substance.

As the gaseous "Breath" entered the dantian, it pressed on its surface, enlarging it.

The pace was slow but also relaxing, Noah felt a bit more refreshed every time his dantian was charged.

After about one hour, William's voice sounded.

"You can stop."

Noah looked at his Master's face and saw that he had a worried expression.

Then he lowered his gaze on the stone on his waist.

The Pharos stone was completely black.

#### Chapter 67 - 67. Dantian

Noah stared at the black stone for some time before raising his gaze toward his Master.

"What does that mean?"

William still had his worried expression when he answered.

"Darkness."

Noah was surprised but happy.

'I have one of the rarest elements, won't that mean that my potential is ensured?'

However, when he realized this point he became worried too.

'Doesn't this imply that the inner circle will try to suppress me?'

He looked at William and spoke with a pleading voice.

"Can we hide this news from the inner circle?"

William shook his head.

"The Pharos stone is quite rare as a mineral. It has to be given back to the family in order to clean it from the "Breath" that tainted it to use it again in the future."

Then he lowered his head and continued.

"Actually, I already reported that your dantian formed. I needed to say the name of the cultivator that I had to test to borrow the stone."

Noah fell deep in thought.

'So they will be able to discern my element as soon as they get the stone back. I have a bad feeling about this.'

Noah sighed and then gave the Pharos stone back to William.

He put it away and then sat in front of his disciple.

"Do not linger too much on things that you can't control. For now, just focus on your dantian, I still have to explain how it works."

Noah nodded and listened attentively to his Master.

"Generally speaking, the rank of a cultivator is determined by the stage his dantian is in. I am a rank 3 mage with a rank 4 body and a rank 3 dantian, which makes me a rank 3 cultivator."

Noah was amazed, he knew that his Master was strong but he didn't imagine he was this strong!

"The dantian is where we store the majority of our "Breath", but the "Breath" is an energy too powerful for normal bodies to handle. Tell me, what will it happen if you accumulate too much power and you can't contain it?"

Noah's answer was immediate.

"You would explode."

William nodded and resumed the explanation.

"Exactly. I must say that if the family didn't give me a rank 4 body nourishing technique I would still be stuck at the last stage of the rank 2 dantian. That is about how much a rank 3 body can handle."

He went silent for a moment to sort his thoughts and then continued.

"Every rank of the dantian has three stages: gaseous, liquid, and solid. Every stage is vastly more powerful than the previous one. The training of the dantian consists of two phases: accumulation and compression. First, you accumulate "Breath" and enlarge the dantian till its maximum potential, then you compress it to make the "Breath" inside it change state. The process is not so easy as it might seem and cultivators usually have pills to help them in advancing stages. Actually, going through the compression phase is wearisome for the dantian and a failure might even damage it permanently. Remember to never attempt to break through if you don't have the necessary mental energy or some pills."

Noah maintained a calm expression but inside he was cheering.

'Now I know how to use the Earth pill!'

"Also once you are in the next stage your dantian will only accumulate "Breath" of that density so the process will be slower."

William pointed at the book near Noah.

"That is a rank 1 cultivation technique and doesn't even have requirements for the element, which makes it the lowest tier of cultivation techniques. A rank 1 technique can at most take you to the peak of the rank 1 dantian and there are specific ones for each element which speed up the absorption process. To break through ranks you need a reagent that will heat your dantian, purifying the "Breath" inside it. The solid "Breath" will be consumed and only a strand of

gas will remain that will be of a higher purity than the gaseous "Breath" of the previous stage. Then you start again to cultivate in the stages."

Noah was about to speak when William stopped him and added something.

"Never advance in rank even if you find the reagent if you don't have the corresponding technique for the next rank. What's the point of reaching a higher rank if then you can't accumulate the purer "Breath"? Always remember that the technique comes first, and if you can, try to match it with your element, some higher tier techniques can also give peculiar proprieties to the "Breath" you store."

Noah finally had a complete image of the powers of a cultivator and was eager to go back to his room to train all day in the rank 1 technique.

He smiled innocently and pointed at himself.

"Master, so now I'm a rank 1 cultivator?"

William nodded and smiled.

"Yes, rank 1 cultivator in the gaseous stage."

Noah was happy, but then he remembered his position.

"There is no chance that I'll get a better technique than this one?"

William shook his head.

"No chance at all."

"How do I know that my dantian is ready for the compression?"

"You won't be able to accumulate more "Breath" once you've reached its limits."

Noah nodded in understanding, a plan was forming in his mind.

'I can only wait till the peak of rank 1, then I have to go away from here. Not only my advancements will be halted if I decide to stay, but my mother is also nearing her limit of endurance.'

He looked again at his Master.

"How long does it takes to cultivate the dantian?"

William thought for a little and then answered.

"It took me twenty-five years to reach the gaseous stage of the rank 3 but that was caused by the limits that my body had. Don't worry too much about the time spent, a cultivator's lifespan gets longer as you advance in the dantian or in the body."

He misunderstood his disciple's intention but still gave the answer Noah wanted.

#### Chapter 68 - 68. Scheme

"So what should I do now?"

William shook his head and showed a complex smile.

"The news of your dantian and element will astonish many inside the inner circle. You are, after all, a cultivator younger than fourteen and have one of the rarest elements. I won't be surprised if people will call you a prodigy."

Noah nodded at his Master's words.

"And this is a bad thing right?"

William answered.

"Yes, they had already tried to send you in a trap with the escort mission and I'm afraid that they will use more direct methods to hurt you from now on. Well, maybe the family will be divided when choosing which role you will have but it's better to be careful anyway. As always, don't spend too much time

inside the mansion and take only missions about magical beasts. I will probe the situation in the meantime."

Noah stood up and bowed and then he exited the room.

William stood in the room for some time before he sighed.

'I'm sorry, your Master is really useless some times.'

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Noah went to see his mother and explained the situation to her.

She didn't understand much about cultivation but when he said that he was possibly in danger because of his talent, she didn't hesitate in sending him away.

"If the mansion is not safe then just go away, don't care about me!"

These were the words she said and Noah could not help but steeling his determination as he exited the mansion.

He took the first mission he could find and went to the appointed place where the report said that the magical beasts were gathering.

The beasts were all rank 2, it took him less than five minutes to annihilate their pack.

'Rank 2 beasts can't really do anything now that my body advanced and the "Breath" in it is on the same level as the one in my dantian. It seems that the hardest part in cultivating the dantian is the "Breath" necessary to enlarge it, while only refilling it doesn't take that much time.'

He was experimenting with his new strength and was completely satisfied.

His dantian was still small but he could feel that its maximum capacity was way higher than the one of his body, and this without considering the stage he was in.

'There is really a great difference, if I didn't practice in the Forging of Seven Hells I'm afraid that I couldn't have lasted for more than five clashes against a real cultivator. Now my weakness is gone, I only have to cultivate and I will be able to fight for a long time.'

The advantages of having a dantian didn't stop at that, but Noah's body was too strong for him to feel any other positive change yet.

Noah decided to spend some nights outside the mansion to focus on his new organ, the missions were the perfect excuse for his absence.

Meanwhile, William was kneeling on the floor of a luxurious hall.

The hall was big, as large as an entire floor of the guards' building, and many paintings and colorful items were exposed on its walls.

In front of him, many spacious chairs were placed on top of short marble steps, making those that sat on them look down to whoever asked for their presence.

Thomas Balvan was seated on the central chair, carefully inspecting a black stone.

After some time, he lowered the stone and looked at the kneeling vice-captain.

"Are you saying that Rhys's bastard not only developed a dantian before the age of fourteen but that is also of the darkness element?"

William's answer was immediate and loud.

"Yes, Lord Patriarch, I was there myself when he did the test with the Pharos stone."

Thomas thought for a bit and then he nodded.

"I've decided, no one is allowed to do anything to that kid, let's see how he develops. Do you understand me, Rhys? I don't want to see another scheme done behind my back."

Rhys was seated in one of the chairs on Thomas's side and at his words, he stood up and bowed.

"I understand Father."

Thomas then waved casually his hand.

"The meeting is over, you can go."

At his words everyone stood up and bowed, returning to their tasks.

William was relieved at the Patriarch's words as he went back to the outer circle.

However, not everyone in the Balvan family was happy with the disposition.

In another room inside the inner circle.

CRASH!

A big and seemingly expensive table was crashed by Rhys' blow.

'Fuck, he is my son, I can do anything I want with him.'

He looked at the broken desk and focused his gaze on it.

The table burned and was reduced to ashes.

A bit of sweat appeared on Rhys' face which made him even angrier.

'Fuck, who does he thinks he is growing so fast. The son of that whore has to always, ALWAYS be weaker than the son and daughter that Rebecca gave me.'

He sat on a pillow on the floor to calm down.

Rhys Balvan was the weakest inside his family.

Since he had everything he wanted he never cared about training.

However, the descendants he made with his dead wife Rebecca had taken his carefree attitude and were unwilling to spend too much time cultivating.

Rhys had already given up on the idea of succeeding his Father since his two older brothers were way better candidates, yet he couldn't accept that his bastard son could become someone important in the family when his other ones couldn't.

He thought for a while before his eyes began to emit a cold light.

'I can't hurt you but I can make sure that you'll never be loyal to the family and then I'll just wait patiently for your mistake. I can't wait to see your sorry figure being chased by our personal guards.'

He stood up and yelled seemingly to no one.

"Wayne, I'm going to the outer circle, take care of my children."

A guard appeared from nowhere and half-kneeled on the floor.

"Yes, my Lord."

#### Chapter 69 - 69. Lily

Inside the guests' building, in Lily's room.

Lily was holding a small mirror checking her make-up.

She would do this action every time she felt that Rhys was coming.

'He will vent on me, he always does.'

Lily never had the chance to get instructed due to the fact that she came from a poor family.

However, her beauty was renowned, attracting even the attention of the nobles.

That was how she met Rhys and managed to live in the Balvan mansion. From the commoners' perspective, she was blessed and she felt that too before Noah was born.

'To think that such happiness could turn into so much pain.'

She knew that her son was amazing.

She might not know anything about cultivation but she was sure that Noah would become someone important in the future.

'I still remember when he tried so hard to learn to walk. How could a baby have that kind of determination?'

She smiled when she remembered the scenes from his youth.

'You've worked so hard, and I know that you hide a lot of things from me. You are not even a man but you already want to protect me.'

She shook her head.

She knew that Noah cared for her, that he always checked her body every time they met.

She knew that part of his hardworking personality was because of her situation.

She then remembered the first night that Noah spent training in the Kesier rune, his pale face, his bloodshot eyes.

'How many nights did you end up like that? How many times did you end up worse than that? Jeez, what a reckless son I have.'

She moved the mirror to point at her right cheek, some bruises were still healing on that spot.

'I never told you that your father hits me to hurt you. Everything he does is for ruining your life, I'm just a tool for this goal and it seems that his methods are working.'

She sighed.

What she learnt most since she came to the mansion was Rhys' personality.

She could almost predict what his every action would be.

'Today you seemed really worried otherwise you wouldn't have told me. That means that Rhys' response will be harder. Don't worry though, I might be useless as a mother but I finally have the courage to stop being your burden.'

She threw the mirror on the floor, smashing it.

Then she picked two sharp shards and hid them in her sleeves.

'I hope you will understand and, in time, forgive me.'

Then her eyes became resolute as she waited on the bed for her lover to come.

Rhys didn't make her wait much and arrived in her room only a few hours later.

As he went inside, he noticed that something was wrong with Lily's expression but then he remembered his plan and put a smile on his face.

Before he could speak though, Lily took the initiative.

"Have you come to kill me?"

They have been together for a long time, Rhys knew that Lily wasn't just a stupid woman.

"Kill you? Not at all, you probably don't know but it would be against the direct order of my Father to do that. Our son has become quite a celebrity already."

She raised her head to look right in Rhys' eyes.

"What will you do then?"

Rhys put a complacent smile and answered.

"Well, everyone knows about the treatment that I reserve you. I was just thinking that I might as well leave some permanent sign this time. I might have lost the chance to kill you but that doesn't mean that I can't increase the hate he already has for the family.'

Lily smiled at his words.

'If he hates him this much it means that my son really is extraordinary.'

"So, what were you thinking of doing."

Rhys put a pensive pose and then casually answered.

"I was thinking if I were to disfigure your face, wouldn't his hate for the family increase every time he looked at you? The lofty Patriarch sure wouldn't intervene personally for a few cuts on a whore's face.'

Lily continued to smile and stood up with her hands behind her back.

Then, she went close to Rhys with a bewitching expression and put her arms around his neck.

"Don't you want to enjoy my face one last time before you do that?"

Rhys excitement grew and he held the woman tightly by her waist, putting her close to his groin.

"You sure are a whore, eheh."

He was about to kiss her when Lily took out one of the mirror-shards from her sleeve and stabbed it in Rhys' left eye.

Rhys instinctively flung her away at full strength and she slammed in the wall of the room and then fell on the floor.

Rhys was weak but still a cultivator, his blow broke some of Lily's ribs.

He began to yell madly at Lily's figure on the ground.

"You mad woman! Now nothing can save you, not even the Patriarch! I will slowly torture you and make sure that your bastard son watches as I do it!"

Blood flowed from his eye socket, the shard had pierced him deeply, he wasn't sure that the injury was curable.

However, Lily had already held her other hidden shard and stabbed it on her throat.

She showed a bright smile as life left her and was happy to know that her plan had succeeded.

'Now he won't have any hold on you, my dear son, and you will think that your mother was just a weak woman. I hope that like this you will grow strong in the Balvan family and you won't do anything reckless. Be safe my dear.'

Then she died.

Rhys was still yelling and was about to near Lily's corpse when a suffocating pressure engulfed the room.

"You idiot son, are my orders only farts in your ears?"

Thomas Balvan appeared in the room and stopped Rhys from taking any other step.

#### Chapter 70 - 70. Inner circle

Rhys was covering the wound on his eye and turned around to look at his father.

Thomas had a disappointed expression on his face as he looked at his son.

"Not only you disobeyed me, you even let a common woman hurt you. As a cultivator, you really are a failure."

Rhys began to complain.

"But Father, that whore attacked me f-"

He could not continue to speak as more pressure was applied by Thomas.

If he didn't want his son to speak, then Rhys could not speak.

"Tell me, what makes a family a noble one?"

Rhys had been educated for years so he knew what his father wanted to say.

He lowered his head and answered with a soft voice.

"Strength."

Thomas nodded.

"Correct. Your brothers understood that and worked hard to become strong. They even forced their children to train in order to maintain the power of the family. You instead..."

He shook his head and continued.

"You spoiled your descendants too much but that was fine, you weren't actually hurting the family. Now, however, you made us lose the only tie we had with a promising cultivator."

At his words, Rhys became angry again, he really could not bear seeing his bastard son being praised.

He had to hold his feelings back though, and he bowed slightly while asking a question.

"What do you want me to do?"

Thomas massaged his temples and sighed.

"I might be able to heal your eye, but I won't. The kid needs a proof that you were punished. As for the other arrangements, I will take care of them myself. Furthermore, no one is allowed to touch anything on this floor, let my grandson decide how to interpret the situation."

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Noah didn't know anything about what happened in the mansion and continued to train and fight.

A week had passed since he went out and he finally felt accustomed to his new strength.

His dantian had enlarged a little but he felt that it was too soon for it to show its power.

There was one thing that bothered him though.

'I want to change my blood companion already!'

Now his body was on the same level as Assea, but that wasn't the limit of the technique.

If he could find a peak rank 3 magical beast of the darkness element, his battle capability will rise by a lot.

'Sadly I don't really know where to find one. It's not like rank 3 magical beasts are easy to find.'

He hid the space-ring in his clothes, he would always wear it whenever he went outside after the events in the valley.

'Time to go back.'

As he neared the mansion, he saw that the patrolling guards were avoiding his gaze.

An ominous feeling began to form inside Noah that reached its peak when he saw William waiting for him at the main gate.

Noah hurriedly went toward him and asked:

"What happened?"

William shook his head and answered.

"You can judge it by yourself. The Patriarch didn't allow anyone to modify the scene."

There were guards in red armor in front of the guests' building and they opened a way for Noah and his Master.

Noah sped up and reached the first floor in an instant.

When he saw the scene that was displayed, he felt completely void of any strength.

His mother's corpse was on the ground, her throat was sliced and a mirror-shard was in it.

He was about to rage and ask something when he saw the smile on her face.

He neared the corpse uncaring of the awful smell that it was exuding due to its decomposition and kneeled in front of it.

William began to talk at that moment.

"She met with your father one week ago. According to the report, she stabbed his eye and then sliced her throat. To show his condolences, the Patriarch had forbidden Lord Rhys from healing the wound that she caused."

Noah didn't pay much attention to his words and gently caressed his mother's face.

'You did it for me, didn't you?'

Noah wasn't a common thirteen years old kid.

After he saw her smile he immediately understood his mother's intentions.

'Why? You just had to wait a bit more and then I would have taken you out of this place. I was so close too.'

He placed his front on hers and closed his eyes to memorize every detail of her face with his mental energy.

'I understand, I will not do anything reckless for now.'

Noah stood up, his heart grew cold, his mind released a bit of pressure as he vowed to himself:

'Yet one day, I'll definitely kill my father.'

The more he stared at his mother's corpse the more his mind became sharp.

Some cracking sound came from the furniture around him as he was losing control of his state of mind.

William noted this and placed a hand on his shoulder.

Then he neared his mouth to his disciple's ear and whispered softly.

"You will have to control yourself from now on, remember to never fall for any provocation. They will suppress you but secretly you will always be ahead of them. Endure it, your time will definitely come."

He slipped a piece of paper in his clothes.

When Noah turned to look at his Master with a confused expression a guard in red armor arrived at their position.

William bowed lightly at his sight and gestured for Noah to do the same.

Noah was still confused but trusted his Master so he followed his example.

The guard nodded and put a stern expression before he spoke.

"Per order of the Patriarch of the Balvan family, Noah Balvan has to be immediately transferred to the inner circle to join the personal guards of the family. Please follow me to your new lodging."

William looked at Noah and smiled slightly.

He ruffled his hair a bit and spoke in a warm tone.

"Go, and remember to be careful."