

Alchemy 1001

Chapter 1001: Stepstones Tribe

"If you want my daughter, then you better be strong," the old man with a big body said as he started walking towards Alex.

"I don't want your daughter," Alex said with an annoyed look on his face.

"Hah! Too late to run away now. You should have thought of that when you tried to get my daughter," he said without stopping his approach. "You already tried to seduce her with your strength."

Alex slowly backed away. "Sir, I did no such thing. I have no intention of marr—"

"I said it's too late now," the old man shouted as he jumped toward Alex.

Alex who was barely stepping had to defend himself when he saw the old man coming at him with a readied fist. He was used to seeing strong and fast people move slowly thanks to his new eyes, so he didn't know exactly how strong the old man was.

Thus, he had to prepare for the worst by using the tiny bit of Qi in his body to use for blocking.

He crossed his arms and the old man's fist landed right there. When the old man's fist landed on his arms, he was surprised beyond belief.

'He's so weak,' he thought. If he were to assign a cultivation realm, the old man would be somewhere in the low True King realm at best.

Due to how well-prepared he was, he wasn't even pushed back at all. However, he couldn't help but be sad that he used up the last of his Qi on someone so weak.

Now, he had nothing. 'Damn it,' he thought. He opened his arms back up, sending back the old man that could only stare at him with shock.

"Ho-how are you so strong?" he asked. Even the bystanders were shocked beyond belief. Their tribe chief was one of, if not the strongest person that they had ever seen. And somehow Alex had been able to defend against him so easily.

The old man's eyes wandered for a moment before landing on Alex again as a smile appeared on his face. "I accept," he said as he stood upright with a proud smile on his face. "You may marry my daughter."

"I don't want to," Alex said.

"What? Why not?" the chief asked.

"I only met her 3 days ago," Alex said. "Besides, I have no intention of marrying anytime soon."

The old man's eyes narrowed in confusion. "Then why did you seduce her?"

"I did no such thing," Alex spoke in a frustrated tone. He was finding it hard to keep his cool when both the father and daughter kept asking him to marry the girl.

"Huh? But my daughter said you hit her. Did she lie?" the old man asked.

"Uhh, about that, I was simply angry because she said she wanted to make me a slave. So I hit her," Alex said.

"So, you didn't hit her because you wanted to marry her?" the old man got sad. "I thought I finally found someone my daughter could accept."

"You guys seduce by hitting each other?" Alex was with a weird face.

"Hahaha, what else would we do?" the chief asked. "I still remember the day I seduced this girl's mother. I had to beat her so hard that she could barely see by the end of the day. Come the next day, she had fallen in love with me."

'Goddamn, that's messed up,' Alex thought.

"Well, I'm sorry to disappoint but I did not seduce your daughter or plan to," Alex said. "Now, can we go in?"

"Yes, yes," the chief said. "Everyone, go do your thing."

The group finally moved along, but even then, they kept staring at Alex from time to time. Li Yun came up to Alex again and grabbed him by the hands before dragging him away even when he kept saying that he didn't want to marry her.

She was adamant that he would turn around to her eventually.

The Stepstones tribe was located on top of a canyon, with a slightly deep gorge between segmented cliffs that were all interconnected by terribly unsteady bone bridges.

There were about 7 different cliffs in total with 6 surrounding a single one in the middle, which was the main site for the tribe.

Alex was simply stunned to see what a desolate place this was. He had not expected these people to live in such a location.

"Come on, let's go," the girl said as pulled Alex along.

The very first cliff where many small huts were present and various beasts and people remained, Alex could see some bone spines dug into the ground.

He also saw a wall of bones to keep things away from the tribe.

Alex walked along while looking at the people starting to carry out the gigantic fish they had killed in Maroon bay. They were taking it to the center camp where the chief and various other stronger folks of the tribe lived in.

The people walked to the canyon's edge and jumped, crossing the entire distance in between in a single go.

He was surprised because it wasn't just one person doing it, but rather everyone.

"Everyone of them is strong? Why the bridge then?" Alex asked.

"Not everyone is strong. It's just that we took the strong ones with us. As for the bridge, it is so we can take slaves and beasts to the other cliffs," Li Yun said. "Come."

She crossed the entire range in a single leap. Alex paused and turned around to see the chief lagging a bit behind, giving instructions to the various people of the tribe.

He shrugged and turned around to jump across the cliff in a single go. As he did, he saw the entire place from the air and finally understood why the tribe was called what it was.

The 7 separate cliffs when looked at from the top looked like stepping stones that one would use as a rudimentary pathway in a field or river.

It was around 3 or 4 in the afternoon, so while the sun would set in a few hours, it was still burning brightly at the entire tribe.

Alex walked through the homes made with rocks and mud and maybe some dried plants such as the bushes that could be found in the desert.

"That's my house there. You can stay in my room," Li Yun said.

"No, thank you," Alex said as he looked around at the tribe. Many dark-skinned individuals were staring at him, most likely for his fairer skin.

The children were even more curious as they ran up to Alex and asked why he was so white. Alex had to take a moment to think of how exactly to answer it when Li Yun spoke up first.

"You kids, I don't see a single wound on you. Shouldn't you be jumping into the gorge?" she asked.

"Yes, sister Yun," they said and as Alex watched, they jumped directly into the gorge.

"What? What did you do?" he asked.

"What? ... nothing?" she asked.

"You told the kids to jump into the gorge. They couldn't possibly be strong enough to survive that." Alex said. He quickly ran up to the edge of the cliff and looked down to see that the kids were nearly 20 meters below.

Fortunately, none of them were bleeding.

Alex was about to jump when Li Yun caught it. "Don't bother. Their parents will go get them once they are free," she said.

"What? You not only hurt the children but are also going to leave them there?" he asked.

"They're fine. The most they will have is broken bones. It would be better if they were more wounded, but it suppose you can't spread your resources too thin to improve the kids," she said.

She turned to look at Alex and saw that he looked appalled, even disgusted. So, she put on a frowning face of her own. "What? That's how we do things here. If you're not going to get hurt, you're not going to get strong. And if you don't get strong, the best you can be is bait to lure in beasts."

"Do you want to be the thing that lures beasts?" she asked.

Alex kept quiet. He was in a different location, so he shouldn't be judging them so harshly. He didn't know what kind of life they had lived here.

"I'm sorry, go on then," he said.

"Ok, so you will be staying in my room for no—"

"Not that. I will stay outside if you don't have a place," Alex said.

Li Yun couldn't help but pout. "Fine, you can stay in my mother's room," she said.

"And what about your mother?" Alex asked.

"She's dead, so you won't have to worry about her," she said with a hint of anger and sadness in her voice.

"I'm sorry," Alex said. "How... did she die?"

"Beast attack, 7 years ago," she said.

Alex looked at where they were and asked, "Was your mother out of the tribe at the time?"

"No, she was sleeping soundly in her room. The beasts were simply too many and attacked us too fast," she said. "It wasn't until after we were done dealing with the strong beasts that we found her corpse."

"My god," Alex said. "Are the beasts really that dangerous around here? I thought you said they were relatively rare."

"They are rare, for now. But on that day 7 years ago, they came in a wave, attacking everything in their path," she said.

"What happened 7 years ago to make them behave like that?" Alex asked.

"We are not sure, but we have a general idea," she said. "It definitely had something to do with the disappearance of the northern lights"

Chapter 1002: Inside a Fish

"The Northern lights?" Alex turned to look towards the north. "There was light there?"

"Yeah, It used to shine in the night, like a second sun," she said. "Well, maybe not as brightly."

"What was there?" Alex asked.

"Don't know," she said. "I doubt anyone knows. As far as I know, it was there before I was born. Probably since before even father was born."

"Oho, what are you guys talking about?" the chief appeared right next to them as he jumped from the other side of the canyon.

"We're talking about the Northern lights, father. Do you know since when it was in the north?" she asked.

"Well, the Northern lights go as far back as the sun and moon, I suppose," he said. Every piece of knowledge that gets passed down always speaks of the Sun, Moon, Sacred flames, and the Northern Lights."

"May I ask how old are you exactly, chief?" Alex asked.

"Hmm, I haven't kept track of my own age for a while now. 110 maybe? 120? I should be around that age," he said.

"What is the oldest a person has been able to live out here?" he asked.

"Hmm, my father lived for about 175 years. I heard someone from the Serpent oasis managed to live to be about 300 years," he said. "I think those that live by the shore in fact live much longer, but I don't know how much."

"I see," Alex said. If a person's life expectancy was so short compared to Qi cultivation, then he could be certain that the knowledge passed down from generation to generation in this place actually didn't go too far back.

"Are you hungry, young man? We are about to cook a fish. It's a feast tonight," the old man said.

"I'm not exactly hungry, but I would love to eat something if you don't mind," Alex said. "Of course not. Come, I will show you around now."

"Father, I'm showing him around," Li Yun said as she grabbed onto Alex's arms again.

"Fine, fine, just follow me," he said. Since he had tested Alex's strength, he was fine with his daughter's public infatuation with Alex. Anyone would do that after finding out how strong Alex was.

Alex walked along with them as he didn't want to seem disrespectful. His spiritual sense was moving wildly, however, looking at everything he could in the tribe.

With how small the tribe's living area actually was, Alex's spiritual sense was covering it all. And yet, he still couldn't find his father.

He did find 2 things that took away his attention. The first was the phoenix flame that burned in the center of the giant room at the center of the tribe.

This was the sacred flame that the tribes bet their lives upon. Alex could even see some wounded folks being kept nearby who were being healed by it.

Other than that, he could also see the fish that was being prepared at the moment for cooking.

Inside the fish was something that he was way too excited to find.

Alex walked ahead of the other two, increasing his pace as he entered the room.

The man who was working on the fish was cut open the guts and was on the way to pull out something spherical from inside the fish.

Alex walked straight to the man and said, "hand it to me."

The man had been someone who had seen Alex fight, so refusing was the last thing he was ever going to do. So, he brought out his hand and gave the item to Alex.

Alex looked at it with fervent eyes. "A beast core!" he thought. He couldn't imagine finding a beast core in a place like this, but he had found one.

Although, it had to come from a fish that was not from this continent.

"Do you have some water to wash this off?" he asked.

"There's some over there," the chief said.

Alex quickly walked up to the hole in the ground that was used to hold water. He quickly washed the blood off the beast's core and with zero hesitation, ate it.

"What?"

"Don't eat that!"

Both the father and daughter shouted at the same time as Alex ate the core. The core reached his stomach and dissipated into some energy.

The fish that the core belonged to seemed to have a high cultivation base in the Self-tempering realm, so all Alex got was very low Qi, which was something he could fortunately use.

He wasn't really intending on using that Qi and wanted to keep it unused, but a portion of it still disappeared, stolen by a hungry mouse that wanted his body back.

"Are you okay?" Li Yun came up to him and asked.

"Oh yeah, I'm fine," Alex said.

"Are you sure? Why the hell would you eat that?" she asked. "Do you even know what that is?"

"Oh, it's alright. I can eat these," he said.

"How?" the girl couldn't understand. Everyone who was young and curious would try and eat that since it smelled so good, and each time they would have a horrible case of nausea and fever, followed by an upset stomach and constant vomits.

That were some of the first things that were taught to the children not to eat as the fish cores had unfortunately come to be used as a children's plaything.

"Right, do you perhaps have more of these?" Alex asked her.

"Um, we don't get many of that in the fish," she said. "But there should be quite a few outside with the children if they didn't already throw them away. Why do you want it?"

"I would love to have them if you don't mind," he said.

"I will go around and ask, I guess?" she said.

Alex thanked her. He waited around with the chief, talking for a bit as they watched the fish being cut open.

They realized that they had yet to introduce themselves to each other, so they did. The old man's name was Li Yanxiao, and his family had been chief for ages.

"Oh right, do you have some good tailor? I need to have some clothes made for me," Alex said.

"Clothes? We have some good tailors that can make you some clothes. Although we don't have fabric and only leather and fur, so you will have to make do with that," he said.

"That's fine. I just need proper clothes," Alex said. "Also, can you make it out of this?"

Alex tossed out the snake corpse that he had killed some nights ago.

The moment the snake appeared, the old man was shocked. "Where did it come from?" he asked.

"I have a place where I can keep it," he said. "It's what us cultivators do regularly."

The old man walked up to the snake's corpse and touched its skin. When he did, his eyes went wide.

"You killed this beast?" he asked.

"I did," Alex said.

"Amazing," the old man said. "This is so strong, and you somehow managed to kill it."

He turned to look at Alex. "Don't worry, we can make the best clothes for you with such a material."

Chapter 1003: Talk by the Flame

The old man took away his snake corpse and gave it to some woman in the tribe that would make him a good set of shirts and pants.

Alex told the chief that they could use the rest of the monster for whatever they wanted as that was all he could do for letting them stay there.

Of course, there was the case of him having to do nothing as strength was what these people revered, and would let him get away with almost anything just based on his strength. But he didn't feel like doing that since he had his own values that were different from what these people followed.

He walked out with the chief and went somewhere to talk. The chief was curious about where Alex was from and Alex used the opportunity to learn more about the Southern Continent from the father that the daughter would likely not know.

"These fish you get from the Maroon Bay. How often do you go to get them?" he asked.

"3 times a year," the old man said. "Each trip brings back enough food to last 4 whole months, so we only have to go there 3 times each."

"And this Maroon Bay, does it have Qi?" Alex asked.

"Qi? Hmm... I can't say confidently, but I would suspect that it doesn't," the old man said. "Well, not the bay at least."

"I see," Alex said. He had suspected as much after all.

"I have to be honest, I've only ever heard of a Qi cultivator. I know there are some in the north, but they never come in this direction. Is this true that they can live for thousands of years?" the old man asked.

Ning smiled and started answering his question.

Li Yun came back a few minutes later, holding nearly 15 different beast cores in between her arms. "Will this be enough?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. That will be plenty," Alex said.

"Just wait, I will return after washing this," she said and went into the room with the water.

"I see you guys don't treat water as a rarity. Why is that?" Alex asked.

"Oh, water is not rare. While it is rare on the surface, if you dig deep enough, you can find it," the old man said. "There's a well at the bottom of the cliff over there. We go down to bring water each day."

"Oh," Alex gave a surprised expression. He truly hadn't expected the desert to be this resourceful when it came to water.

Li Yun returned not long after with clean beast cores and sat in front of Alex as she handed them to him.

"Thank you," Alex said as he took them, but found it hard to eat when she kept staring at him.

"Umm... do you have to look at me like that when I'm about to eat?" he asked.

"Of course, I'm very curious how you can stomach it all," she said.

"Sigh, do as you want," he said as he started eating the cores. He ate them one after another, shocking both the father, daughter, and anyone that was around that saw them.

They looked absolutely appalled at seeing someone eat something that would otherwise make them terribly ill.

"How is he eating all that?"

"Is he not sick?"

"He must be a beast in human clothing."

"I hear he came from across the ocean."

People talked around him, but Alex was too focused on eating the cores to care about the rest of the stuff.

Not a single one of these cores he ate was a Saint rank one and that made him sad. If it was, then maybe he would have a decent amount of Qi.

The total Qi he got from the 15 beast cores was not even enough to fill a tenth of his dantian, and even then, half of it was taken away by Whisker, and surprisingly some by Scarlet.

'Dammit, I have two Qi-hungry beasts with me. Eating beast cores alone isn't going to be enough for me,' he thought. He would have to down hundreds of such cores to gather enough Qi to fill his dantian.

"Can all people with Qi do that?" Li Yun asked with a look of awe on her face.

"A few, not all," Alex said.

"Was it useful?" she asked.

"Uh... no, not really," he said. "It's not your fault though. The cores were just from weak beasts."

"Weak... are they really that weak?" she asked. She remembered the trouble one would have to go through to find such fish, and Alex was calling them weak.

"If you are done, let us feast now," the chief said.

The giant fish was brought out, fully cooked and every single person in the tribe that had gathered there was given a piece of it.

Alex looked around at the people who were broken arms, cuts all over their bodies, lacerated skin, and an overall hurt look as if they had just been through a gruesome fight.

They all ate some piece of the fish, the weaker ones getting more as they required strength to function.

Alex saw the slaves that had eyes full of determination to get stronger. They were with wounds too.

He quietly ate his fish while watching the people talk to each other. The tribe had been just back from a long journey, so the people were catching up to what happened.

Some talked about fighting beasts on the path. Some talked about how hard it was to catch a fish. Some talked about the many, many distance-long beaches of salt.

The chief stayed quiet as he watched his tribes folk passionately speak too.

A while later, after everyone was done eating, they all stood up around the same time and started walking away.

"Where are they going?" Alex asked curiously.

"Oh, to the hall of Sacred flames. They will sit there for a few hours to heal," Li Yun said.

"Ah, I see," Alex said. He went along and walked into the hall. Inside, he saw the same type of flame burning as the one he had seen by the crater where he had appeared.

"Come to the middle," the chief said when he saw Alex stop moving after entering the hall.

"It's fine. I can remain here. Let the wounded stay closer," he said.

"Nonsense," the old man said. "In the Stepstones tribe, only the strongest get the best treatment. Since you're the strongest, you will sit closest to the flames."

"Come on, do we have to?" Alex asked.

"It's tradition," the old man replied without giving any room for argument.

"Fine, let's go," Alex said and walked up to the fire.

He sat the closest to the fire that was at the center. Even the chief stayed a step behind him. 'They really care about strength, huh?' he thought.

The room was quiet, aside from a few grunts of pain here and there. Alex didn't have to heal himself, so he simply looked around the room at those that needed it.

He was truly surprised by just how quickly they were all healing. It wasn't at the same rate as his Undying body of course, but in just an hour, one would be able to heal broken bones. Wounds healed in a matter of minutes too.

The kids were surprisingly healing faster, perhaps due to the low energy required to heal fully.

As the entire tribe stayed quiet in the room, they were all healed.

After an hour, a few people finally started standing up and leaving. Alex kept on sitting while watching the colorful flames, trying to see if there was any way he could replicate the properties inside of it.

However, it seemed a bit too advanced for him. If there was only the property of fire, he most likely could have understood it all, but there was clearly something else present in the flames that he couldn't even begin to understand.

"You don't have these flames in your place?" the chief asked. "You seem to be entranced by it."

"No, we don't," Alex said. "This is exclusive to just the Southern Continent, and maybe a few other locations out there."

"Oh, is that so?" the old man said. "Well, we are blessed to have this then."

"Right, how easy is it to find the Sacred flames in the Southern Continent? How did you find yours?" he asked.

"Well, it has been here since before my grandfather's time. It should have been here forever. Also, just like us, you should be able to find Sacred flames in any of the tribes in the Wasteland," the chief said.

"Any tribes? Do you have a special method of acquiring it?" Alex asked curiously.

"Oh, no," the chief said. "I guess I misspoke, in a way."

"Hmm? What do you mean?" the old man asked.

"Rather than saying you can find the Sacred flames in every tribe of the Wasteland, it is more accurate to say that wherever there is a Sacred flame, you will find a tribe," he said.

Alex thought for a bit and said, "So, you're saying that you don't acquire a Sacred flame, but rather you flock to one when you find it."

"Yes, my ancestors did the same with this place as many others did with their own," the chief said.

"I see," Alex said. He was truly very much intrigued by the Sacred flames now.

He had been in the Southern Continent for just a few days and he was already curious about the mysteries it held. He hoped he would get the answers by the time he left the continent not long from now.

Chapter 1004: Incident at Night

"This is where you will be sleeping," Li Yun said.

Alex and she were in her mother's room, which hadn't been in use for nearly 7 years.

While it was technically a room, the room Alex was given was no more than the size of a closet. There was just a small sleeping area with beast fur where could sleep.

Alex looked at the small room and sighed. There was nothing he could complain about.

"Thank you," he said and lay on the beast's fur. There was a small pouch full of sand at the end that was to be used as pillows.

"Do you need a sleeping companion? I can do the part," she said enthusiastically.

"No, thank you," Alex said and lay on the bed.

"Well, you'll come around soon enough," she said and went away.

Alex sighed. He felt too tired to even care about her advances. It was a weird feeling, tiredness.

It was different from the fatigue one could get from working for a long time. It was both physical and mental.

'Is that what happens when you are out of Qi for this long?' he thought. He had been functioning on practically no Qi for over 4 days now and was now incredibly tired.

For the first time in a very, very long time, Alex felt like falling asleep. He yawned for a moment and laid back as he watched the simple roof for a while. Then, slowly, as the fatigue caught up to him more and more, he fell asleep.

Some hours later, in the dark of night, Alex woke up suddenly to some sounds. "Li Yun, is that you?" he asked. He wouldn't expect it to be anyone else that would come by his place.

However, when he saw who it really was, he calmed down.

"Oh, Scarlet. What are you doing outside? You should rest," he said. However, the bird didn't want to hear what he had to say.

Without making a single other noise, it silently flew into the dead of night, flying out of the house.

Alex was worried about where she would go, but when he saw her going toward the Phoenix flames, he guessed she only wanted to play by the fire.

'It must remind her of her parents,' he thought and went back to sleep. Soon enough, he fell asleep.

Scarlet arrived by the flames with the only people in the room being ones that were too severely wounded to leave. They had mostly healed by now, but while doing so had fallen asleep in the room.

Scarlet's deep purple eyes stared at the flames, eyes that were intelligent, eyes that seemed to be planning on doing something very soon.

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Alex woke up again to noise from outside. His first thought now was that Scarlet had returned. However, he could feel her inside her beast space already, and the noise was still coming from outside.

Alex slowly stood up and looked outside the room. He could see some light from the east, lighting the horizon and the landscape a little.

It was still dark outside, but dawn was close.

'What's the noise about?' he thought as he walked outside. He saw people gathering outside, mostly by the hall of Sacred flames.

He slowly walked ahead, and heard tidbits of people's confusion, but couldn't gather anything substantial. It wasn't until he was halfway through the crowd that he heard what had happened.

The Sacred flames had been snuffed out.

"What?" Alex expressed his shock rather loudly, letting the people around him know that he was there.

The moment the people saw him, they quickly sided away to let him walk ahead.

Alex took the opportunity to rush inside and saw the chief gather around the location where the Sacred flames used to be. Now, there was simply nothing but a black smudge on the ground.

"So, it's true," he said when he saw the flame is gone.

"Did no one see who did this?" the chief asked angrily, but the other people just remained quiet.

Alex wondered what happened too when he remembered last night when he had woken up for a small moment and had gone back to sleep.

'Scarlet did this?' he thought. 'How?'

He looked back at the location of the flame and didn't know what to say. However, since he didn't want to lie or hide from them, he decided to tell them that it was him.

If someone else was punished for a situation that Scarlet had most likely caused, he would feel very guilty.

'I will have to make sure it truly was Scarlet,' he thought and sent his spiritual sense to check the area around where the fire used to be.

Just as he was about to check for it, he noticed something and he couldn't help but have his eyes go wide.

'No way,' he thought when he sensed the thing that was simply unthinkable in the wastelands.

He sensed Qi.

'This is... True Qi,' he thought. Alex quickly sent his senses underground and deep below, he found a spirit vein that was perfectly working.

'What the hell?' he thought as his eyes went wide. 'How is there a working spirit vein here?'

There was no way for him to gain answers at all. Just then, he saw something curious about this Spirit vein.

While the vein itself wasn't noteworthy, and was similar to every other Spirit vein out there, for some reason, the Qi that was released from there was slowly converging in the middle before coming up straight.

The place where it came out was exactly the spot where the sacred flames were.

A thought came to Alex that the more he thought about it, the more it started to make sense. 'The Spirit vein is sustaining the Phoenix flames, and the phoenix flames are stealing away all the Qi from it.'

He figured that was the reason why there was absolutely no Qi in the Wastelands at all.

'Don't all tribes have sacred flames? Or rather, everywhere there is a Sacred flame, you can find a tribe gathers,' he thought.

If he was to go by this assessment, then the only logical conclusion he could come by was that in every single location there was a Sacred flame or a tribe, there was a Spirit vein underneath that was being worked up.

'Is that is?' he thought. 'Is that why there is absolutely no Qi anywhere in the Wastelands because all of it is eaten away by the flames?'

Alex wanted to learn more. All he thought, for now, was just a theory. He would have to go to another tribe and see if there was a Spirit vein underneath.

If his theory was correct, there most definitely would be.

"Is no one going to answer me?" the Chief said aggressively. He was visibly angry and for good reason. In a way, since the sacred flames were snuffed out, the tribe would have to disband.

Even if they didn't want to, they would have to leave the location as everyone would want to grow stronger and there would be no way of growing stronger in a place without the Sacred flames.

"Chief, wait a minute," Alex said.

"What?" the chief turned towards him angrily too. Even if Alex was stronger, his anger was too much for him to think rationally.

"Please send the people out. I will either try to reverse the situation or find a way to make this a good thing. I promise," he said.

The chief's chest heaved in anger for a while before calming down a little. "Fine, everyone out!" he said.

"I'm staying," Li Yun said.

The chief turned to look at Alex for his approval. "It's fine. You two can stay."

The chief nodded and waited for everyone to leave. Once everyone was gone, he turned to Alex.

"What do you plan on doing now?" he asked.

Alex sighed. "Scarlet, come out!" he said.

Scarlet didn't respond at all. There was no coming out either.

"Scarlet, don't play with me right now. I know it was your doing, come out," he said. "If you don't, I wi--"

Screech

Scarlet finally came out, making angry noises at Alex for always using the same excuse to bring her out.

"Come down here," he said to the bird.

Both the chief and his daughter were way too surprised to see a bird appear from practically nowhere.

Scarlet refused to come down and kept flying above their head in circles. Alex got slightly annoyed as well.

"You did this, didn't you? It was you who got rid of the fire," he said.

Scarlet screeched, saying 'so what?'

"Why did you do this? Are you just trying to be rebelli--" Alex paused when he sensed it, and his eyes went wide.

Just as Scarlet was flying, he felt a wave of Qi move in her body, which signaled a breakthrough.

While he was scolding her, she had somehow broken through, while in the air. "What?" he looked confused.

"What? What's going on?" Li Yun asked.

"One moment," Alex said. He wondered how she could've possibly broken through since she didn't seem to be cultivating at all.

Then, a thought struck him. "Did you know there was Qi down there?" he asked.

Scarlet hovered at one place and nodded.

"And you put out the fire so you could bring it out? So you could cultivate and breakthrough?" he asked.

The bird nodded.

Alex was stunned for a few seconds. How was this bird so smart? Or were all beasts born from the four heavenly beasts this smart?

"You did good in finding it, but you made things worse for some people in the process," Alex said. "Can you put the flames back on?"

Chapter 1005: Wounded

Scarlet argued in an annoying screech. Alex couldn't understand much, but he understood that she wanted to keep the Qi flowing so that she could breakthrough even more.

Alex sensed her cultivation base and it was at Skin Tempering 5th realm. If she was indeed allowed to keep it going, she would probably advance through the Self-Tempering realm very fast and would be quite a bit of help to Alex.

However, this was coming at the cost of everyone in the tribe no longer being able to grow. So, Alex didn't feel right.

"Can you put back the fire or not?" he asked. "I promise you will still get to cultivate with the Qi."

Scarlet looked at Alex intently, trying to search for any hint of lying. However, when she realized that he was being truthful, she decided to do as he asked.

She flew to the spot where the Qi was being siphoned up and flapped her wings once to create a small ember of Phoenix fire. The fire caught on to the Qi that was coming up and suddenly grew to become actual flames that didn't extinguish at all.

The Sacred flames were back.

"Oh, thank god," the chief looked very relieved when he saw the sacred flames burn in the hall again. If they hadn't come back, they wouldn't know what to do at all.

"How is that bird able to bring back the Sacred flames?" Li Yun asked.

"Well, this bird is the descendant or at least a kin of the bird that your Sacred flames originate from," Alex said. "So, she seems to be able to easily get rid of it or bring it back."

"Wow, really? Doesn't that mean that she is sacred as well?" she asked.

"You can call her whatever you want to call her. Which brings me to a request I want to make," Alex said.

"What request?" the chief asked. "You can ask anything that you want."

"Yes, I would like to request a portion of the day or night when the Sacred flame is least used to allow my bird to extinguish it. There is Qi underneath this location that she can use to grow stronger," Alex said.

"Extinguish the flames?" the chief looked at Scarlet with a deliberating eye.

"I think that is fine, father," Li Yun said. "After all, we've already seen her bring back the flames, so there should be no problem, right?"

"Yeah, I suppose so," the chief said. He thought for a bit and said, "alright, I will agree to your request. After midnight, we don't really need to use the Sacred flames unless there is an emergency, so your sacred bird can use it at the time."

"Great," Alex said. "As a thank you, why don't I help you guys learn Qi cultivation too? You will find the wonders it can do and make your life so much easier."

"Qi cultivation... can we do that?" the old man asked curiously.

"I don't see why not," Alex said. "Once you've reached a certain level, which will take you a few years, you will be able to fly, use various different powers..."

Alex paused. He was so excited to tell them about everything that Qi cultivation could do that he didn't even stop to think how they will be learning it for years to reach the level he said they will.

'If I'm not here to teach them, or if Scarlet isn't here to get rid of or bring back the flames, they won't succeed at all,' he thought.

"We can really fly?" Li Yun asked excitedly.

"Um... please don't get too optimistic just yet. You will have to spend a lot of time cultivating for that to happen, and with you constantly needing the sacred flames to be burning, I'm not certain we can bring out enough Qi from underground to fill the area such that you can absorb a lot of it," he said.

"Oh," Li Yun got a little sad. "Well, you can't have something without giving up on something else, I suppose."

"Anyway, we can talk about this later. The people outside must be waiting for the news," the Chief said.

Alex nodded and they opened the doors to the halls to let the people know that they had reinstated the Sacred flames.

Alex took back Scarlet after telling her that she could use the Qi later tonight after everyone had fallen asleep.

The sun had just risen past the horizon and the day had begun.

The first thing the people did was go fetch some water. Alex jumped down the cavern to see where the water came from and was surprised to see a rather massive well in the ground with water coming up to halfway up the well.

Alex wondered how they would get the water up the cliff when a person threw something into the well. He looked closely and saw that it was a large pouch made from beast leather that could hold at least 10 liters of water.

It wasn't the only pouch as there were multiple people there, all waiting with the pouch. When the pouch filled up, the person who threw it in fished the water out and jumped up the cliff back onto the top of the canyon.

Then, another person threw in their pouch and started doing it all over again. Alex finally understood how they got water without any buckets or items of some other sort.

Once the people were done getting water, they moved on to what would otherwise take the most time in their day. That was getting beat up.

Alex watched, half horrified and half surprised at the fact that people were getting beat up by others and had happy looks on their faces.

He understood that they weren't happy because of the pain, but because this pain was going to make them stronger in the long run. However, that couldn't stop him from being weirded out.

The adults were being beaten up by other adults, ones that were certainly weaker than him, and the kids were jumping off of the edge repeatedly so that they could break their bones and get hurt.

"There you are, I was looking for you," Li Yun said as she came from the side. "I was looking for you."

"Sorry, I was looking around at what the tribe members do to pass their time. What did you need me for?" he asked.

Li Yun handed him something which Alex took without question. Then he looked at it and let it unfurl in his hands to reveal that it was a whip.

"Why are you..." he understood why it was without having to finish the question.

"Come on, hit me. Since you're so strong, I should be able to improve very fast," she said.

"Uhh... can I not? I don't feel right hitting a girl who isn't even defending," he said.

"What? Stop being a wussy and hit me. If I'm not against it, why are you?" she asked.

Alex hesitated for a bit and sighed. "Fine," he said and clutched the whip tightly.

Li Yun turned around to expose her half-naked back and waited for Alex to start. "Come on, hit me already," she said.

"Yes, yes," Alex said and tried to hold back his strength before swinging at her.

CLACK

The whip made a sharp sound as it struck Li Yun on the back, causing a slight wound to form on it. Even through the dark skin, he could see the skin turning quite red at the point of contact.

Li Yun grunted in pain, but she could handle it. "Hmm? What are you waiting for? Continue," she said.

"Okay," he said and whipped her again.

Li Yun held back her moans from being hurt, and Alex struck again. He whipped her again and again, multiple times.

Each time she was whipped, a different part of her back was injured. After a while, Alex managed to injure every single part of her back.

"Ughh... now my legs too," she said.

Alex nodded. He started whipping her legs this time around and soon enough her legs were fully wounded as well.

Li Yun turned around with a pained look on her face, but the clear determination to continue on. "Now the front," she said.

Alex didn't want to hit her from the front, but he gave in to her demand and started whipping her again.

In less than 15 minutes, the girl was wounded from head to toe with not a single part of her skin that wasn't lacerated, swollen, or bleeding.

"That should be enough for now. You should go heal," Alex said.

"No, not yet," the girl said through tears and grunts. "I'm not hurt as much as I can."

"You're covered in wounds from head to toe. What else do you want me to do? Break every bone in your body?" he asked.

The girl gave a cheeky little smile. "Yes. Now do it, please."

Alex hesitated for a bit before sighing again. 'I don't think I can ever get used to the way of these tribe folks,' he thought before starting to break her bones one by one.

He flinched every time her bones cracked under his hands and then proceeded to break other bones.

Finally, after everything was broken, he stopped. "We're done now, right? Don't tell me to hurt your internal organs or anything like that," he said.

"No, no, we're done," the girl said as she lay on the floor unable to move. "Umm... can you help me to the room? I can't move right now."

Alex chuckled a bit. "Yeah, let's go," he said as he carried her in his arms and took her to the hall.

Chapter 1006: Baits

Li Yun grunted in pain with barely opened eyes as Alex carried her towards the hall of Sacred flames.

"I've... never been... this heavily injured... in such little time," she spoke through her pain.

"Don't speak for now. Wait until you are healed," he said as he walked.

Li Yun didn't say anything else for a while, but her eyes remained on Alex. When they reached the hall and Alex laid her down next to the fire, she finally spoke.

"You're so cute, you know?"

Alex was not expecting that. "Ahem, is that so?" he said.

"Yeah," Li Yun said. "You're so cute. I wish I could kiss you right now."

"Unfortunately, you can't even move your fingers at the moment," Alex said.

"Then you kiss me," she said.

"I'm sorry. You should give up on it," Alex said.

"Why? What's wrong with me?" she asked. "You keep trying to deny me for some reason. Surely its not because of our age right? I don't mind if you're too old for me. You look young enough. Or are you worried that I might turn old too fast?"

"That's not it," Alex said. "I just don't have the luxury to fall in love at the moment. There are so many things I have still to do and falling in love just... it just makes it hard for me when I have one more person to care for. Especially right now, when I'm in a situation where I feel incapable of caring for myself."

"I won't be a burden. I'm sure you can—"

"No," Alex said. "I've made up my mind and I won't change it for a while. As long as I'm not together with everyone I care about, I won't even think about getting into any sort of relationship."

"Well, whatever you say, you can't stop it when your heart says you're in love. As I've said before, I'm sure you'll come around to me," she said with an air of defiance in her voice. She did not believe that Alex could hold on to his beliefs any longer than his heart could.

"I doubt that," he said. "Especially since I plan on leaving this place in a few days."

Li Yun remained quiet after she heard that. She understood that he had many other places to go to look for whatever it was he was searching for. But that didn't make it any easier for her to hear it.

"How about a bet then?" she asked. "I say that we will kiss before you leave."

"Haha, no chance," Alex said.

"That's why it's a bet," she said.

"Okay, what do you want if you win?" he asked.

"Nothing. If I got to kiss you, then I already won," she said. "What do you want instead?"

"Nothing, I guess," Alex said.

"Okay, so the bet itself will be our prize," she said and finally turned around to heal quietly.

Alex didn't know what else to say, so he remained quiet and let her heal. He sat there for a while with her, and once her body was done being healed enough, he finally left.

Once he got outside, he met with the chief who asked him to help his body cultivate next. Alex wanted to refuse, but seeing the old man's enthusiasm for finding someone that could help him, he gave in to the old man's request and helped him.

Fortunately, he didn't have to carry the old man as he did his daughter.

Once he was done, Alex jumped down to the canyon and ran away from the tribe to look at the nearby areas while he waited for everyone back at the tribe to be done with training.

'So much empty space,' Alex thought. He walked to the top of a small hill and looked all around him, but he could see no other sign of humans at all.

He roamed the area for a while, and after the sun started going down, he finally returned to the tribe.

He was told that he could eat if he wanted, but Alex didn't find that necessary. If anything, after yesterday's meal, he wouldn't have to eat for at least 3 more days.

So, instead of eating, he was taken to the hall of sacred flames where everyone started healing. Alex spent a few minutes there and wondered what he would do in the future.

Since there didn't seem to be much to do, he decided to leave this place for a day or two from now. He needed to move on with things as Pearl most likely needed him wherever he was.

He had grown a habit of looking at his left arm from time to time just to make sure that Pearl was still alive. He wouldn't know what to do if he looked at his arm and saw that it was empty.

He sighed and thought of leaving the hall early when he saw the chief leave before him. Alex looked at him leave quietly and wondered what he was doing, leaving the hall so soon.

He let out his senses and kept track of him to see where he was going this early on. When he saw the chief taking away people who were clearly very weak away from this place, he started growing concerned.

'Wait, are they...?' he remembered something Li Yun had told him when he had just met her. If not her slave, the best thing he could be would be bait for the beasts.

Without even thinking, Alex leaped away from where he was sitting and went outside. He followed the chief and quickly arrived at the southern end of the tribe where there was a fence made up of beast bones.

"Chief, what the hell are you doing?" he asked.

"Hmm? Oh, we were thinking of getting killing some beasts today, nothing more," the chief said.

"And you're going to sacrifice these people for that?" he asked angrily.

"Sacrifice? What do you mean?" he asked.

"Aren't you going to put them in harm's way just to lure the beasts?" Alex asked.

"Uh... yeah, but what else can we do?" the chief asked.

"Why not put yourself up there?" Alex asked.

"Sigh, that doesn't work. The beasts seem to be able to tell when someone isn't strong. Maybe it is our scent or something. They will only come if we let the weaker folks be the bait," the chief said.

"And you are willing to kill these people for that?" Alex asked.

"Wait, what are you talking about?" the chief asked. "Why would these people die?"

Alex was taken aback by the response. "Aren't they going to die if you let the beasts come for them?" he asked.

"Well, yes, but we'll be right here to save them. We're only luring the beasts, not feeding them," the chief said. "Our intention is to kill the beats before they can even get close enough. Who gave you the idea that we were going to let them die?"

Alex thought for a bit and sighed. "Dammit, your daughter made it sound like becoming a bait was a horrible thing and that I should instead be her slave when we first met. I thought she was being genuine, but turns out she only wanted me to accept her condition," he said.

"Hahaha, you nearly fell for it. Were you not stronger, you would've become my son-in-law by now," the chief said.

Alex said nothing. He shook his head and forgot about it. "How long does it usually take for the beasts to come?" he asked.

"We're not sure," the chief said. "It really depends on if the beasts are nearby. If they are, with the night wind, it should carry these people's scent far enough that they can smell them and come for them."

Alex instantly let out his spiritual sense and saw over 8 kilometers around him. His spiritual sense had improved thus far after entering the 8th Saint Condensation realm.

It would've continued to improve even more if he could cultivate, or even if he could just use his mask. Unfortunately, he had lost it already, along with all the other items he had.

Alex felt sad every time he remembered that as well. He didn't care about many of the items he had lost. He didn't even care about the World Tree's seed or the seed of the Yang fruit.

He didn't care about the hammer or sword or the new cauldron he lost. If anything, he could make them again once he found a way to return to the Northern continent.

What he did care about was the broken shards of the cauldron that his master had given him.

What he did care about was the beast core that belonged to Pearl's mother, which he had been waiting for the right time to give him.

Those were the things he was truly concerned about, and yet, he had lost it all.

Alex sighed once more and enhanced his spiritual sense. He spread it beyond his limit, reaching 12 kilometers after straining a bit.

"There is a group of giant rats about 7 kilometers in that direction, a rather large snake about 10 kilometers in that direction, and there is a desert hyena pack, that is wandering aimlessly about 12 or so kilometers in that direction," Alex said. "If they truly can sense these people, then they should sense them pretty quickly."

The people around him were surprised. "How can you tell?" the chief asked with a surprised look as well.

"Spiritual sense, I explained before, remember? It allows me to— Oh," Alex's senses pulled away his attention. "The rats seem to have caught on to their senses."

Chapter 1007: Fighting the Beasts

"Do you even want the rats? I suppose you can use their skins," Alex said.

"Oh, if they were bigger than my arms, then they can be good meat too," the chief said. "How many are there?"

Alex checked the number, but it was just too many to take his time to count. "Over 50, not over 80," he said. "They're quite fast too. At this rate, they might reach here in about 15 or so minutes."

"Oh, that is quite fast," the chief said. Any idea how strong they are?

Alex tried looking at their footsteps and just how much force they were putting on the ground. It was a little hard to say as the solid ground barely gave away under any force at all.

"They're not as strong, I would say," Alex said. "Compared to your tribe, I would say about average in strength, maybe even weaker than your average fighters. But I would still consider having the stronger fighters ready just in case."

"Oh no, that's quite bad," the chief said. "Had we known we would be encountering this many beasts, we would have waited until more of our fighters were healed."

The chief quickly turned around to the person closest to him and spoke. "Go to the hall quickly and call anyone that can fight. Make sure to not bring people with broken bones," he said.

Alex looked at the situation and decided he had no choice but to help them. Since the rats would be coming soon enough, he would have to help them.

He started stretching a bit. "It's been a while since I've gotten physical, so I can use this opportunity to fight," he said.

"Oh, you're going to help us, young man?" the chief asked.

"Yes," Alex said. "I don't see how you can get out of this without my help. Besides, it's a good exercis—"

Alex paused as he turned to look in another direction and frowned.

"What's wrong?" the chief asked.

"The snake seems to have got a whiff of your baits' scent too and is coming this way. It's probably better if you sent them back immediately," Alex said. "You probably don't want to— and the pack of hyenas is coming too."

"What?!" the chief was startled. "How many are they?"

"About 8, but they are very fast, so I would expect them to be much stronger than the rats. But, I think it's the snake that is the strongest. Might be stronger than the snake corpse I gave you yesterday," Alex said.

"D-Do we run then? Should I start sending people away?" the chief asked. He didn't see what else he could do.

"Just for safety, yes. We can't be sure that they won't go past us," Alex said.

The chief immediately ordered a few of his people to go send the ones that couldn't find to the bottom of the canyon where the beasts most likely wouldn't reach them easily. Even if they did, the fighters would get to them easily since they would have time to get there.

The tribe's folks slowly prepared along with Alex. Li Yun had come over to fight as well. After all, she was one of the strongest people in the Stepstones tribe after.

The Hyenas were fast enough that they arrived before the rats even did. The strongest group from the tribes had all prepared as Alex relayed the information of their arrival.

Once they saw the 8 hyenas dashing toward them, everyone moved at the same time to stop them.

Alex dashed forward, ahead of every single person, and punched a hyena on its head. His fist went through its skull, destroying everything that used to be its head.

He turned around and looked at the other 7, of whom the chief quickly finished the hyena he was fighting with a sharpened piece of bone that he stuck through the hyena's torso.

The others grouped up to quickly finish the remaining beasts off.

Alex watched Li Yun team up with another man and while the man caught the beast in his clutch, she slashed its guts with a bone that was sharpened like a sword.

At the same time, he noticed something interesting that he hadn't even given any thought to yet.

'You can use Sword Intent?' He hadn't even thought about trying that. It had been more than 10 years since he had used Sword Intent or any of its other forms. He had honestly forgotten to even try them after coming here.

"Head's up," he shouted at the people who had just finished fighting. "The rats are closing in as well."

As soon as he said that, the group that was gathered behind them also got into a fighting position as there were way too many for the stronger fighters to fight alone.

Alex didn't wait for the rats to come to him and jumped ahead on his own. He arrived at the front of the rat and kicked it, destroying a part of its body at once and killing it.

He moved again and punched another rat, smashing it into a pulp on the ground. By the time he attacked the 3rd rat, the remaining rats had already gone past him.

Alex killed the 3rd rat as well, and quickly caught the fourth one before it could run away. The rest of the rats managed to go past him and the tribes' folks started fighting them.

Alex slowly crushed the rat in between his hands, but before he did, he noticed the rat bleeding a little.

He didn't think much of it and easily crushed the rat before moving on to the rest of the rats.

Without even weapons, Alex was doing more than what the other individuals were gathered around here.

He was crushing beasts left and right, while the rest of them couldn't beat them in just a single strike and had to waste quite a bit of time dealing with them.

Alex went back and helped them in dealing with the rest of the rats so that they didn't pass the front line and enter the tribe.

If they did, the people would have to leave and go to capture them, which would leave more vulnerabilities on the front line, and that would be bad.

As the group fought them, a few of them noticed something. Far in the distance, above a small hill, one could see something slithering on its way toward them.

Even from this far away, they could clearly see what it was. A snake.

If they could see what it was, then the tribes folk had to agree to the fact that the snake that was approaching them was big.

If they weren't wrong, then the snake was at least 2 meters wide, and over 20 meters long. It was a massive snake that dwarfed any other snake that was seen in this place for ages.

The chief paused his fight for a moment to stare at the snake in absolute awe and despair as well. He knew for a fact that if he were to go and fight it, there was a very high chance that he would come out of the fight either poisoned or missing limbs.

There was also some chance that he would straight up be dead by the end, and the snake would continue to attack his people afterward.

The burden that lay on the chief was a heavy one.

He made the plan to evacuate immediately and run. He turned to look at Alex to tell him his intentions, but Alex was quite far away up front where he had dashed previously to kill the rats.

Alex slowly turned around. "Kill the rats, leave the snake to me." As he looked back, something flashed and a sword appeared in Alex's hands.

The chief looked confused for a moment, wondering where the sword came from. But he didn't think for much longer as he went back to fighting the rats that were all but dead.

He had decided to leave it all up to Alex.

Alex held the sword in front of him with a weird feeling in his hands. It was the first time Midnight was going to accept his Sword Intent.

With barely even any thought put into his intent, the sword glowed with a white halo around it. Alex was surprised at the ease with which he had used it.

'Did I get stronger? Or is my sword just that good?' he wondered.

He couldn't be sure at all, but he had a feeling it was because of the infant spirit that was inside the sword.

Alex turned and looked at the snake that was incoming and saw the earth get destroyed as it slithered toward him.

"True Emperor realm for sure," he thought to himself. "Can it possibly be Saint realm?"

Alex didn't think so, but even if it was, there was nothing for him to worry about at all.

As the people started finishing the rats, Alex raised his sword to the sky with a single hand. Then, as if on command, the sword changed its size to become 16 times bigger than it was.

Now, he was holding a gigantic sword that was massive from the tip to the hilt.

Alex waited for the snake to come close to him, and then he swung.

A white blade made out of energy went out from Alex's sword, flying at a very quick speed.

When it did reach the snake, to everyone's surprise behind him, the blade of white energy cut the snake in two, killing it before it could become any sort of menace.

Alex turned to look at the chief who wasn't doing anything after being flabbergasted.

"You should get done with the rats. I want to go to sleep already."

Chapter 1008: Bonehead

"What was that? What did you do?" Li Yun asked.

"That was Sword Qi. Do you guys not know about it?" he asked.

Li Yun simply shook her head. Alex couldn't help but sigh at just how little these tribes folks knew.

"I'll explain sometime later. Finish with the rats already," he said.

The rest of them didn't take much longer to be done with their fights, and once they were done, they started gathering all the dead beasts and brought them back.

"There are quite a lot of beasts out tonight. It might be better for the weaker folks to stay away from here. Also, increase the guards for tonight," the chief ordered.

After seeing that there was no more need for him here, Alex returned to his small room and went to sleep. He didn't truly require any sleep as he could go on for days without it, but he still liked sleeping. Besides, what else was there to do?

He lay there, thinking about his future while slowly falling asleep. He heard the others come in as well and not long after, he fell asleep.

After a good night of sleep, Alex woke up rather late in the morning and went out to get freshened up. He was planning on getting his clothes from the woman who had taken the snakeskin and later in the day, leaving this place.

However, before his plans went anywhere, he heard a person rushing through the tribe in a hurry. Alex spread his spiritual sense to see what was up and saw the man quickly find the chief.

"Chief, there are other tribes people at the front," he said.

The chief and many others quickly walked away, while Alex looked at the situation from where he was. His spiritual sense had already reached outside and he could see the tribespeople they were talking about.

These people had similarly tanned skin as everyone else, but for some reason, most of the people in the tribe had messed up hair that was full of dried-up white powder that seemed to have been applied while it was wet and grimy.

Other than that characteristic of the people, he saw that a few of them were injured as well. Alex couldn't help but be surprised why that.

So, as he continued checking what was happening outside, he slowly made his way out as well.

The chief arrived outside the fence and looked at the group of tribespeople standing there. Altogether, there were about 70 different people there.

Compared to the Stepstones tribe, that was about a third or fourth of it.

Li Yun was next to her father and looked at the newcomers in front of her. "Are those... the Bonehead tribe's people?" she asked.

The Bonehead tribe was a nearby tribe that could be reached in less than a day of travel by foot to the east.

"I think so," the chief said softly. "I don't remember hearing about any other tribe that puts powdered bone on their head."

Seeing that so many of them were gathered, an older man that wore nothing but small leather shorts, walked up front. Aside from his hair, his body was also tattooed with bone powder.

Also, he seemed to have a recent wound on his right arm that had been stopped using some bone powder again.

"Who is your chief?" the man asked the Stepstones tribe.

"I am," the chief said. "Why are the Bonehead tribe's people at my tribe?"

The man saw the chief and slowly walked closer to him. "My tribe's people need a place to stay. So, I wish to fight against you to determine the future of this tribe of yours," he said.

"What?" the chief was startled and confused. "Why do you want to take over my tribe? Just go back to your own."

"I'm afraid that is not possible anymore. Now, tell me, are you willing to fight me in a match to determine the ruler of the tribe?" the man asked.

"And what? You will become the new chief of our tribe once you win?" the chief asked.

"That is indeed so," the man said. "Now, what do you say?"

"Of course, I'm not going to fight you. Why would I fight you randomly after you come here? This is not your tribe. Go back to your tribe; if you can't, then go somewhere else and don't bother us," the chief said.

"You will be making a big mistake if you don't agree to this duel. If you won't fight me, then I will be forced to start an all-out attack against your people so I can find my people a place to stay in," the man said.

"We have 4 times as many people as you. We have nothing to worry about," the chief said.

"That may be true, but the ones I have here are only the best of the best of my tribe. If you are confident that you can survive a full-on assault from all of us, then you can continue refusing," the man said.

The chief looked at the people that stood behind them. He checked every single one there and just as the man had said, they were all rather strong. He could tell by the shapes of their muscle and the posture of their body.

'But why do they all seem to be hurt?' he wondered.

"What do you say?" the man asked.

"What will you do if we fight and you lose?" the chief asked.

"Then, I will leave and go duel another tribe somewhere," the man said.

"You don't expect me to trust your words, do you?" the chief asked.

"I swear on my name, Han Guanxi that everything I speak of today is the truth. I swear on the name of our Bonehead tribe as well that if we lose the duel, and we aren't allowed to stay here, then we will leave," the man said.

"Do you swear this on your position as the chief?" the chief asked.

The man's face turned gloomy for a second before calming himself. "I cannot," he said. "For I am not the chief of this tribe."

The chief was surprised. "Then who are you?" he asked.

"Just the strongest of the group. We are without a chief, so if I can find these people a place to stay, then I might consider becoming the chief," he said.

The chief was a little taken aback. "You're not the chief? Where's your chief then?" he asked.

"He died not long ago," the man said. "Now, do you accept or not?"

"Just accept it," Alex said as he slowly walked through the crowd.

The man named Han looked towards Alex with a bit of confusion on his face, wondering why such a weak-looking person was speaking amongst the tribe.

However, when he saw the respect the people gave by moving aside for him to walk through, he quickly understood the young man wasn't so simple.

"Do you suggest that we accept their duel?" the chief asked.

"I don't see what's wrong with accepting it," Alex said. "Are you afraid you can't win?"

"I can," the chief said. "I'm just worried they might not keep their word and attack us later on."

"What can you do to stop them from attacking you later?" Alex said. "Will making him say that they will attack you help in any way? Will you suddenly have an advantage against them?"

The chief thought for a moment. "I suppose not," he said. "I see, so whether I take the duel or not, I will end up with the same amount of information. But if I do take the offer of the duel, there is a chance that they will not attack me, which will be beneficial for us."

"We won't attack you after we lose. As I said, I am the strongest. If I lose, the others won't have a chance of beating you," he said.

"Do you want me to fight?" Alex asked.

"No, this is my tribe's problem. If I include you in this, it will not be fair for them," the chief said.

The man curiously looked at Alex, wondering what the chief meant by those words.

"Fine, I will accept your duel. Let's fight," the chief said.

The man smiled and walked up front. "Let us fight then," he said.

The duel started a minute later, and it ended not even a minute after. Alex watched in surprise at how easily the chief won.

'What the hell was that? A false bravado? Some sort of trick?' he wondered as he looked at the man that was on the floor.

The man struggled to get up and nodded toward the chief. "Since you've beaten me, I will leave," he said and turned around.

"Are you seriously leaving?" the chief asked.

"I gave my words," the man said.

"Why even try and attack us when you are so weak? Are the people behind you even weaker than you or what?" the chief asked.

"They are indeed weaker than me," the man said and walked away.

"Next time, bring some of the stronger folks from your tribe," the chief said and turned to leave as well. However, he heard the man speak from behind him.

"I'm afraid that will be impossible. These are the last remaining people of the Bonehead tribe," he said. "If we can't find a place to stay soon, we will go our own separate ways."

The chief turned around quickly. "What? What happened to the rest of your tribe?" he asked.

"They all died," the man said with a solemn face. "They all died in a beast attack half a month ago."

Chapter 1009: Leaving

"Beast attack?" the chief looked at them with concern. "There was another one?"

"Yes," the man said. "But it seems to be just our tribe that suffered. Every other tribe we've been to has been fine."

"What sort of beasts were they?" the chief asked. He remembered the many beasts that had come for them last night too. Had they been oblivious to the amount, yesterday might've ended in a few tragedies at least.

"Just the normal ones," the man said. "Anyway, we will keep our word and leave. Thank you for dueling with us."

"Wait," the chief said. "Tell us more about the beasts. Instead, you can heal your people in our sacred flames."

The man contemplated for a single second before agreeing. Even if not for his people, just him alone healing would help them a lot.

"Thank you," he said and walked into the tribe.

Alex curiously followed behind them and walked over to the hall where the chief sat down the man people and let them heal.

The 70 or so people were on guard for a while, but seeing the sacred flame heal their wounds made them feel better. Only then could they find the time to remember everyone they had lost in the past few days and so they cried.

It didn't take long for the entire hall to be a cacophony of cries as everyone mourned for their family.

The chief waited for a while before asking the man named Han to explain his side of things.

Han didn't hesitate and explained everything.

About 10 days ago, the Bonehead tribe had been ambushed by a bunch of beasts that killed their chief and many other members of their tribe. They tried to fight the beasts, but it was simply impossible to stop them all.

As a result, only a few of them managed to escape.

They immediately left the area and went around to other tribes to ask for help, but no one wanted to fight after learning that the beasts were strong enough to kill so many of a tribe's people.

They would only be sending their own people to die after all. Since the beasts were known to be attracted to the Sacred flame because of its healing properties, they wouldn't leave that place at all, and as such the tribes were much safer.

They had learned about this after the beasts had settled onto several different tribe's locations 7 years ago after the incident of the beasts after the Northern Lights disappeared.

The tribe stayed there for a few more hours, healing up, and then decided to leave.

Just as they were about to, Alex stepped forward. "You don't have a place to go, right? How about I help you get back to your place?" he asked.

The man who was about to leave the hall stopped. He looked at Alex and then towards the chief.

The chief was surprised and walked up to Alex. "You will do that?" he asked.

"Sure," Alex said. "I was planning on leaving here already, so why don't I go there."

"You were thinking of leaving?" the chief was surprised.

"Yes, I was going to leave today," Alex said.

"What about cultivation? You said you would teach us," the chief said.

"Uh, that is going to be hard. Unless you are okay with losing the sacred flames forever, there is no way for you to properly cultivate," Alex said.

"That... I suppose we will have to give up on it then," the chief said.

"If that's what you say," Alex said. He turned around towards the man named Han. "You should get ready to go back to your tribe. We will leave in a bit."

The chief turned to look at the man as well and nodded towards him in the assurance that this was the best choice.

"Very well, brother. I shall wait for you to get ready to leave. However, I hope you can do something about the beasts there without us having to fight. We already fought and lost against the beasts," the man said.

"No, you won't have to fight," Alex said. "I will handle it."

The man was surprised to hear Alex speak with such confidence, mainly because he didn't look that strong physically.

"You can't leave just like that," Li Yun said. "You didn't even fall for me yet."

Alex smiled slightly. "I told you that wouldn't happen. That's why I told you to lose hope," he said.

If he were, to be honest, he was starting to like her company. She brought a straightforwardness to life that Alex hadn't seen in a long while.

She didn't hide her feelings and spoke exactly what she wanted to speak. He appreciated that about her.

However, the underlying feeling of being out of place, needing to save his brother, find his father, and somehow go back to his mother, all bogged down his heart and made it impossible for anything else to appear from it.

"I'm coming with you," she said.

"What? No, I will take these guys there and then I will go somewhere else," Alex said.

"Well, I am going anyway. You can bring me back here if you are so worried about me. If by that time you haven't fallen for me, then you can leave," she said.

Alex was about to argue, but he couldn't find the heart to. "Sigh, fine. Do what you want. We'll be leaving in an hour."

"Great! I will prepare the carriage," she said.

"No, we will be going by foot," Alex said.

"What? But the Bonehead tribe's land is over a day that way. Do you seriously want to walk all the way there?" she asked.

"Do you want to take a carriage while all of these people walk instead?" he asked.

"Well," the girl looked around at the many people and hesitated a bit. "They can take some carriage too."

"Oh," the chief said from the side. "If we send all of our carriages with them, who will be bringing it back?"

Li Yun grumbled. "Fine, we will walk. Happy?" she said with a pout on her face.

Alex smiled and even chuckled a bit. "Yes, very happy. Anyway, get ready to leave." He turned towards the chief. "Do you know if my new clothes are ready yet?"

"Oh, right," the Chief said. "I think they're ready. Come let me take you there."

Alex went with the chief over to the lady that was given the leather to make his new clothes, and she handed them two pairs of pants and two pairs of sleeveless shirts.

Alex looked at the pants and shirts that looked seamless and compared that to his own which seemed to be a wrong motion away from slipping off his shoulders.

"These look nice," he said. "Thank you."

The lady smiled back and urged him to wear them. Alex went into a small room inside the house and quickly changed while keeping the other pair in his storage bag.

"Wow, these fit me perfectly," he said. He felt the pants and shirt that hugged his skin most of the time but still let air pass through it.

"Here," the woman said, giving him something else.

Alex curiously looked at what it was and saw a pair of boots. He looked at it with surprise as he had not been expecting to have boots made for him.

Since he had been walking around with naked feet, the boot was going to be a massive help.

The sole of the boot was made from the snake's bone, while the rest of it was made from leather. There was a small lace made into the upper area of the boot that could be easily laced together.

It left the upper area of his feet feeling a little open and without support, but that was a compromise he was willing to make. He was tired of walking without any boots after all.

Alex thanked the woman and left the area.

He walked towards the front of the tribe as he waited for everyone to gather so they could leave.

If it had gone his way, he would be saying his farewell here, maybe even promising to visit them once again in many years after he was capable of freely traversing the ocean.

However, since Li Yun was coming with him, he would have to return her here again, and as such there was no farewell.

Li Yun came out not long after, wearing something similar to what she always wore. A short leather pants that covered half her thigh, and an upper garment that was more bra than a shirt.

She held a small pouch behind her that held her clothes, food, and water.

"Here, let me take that from you," Alex said.

"No, I can keep it. You don't have to walk around with my clothes," she said.

"Just give it to me," Alex said.

"Fine, if you want to hold it behind you, then do," she said and handed it over.

The moment Alex got it, the bag disappeared into his storage ring, surprising Li Yun. "Dammit, I forgot you had that thing. And here I thought you were being considerate and were going to carry my load."

"That's what I'm doing though," Alex said.

"Not in the way I wanted," she said. "Gah! Let's just leave now."

Alex sighed and turned to look towards the Bonehead tribe that was gathered not far away from them.

"Let's go," Alex said and left the Stepstones tribe.

Then, together with the remaining people from the Bonehead tribe, Alex and Li Yun began their journey to the west.

Chapter 1010: Bonehead Tribe Grounds

The path toward the Bonehead tribe's home village was rather simple. The road was mostly flat as most places in the dried-up desert were.

There was some up and down as hills appeared everywhere, but most places were still flat and cracked from the heat.

The group of people behind Alex walked with almost no loss of momentum in their strides. In fact, the hope of getting their home back seemed to have reinvigorated them.

Alex was on a constant lookout for beasts as his spiritual sense was constantly activated all around him.

However, he didn't see that many, and they never really came toward them.

They walked without stopping and before they knew it, night fell. The hot day transitioned into a cold night. However, that did not stop the people's advancement at all.

Since every single one of them was a high-level body cultivator in their own right, they could handle this small chill.

This far out, Alex finally saw the first tribe other than the Stepstones tribe. He didn't know what these people were called, but they were settled in a valley hidden behind a slightly tall set of hills.

He quickly scanned the place for his father, and when he realized there wasn't anyone that looked like him, he moved on.

Li Yun said that the tribe they had just walked past was called the Valleywind tribe. Alex continued to be surprised by just what random names the tribes gave themselves.

"Well, you know, since we aren't like a family or something, we have to distinguish ourselves using something after all. These people call themselves Bonehead because they used powdered bone and water to put on their hair."

"Our home looks like a bunch of stepping stones. That valley gets a lot of wind. So on and so forth. We don't really care if the name is good or not, just that you can say who we are after hearing the name," she said.

"I see," Alex said. "I'm just used to hearing sect names that seem to be grand and well thought out. Hearing such random words being used throws me off quite a bit."

"Since you make it sound like you'll be staying in the wasteland for a significant period of time, you might as well get used to it," she said.

"That's not true," Alex said. "I plan on not staying here for longer than I need to."

Li Yun stayed quiet for a while. A few thoughts ran through her mind and he asked, "Where do you plan on going next? Can you take me?"

"I'll be heading south," Alex said. "I need to get out of the Wasteland as soon as possible so I can gather Qi again. With Qi, I won't have to waste a long time to find my father. Who knows, he might have also gone south and started cultivating already."

"Since I'm going to have to struggle a lot, I can't take anyone with me. Aside from that, I will have to find a way back to the other continents. Since flying through the ocean is so hard, I will need to focus on doing whatever I can otherwise to go back. If I were to take another person with me, that will double my difficulty. That's why I'm intent on not taking anyone with me," he said.

Li Yun got a little sad when she heard that. She had really come to expect Alex as someone she wanted in her life, but seeing that could never truly hurt her in ways she hadn't been hurt before.

The rest of the journey was a rather quiet one as the only noise in the wind were footsteps and tiny whispers.

No one dared make a noise that was louder than the night wind itself.

The east slowly lit up, letting them know that the sun would rise at any minute now. Still, they continued walking without stopping until a few minutes more when Alex stopped and told the rest of them to stop as well.

Just in his spiritual sense's range, he could see a few beasts roaming, going in and out of his spiritual sense.

Alex decided to see it all for himself, so he quickly expanded his field of view, taking in the nearly 2 kilometers-wide area that was covered in beasts. Compared to this, the beasts from the other night were nothing.

"Everyone, settle here," he said.

"Huh?" Han Guanxi walked forward. "We're not that far away from our tribe's grounds. Just an hour or two and we will reach it."

"I know," Alex said. "That's why I told you all to settle here. Do you want to fight the beasts again?"

"Oh," the man said. "I'm sorry. I thought you were just saying so because you didn't want to continue moving for today."

"It's fine. Just settle here for a while. Since there are so many beasts, it might take me a while to defeat them all," Alex said.

"Can I come?" Li Yun asked.

"No, there are simply too many beasts for me to be able to keep you alive. Its better if you stay here with them," he said.

"What about me? Can I come?" the man asked.

Alex was about to refuse too, but he paused for a bit. However, after thinking for a moment, he shook his head. "You're too weak," he said. "I know how you feel, but you will have to stay and wait. That's all you can do right now."

The man's face saddened a bit and he lay on the said.

"I will be leaving now," he said. "Before I go, is there anything I should keep in mind about your tribe's grounds? Some buildings maybe that I shouldn't destroy."

The man thought for a bit. "As long as the Sacred flame still burns when we get back, we will be happy," he said.

Alex smiled at just how little the man was asking from him. "That's doable. Alright, I'll leave now. Don't leave this place unless something strong comes this way. If it does and you can't win, just run away."

"Okay," the man replied.

Alex finally left the group and walked on his own for another 8 kilometers which easily took him another hour to reach.

The moment he got remotely close to the tribe grounds, a bunch of beasts noticed him and came to eat him as he was the only source of food for them in a very large radius now.

Alex saw the beasts as well and brought out Midnight to fight. Without even pouring Qi into the sword, Alex easily fought off the beasts.

He cut them up however he could and collected the corpse into his storage ring. Since this was the only source of usable resources, Alex wasn't going to simply give up on them.

Another few beasts noticed him and came to fight him. The same thing repeated once more as Alex got his hands on another few corpses. However, one of those beasts managed to run away injured, and Alex quickly caught it in his spiritual sense.

He was about to use Heaven's Impact to defeat it, but for some reason, he wanted to see what this beast was going to do.

He saw the beast slowly make its way through the other beasts, who quickly stepped aside.

"Ah," he thought when he realized what the beast was doing. They were going for the sacred flames. "So they know that the flame can heal them too, huh?"

Since the beasts were occupying the small hall where the Sacred flame was, Alex wondered if they had come for the Sacred flame at all. After all, that made sense for the single reason that they could heal after fighting.

And from what he could see, the beasts really did fight almost all the time. 'Is that how they get strong? Random fighting with immediately healing?' he wondered.

If that were the case, he would have to get rid of the Sacred flame before fighting the rest of the beasts. However, if he did so, there was a chance of the beasts running away from this place, only to return later.

This meant that, whether he liked it or not, he would have to kill all the beasts in the tribe just for the sole reason of not leaving an enemy for the future.

Alex quickly counted the number of beasts that were there, but there were simply too many to completely count them. If anything, there were surely above a thousand different beasts, and each one of them was quite strong too.

He checked his tiny reserve of Qi just in case things got dicey and walked towards the closest beast.

And so began Alex's fight against the thousand different beasts that had taken over the grounds of the Bonehead tribe.

Alex fought all beasts one by one. Whether it was a fox, a snake, a vulture, a group of bugs, some worms, or even some deadly poisonous scorpion, none of them could withstand more than 2 of his attacks.

He fought outside of the tribe grounds, inside of it, inside houses, and even close to the hall where the Sacred flames were.

One by one, Alex killed all of them and took their corpse into his own storage bag.

After a while, he looked around to see the remaining beasts, and to his surprise, there were none.

Alex had done it. He had successfully killed all the beasts that were plaguing the tribe's grounds. Next, he had a little plan of his own.