

Alchemy 1081

Chapter 1081: World Defying

The Divine Devil's fruit wasn't as bad as the Spirit Cleansing lily in terms of difficulty on when and how to pick it.

The how part was incredibly simple. You just picked it like any other fruit. There was no specific way on how to pick it, just when.

For a Divine Devil's fruit to be usable, you must pick it when it is between 120 years and 123 years old. Any fruit picked out of that range was useless.

If picked too early, you would end up with something that would actually poison you. That was what had happened to the city lord's mother. If not for him having accidentally made a pill that could help her sweat out the filth in her body, she would've forever been in a coma.

If picked too late, however, while you would still end up with a useless fruit when it came to Mortal Cleansing, you could plant it to grow a new Divine Devil's plant and grow more fruit.

If it were a place with constant visits, one could keep track of all the fruits that grew in there and figure out when one should pick them. However, due to the nature of this place, no one could keep track of anything at all.

That was considering they even knew it.

Alex went next to one of the black and white fruit and placed his hand on it. Thanks to the knowledge he had, he could easily figure out how old the fruit was.

'39 years,' he thought and left the fruit. That was too young to be of any use. '159 years, I can plant this somewhere outside.'

He took the fruit and stored it before moving on to the next one.

After 3 such more fruits, he finally found one that was 121 years old. "Nice," he thought and picked it, storing it separately from the rest.

He went through the rest as well and found 3 more that you could eat and about 7 that you could plant. Even if he found ones that could not be eaten, Alex would've considered his current findings an absolute win.

He note down the rest of the fruits and their years in a talisman so that he could give it to others that would benefit from it. Why waste such a treasure after all?

Once he was done, he and Whisker left the forest and moved to the grassland outside where he sat down to cultivate.

Alex cultivated until the sun was part of the way into the sky. It had been more than 8 hours since he stopped and so he was now on the move again, to find different ingredients and treasures.

He met up with a few different people along the way and grimaced when he saw the lack of ingredients in the area.

He went to some other place and found other ingredients.

One such place was a flower field that grew many different types of flowers. However, there was a single flower there that caught Alex's eye.

"Wait, is that?"

He quickly ran up to it and as he did its scent hit him. "It really is," he said excitedly. "Whisker look, it's the Soul Elucidating Tulip."

The Soul Elucidating Tulips was a flower whose scent would cause one to lose their normal thought process, trancing one to think about something for a very long time.

It was the flower that made Dao mountain what it was.

Alex learned about the flower and realized that the scent wasn't the only thing that could force one to learn a dao. Even consuming the flower petals would force one to do the same, perhaps with a stronger effect as well.

If Alex could add some other ingredients to it to enhance its effect, it was most likely that he could make the Dao pill that the 10 council members had asked of him.

It would be very helpful if he could do that.

He started collecting the various flowers that were spread all around the field along with Whisker. He found hundreds of such flowers and was incredibly happy.

Once he got everything he wanted, he left that area as well.

Another few days passed and the day had come for the secret realm to open again. Alex needed to finish what he could here and make his way towards the center where the gate would open.

He had collected what he could already. He had been to the end of the river where he found various different flowers and fruits with Water Qi in them.

He had been to a rather rocky location where he found ingredients with Earth Qi in them. These would all be of extreme help to him in making the ingredients for the two pills in the next few months.

Alex looked around the field where he was in and shook his head in disappointment. There was barely anything here at all.

"Come on Whisker, we need to leave," Alex said. Whisker grumbled a bit, asking for a few more minutes so he could gather what remaining ingredients were here before they could leave.

Alex nodded and helped him with the task. After doing what they could, they started making their way back toward the gate.

The path back wasn't that long. It was just two mountains away. Alex and Whisker crossed the river to get to the first mountain. Once crossing the river, there was a small but thick forest with tall trees full of leaves.

He checked the area with his spiritual sense to see what was left behind by those that had come here before him. As he expected, there were still many things here that the people simply didn't know were an ingredient.

Heck, even he himself didn't know what sort of pills those ingredients could help in. All he knew was that they would.

"Should we stop by?" Alex asked. Whisker nodded, but Alex wasn't sure if he wanted to. There was no time to waste as the secret realm's gate would open at any time.

"Let me check if there is anything worth taking. If there is, we will get it, otherwise, we leave," Alex said to Whisker, but it was mostly for himself.

His spiritual sense spread around the forest, searching for anything of value. There were other spiritual senses that passed him in this time, some most likely wondering why he wasn't leaving, but Alex ignored them for the moment.

"I can't seem to find anything that's so good that we have to stop," Alex said to Whisker who was sitting inside his robes. "I think it will be better to just—"

He stopped. He had noticed something that was... well, he wasn't sure.

"What is that?" he thought. There was something in him that moved him towards this thing, surprising himself. It had been a while since his feeling for an ingredient had been this bad. He thought he was jaded to it by now, but it seemed he was not.

Of course, it would be stupid to think a mere Saint realm cultivator like him could overpower the intent of someone that was called a god.

Alex slowly floated down to check on it. He arrived next to a massive tree with roots that came out of the ground. The tree was thick and alive, not that he cared about that at the moment. It was not the tree that was calling him either, but something growing on it like parasites.

Mushrooms.

Along the bottom of the tree, a place where sunlight barely fell and the mist from the river constantly flowed in, there was a mossy patch on the tree and the ground where many pure white mushrooms were growing.

It was certainly a surprise for him that something like this was even growing. After all, the description that was given for it in his head was way too ridiculous to trust at all.

According to the information, the mushroom was called a World Defying Mushroom. The name was grand for something like a mushroom, but if what he was learning was correct, then it was definitely deserving of that name.

A World Defying Mushroom was an ingredient that could be used in any and every pill-making session. The mushroom itself wasn't an ingredient, but it could be used nonetheless.

The mushroom had no elemental energy of its own, but it could copy others. Like a blank canvas, it could take an ingredient and copy its energy to become just like the ingredient.

That alone was a terrifying ability, making the mushroom incredibly useful as it could copy ingredients that were very, very rare. However, there was only so much energy it could transform itself to, and even if it could copy ingredients, it couldn't do so for very long.

After a while, it would lose energy and end up as a useless item. Aside from that, there was also the problem of the mushroom having a different composition which made the recipes not work anymore.

But, there was something else it could do that was incredible. Since the mushroom was capable of copying energy, it could copy finalized energy too.

That was to say, at the end of a pill-making session, if the ingredients used were of poor quality, you could put one of these into the cauldron, and suddenly you would have additional energy floating around, all created by the mushroom.

As long as you kept the mushroom's powder separate, you could collect the energy onto the pill, gaining a very much successful pill with a very high harmony.

Any alchemist would kill to be able to get that.

Chapter 1082: Picking Mushrooms

Alex couldn't wait to take all of the mushrooms that were there. There were hundreds of them scattered around the tree and even further around the forest which was giving him an incredible sense of happiness.

Now, even if he hadn't improved the ingredients itself, he could still make a pill that could most likely bring forth the pill clouds.

"I should be leaving quick, so I can't waste my time anymore," he thought and grabbed the closest mushroom to pick it. However, just as he grabbed it, the mushroom suddenly turned murky white in color and adopted patches of yellow and black all over it.

Alex stepped backward in surprise. "What the hell?" he thought. "Why did it suddenly change color?"

He understood that the mushroom could copy energy from other ingredients, but that should have been it right? Could it copy from a cultivator as well after coming into contact with them?

"The color doesn't make any sense though," he thought. "My Qi has no elemental attribute to it. Or is it actually taking the Yin and Yang energy that is mixed into my Qi separately? Can it even do that?"

The information on the uses of the pill had nothing about it, so Alex went on to look at the rest of the information it had.

More accurately, the way to pick it without ruining it.

"Oh, I see," he thought with a blank look on his face. As unique as the mushroom was, the way to pick it was also equally unique.

First of all, you were absolutely not allowed to touch it by hand, even less using your Qi. You needed to use items that did not have any sort of energy in them.

Artifacts were out of the list of things you could use as they mostly contained Qi. Instead, you could use normal tools, especially ones created by mortals using metals that weren't affected by Qi.

As long as you could use something that was not affected by any Qi or the 7 elements, you were fine. As for after actually picking it, there was less threat as the mushroom went dormant unless kept around something that had a lot of energy.

Alex frowned a little. 'Do I even have anything like that?' he wondered. The answer was obviously no.

He couldn't use his hands or Qi as they were affected by the yin and yang in his body, and similarly, Midnight couldn't be used as well as it was affected by yin as well.

There was no tool with him he could really use, but thankfully, he didn't need tools.

His hand moved as the dao of cutting took over it. At the same time, he manipulated space to use it alongside the Dao of space to make a small separation of space that moved along, separating the other things in its path.

The distance Alex could send this wasn't very high, and it also took more out of him mentally due to having to use two dao together, instead of one after another.

However, doing that helped him correctly cut the mushroom by its stem and he now had a pure white mushroom.

Alex hesitated to grab it in fear that he might ruin it again, but what use was that fear when the Alchemy God's knowledge had told him it would not?

He grabbed the now cut-off mushroom and looked at it. "Truly world-defying," he thought. He wondered what sort of energy structure an ingredient of this type must have, so he used his Dao to check the energy composition in the mushroom.

Alex's eyes opened wide in shock when he learned the answer.

Nothing. There was no energy in there that he could check.

His brows raised in shock, but the shock wasn't there because the mushroom didn't have any energy in it. That could never be true after all. Everything in this world had energy, this one just wasn't one of the 7 elemental energies he could easily check.

However, there weren't that many things with this sort of lack of energy types. In fact, he could name only 3 other ones, and with the addition of this mushroom, the list had grown to 4.

"The Three Demonic Plants," he thought as his eyes became the widest they had in a very long time. "I found another descendant of the Three Demonic Plants."

Alex was sure of it. This made his discovery here even more worth it.

"I wonder which one of the four shares a common ancestor," he thought. Since there were 4 of them, there had to be a common thread for at least two of them.

The four plants he was talking about were obviously the Spirit Cleansing Lily, the Divine Devil's fruit, the World Defying Mushroom, and finally, the seed of the World Tree."

'They do share the word 'world' in them, so maybe that's the one,' Alex thought. He looked at the mushroom in his hand with awe on his face that had grown even more now.

"Oh no, I should probably keep you," he thought and stored the mushroom in a separate storage bag. As it was now, he didn't dare keep them in the same place as the other ingredients which was his storage ring.

Alex cut off a few more of the mushrooms and stored them as well. "Sigh, it's going to take a while," he thought. "I hope I make it in time."

He cut off some more and stored them as well. After doing this for a while, he stopped at one point as he held the mushroom in his hands.

"Will it ruin with just being in my hand?" he wondered. Since he had to use Qi to put it in and out of the storage bag, he wondered if that would affect it at all.

A minute passed, but nothing changed at all. He was safe with keeping the mushroom as after it was separated from its roots, it wasn't as harsh to the surrounding.

"My palms must not be releasing that much Qi," he thought and looked at his own hands. His vision changed slightly as his Demon Eyes worked to show him barely any black and yellow colors moving in his arm.

'There's not much here,' he thought. Even the surrounding didn't have much energy, which was most likely why it thrived here.

Right then, they sensed someone coming closer and quickly turned around to look at who it was.

"Brother Alex, what are you doing here? You should be leaving," the man said.

"Oh, hey harry," Alex said. "Yeah, I should be leaving. Just give me a few minutes."

Alex saw the green, blue, and dull brown colors floating around Harry and was worried that he would affect the mushroom with his presence.

"What are you even doing here?" Harry asked. "Are you picking those mushrooms, brother Alex?"

"Yes, that is what I'm doing," Alex said.

"Let me help you," Harry said and moved forward but Alex stopped him.

"I will do it on my own," Alex said.

"Okay then," Harry said. "Ah right, how're your ingredients coming along? I hope you're taking our competition seriously. I will be angry if you weren't."

"No, I'm doing my share of the task," Alex said. He wasn't picking any mushrooms at the moment as he couldn't show his cutting dao or his space dao.

"Ah, great then," Harry said. "Finish this quickly, I'll go out and wait for you."

Harry started to leave, but Alex spoke quickly. "Wait, there's something I have to ask you," he said.

"Oh? What is it brother Alex?" Harry asked.

"Actually, I'm still a bit confused about the Composition and Structure you were telling me about beforehand. Do you think you can teach me some more about it once we leave?" he asked.

"Oh sure," Harry said. "Anything you want, brother Alex. But we really should be leaving soon."

Alex nodded. Then, he attacked.

Harry didn't realize when Alex moved, only when he struck. His chest felt a sudden pain from the strike and in the next instance, he was nowhere near where he was in the forest.

He was somewhere on the other side of the river outside the forest and Alex was with him, his hand still in contact with his chest.

Harry fell back in pain and struggled to stand up straight with the incredible amount of pain his face showed. "What the hell, brother Alex? Why did you attack me?" he asked.

"I was trying to kill you, but it seems you are stronger than you appear to be," Alex said as he brought out midnight. He was sad that he couldn't use his blood aura, but that might have alerted him to his intentions.

That and he had to get away from the mushroom before the fight broke out so he didn't affect the mushrooms by the aura around him.

"Kill me? But why?" Harry asked with a frustrated look on his face. "I thought of you as my brother."

"Stop the act," Alex said. "Who are you exactly? An assassin? Are you friends with the Jade-Faced Assassin?"

Harry's eyes shined slightly when he heard the information, but his face never gave away the pained expression. "What? No, I'm Harry," he said. "Have you gone mad, brother Alex?"

"You fell for my question," Alex said. "It was I who taught Harry, not the other way around. You can drop the act, you've been found out."

Harry's pained face suddenly disappeared as he stood straight with a smirk on his face. He spread his arms wide as if in surrender.

"Congratulations, you got me."

Chapter 1083: Battle against the Unknown Man

Alex tightened his grip around Midnight, ready to strike at any moment. His opponent, however, seemed rather lax even though he was standing there with a sword.

"I must admit, I never thought I would be caught by you, that too so early on," the man said. "I was planning on sticking with you for a year at the very least."

Alex's eyes narrowed when he heard that. 'For a year? He wasn't planning to assassinate me?' he wondered. Regardless, he was going to get some answers.

"Tell me, what did I do wrong?" the man asked, still looking and sounding like Harry. "Surely you didn't randomly ask me the question. Something must have made you suspicious."

"Harry doesn't call me brother Alex. He just says Alex, like every back in our homeland," Alex said.

The man's eyes widened. "That's it? That was all that took to give me away?" he asked in shock. "No way! You're lying."

"That, and the fact that you have a Water spiritual root. Harry doesn't have that," he said. The blue aura around him when he first showed up had made Alex suspicious.

"You can tell I have a water spiritual root? How?" the man asked.

"How about I ask some questions instead?" Alex said. "Who are you and why are you after me?"

"I can't go around giving away my identity," the man smiled. "As for why I'm after you, I was given the task to observe you, and find out more about you, so we can use it in due time."

"Are you an assassin? Like the Jade Faced assassin," Alex asked.

"How do you know about him?" the man asked. "He wasn't supposed to have shown himself."

Alex kept quiet, not daring to answer him.

"Did you kill him? Considering you know who he is, I will assume that you managed to kill him," the man said. "Well, that idiot deserves it. He must've tried to kill you. He's very impulsive, you know. He was supposed to be observing, but instead, I have to take over his job."

The moment he said that Alex realized that he was an assassin as well and moved. He struck the man with his sword, slashing right in front of his chest.

The man's cultivation base suddenly increased, reaching the Saint Core realm in an instant. It went even higher and stopped increasing after ending on the Saint Core 6th realm.

He placed his hands up and caught Midnight by the flat side using his two palms. "Woah! Woah! Don't go attacking someone so suddenly," the man said. "I'm not your enemy, at least not yet."

"You are an assassin," Alex said. "You will die all the same."

The man tried to pull away Alex's sword, but he found that hard. Instead, he was forced back as the sword suddenly glowed in black light and Alex used the God-Rending Death Blade skill in his sword.

The black flash of light struck the man on his chest, tearing his robes, and revealed the armor that was inside of it. The armor had some signs of damage from the attack he had just taken.

"Shit!" the man cried out as he moved backward. "You really do plan on fighting me, huh? I suppose since you've seen me, I must fight back as well. At the very least, I can't let you tell the others what I am up to."

"Who sent you? Who wants you to kill me?" Alex asked.

"I'm not telling you." The man smiled and pulled out a spear of his own. "Killing you is not our priority, but that's not out of the option."

"Who is we?" Alex asked.

"We are the Dark Phoenix," the man said. "The one and only."

Alex was surprised that he was so readily revealing the information when he was hiding everything else.

The man looked around the secret realm. "Well, it is not really the ideal place, but I suppose this will have to do. It's better than the outside world anyway," he said.

Suddenly, the man moved as his spear struck out an attack where 100 different illusory spears came flying at him.

Alex sent out a Yang palm with his left hand but quickly realized that it was too weak. The man's cultivation base was just too strong for him to take the man out with common ways.

Thinking this, his blood poured out of his body, forming a protective armor around him. Dozens of spears landed on him, but only a few of them actually hurt.

The rest was blocked by the armor.

Blood poured out from the cuts where he was hit, but even that healed quickly. As for the blood, it entered the armor, reinvigorating it.

The man looked with shock and a little bit of disgust in his eyes. "What the hell is that?" he asked. He had never seen one use blood aura at all.

"Your demise," Alex said and dashed forward. He teleported next to the man, surprising him again, and attacked. The man moved his spear as well, striking straight ahead.

Alex saw the spear come at him, and with it, a wave of Spear Qi that was coating it. He moved his head to the side barely enough to dodge the attack and his sword which was enhanced by his blood landed on the man's chest.

Alex felt the armor crack even more as the man was sent flying to the left. He stopped a few dozen of meters away before grabbing his chest on the left with a pained expression.

"Why the hell are you so strong?" the man grunted in pain. Never in his wildest dream was the man expecting Alex to be this strong at all.

However, instead of getting an answer, he was hit with another attack.

An explosion appeared behind him, sending the robes on his back to tatters, while propelling him forward, toward Alex's sword.

He struck out with his own spear that was filled with Water Qi. A water serpent flew out from his spear, attacking Alex, but Alex used the dao of cutting to slice the serpent into two while moving to attack the man in front.

The sword and spear clashed, and the man felt the weight of Alex's attack. It wasn't just his attack that had weight to it, but his sword itself was heavy as well.

This was not there on their first clash.

'I thought he was just supposed to be an alchemist,' the man thought.

Alex struck a few more times with his sword, forcing the man to move further and further back. Then, he slashed from the top, making the man either have to block or dodge entirely.

Going with the flow of the fight, the man decided to stop. The sword clanged on the man's spear shaft which was fully made up of metal. The attack was heavy, but he was somehow stopping it for now.

However, he noticed something wrong all of a sudden. There was a sudden burst of hot air hitting his face, even though there was no fire around him. It was only a moment later that he felt the heat with his own hand.

It was only then that he realized that Alex was heating the metal of his spear and that too at an incredible rate.

Alex pulled back his sword and struck again. Only this time his sword grew to an incredible size that blotted out the sun in the man's vision.

It struck down very hard while the man was still focused on the heat of his spear. The sword slammed the spear and suddenly broke it in two.

"NO!" the man shouted as the sword slammed onto him as well, sending him crashing onto the ground. The man created a small crater from which he pulled his greatly hurt body.

He looked at Alex in the sky, now with fear very visible in his eyes. He had thought that with the difference in their cultivation base he would be free to do anything, however, he was only now that he was realizing the cost of that assumption.

'I need to leave and let them know about this monster,' he thought, his chest bleeding profusely from the cracks in his armor. Just then, something dropped to his left with a slam that shook the ground.

Then, something else dropped to his right. And then to the front, to the back, and 3 more all around him.

The man quickly checked with his spiritual sense, only to be surprised and struck with more fear.

There were now 7 crimson beasts all around him, all with an aura that screamed dangerous to him, and they were all looking at him.

Alex came from the top and looked down at him in his crimson armor that reeked of blood to the assassin.

The man looked around and was quickly face to face with the truth that there was no running. The only thing he could do here and fight and kill Alex, or die trying. He wasn't ready to die trying.

"No, no, no," he started saying softly. "It's not supposed to go like this. I wasn't supposed to be fighting you, I'm only here to observe."

The man was losing it as he faced death on a day that was supposed to be conflict-free.

"You must have spoken an oath as well, so I won't ask you much," Alex said. "Just tell me what you can, and I might just let you live as a cripple."

The man almost spilled everything, but his oath forced him to hold back. He could push against this force, but it would end up killing him instead.

It was death by Alex, or death by his Oath. he saw no other way out of here alive. If he was going to be dead either way, he would die a third way.

He smiled a crazy smile as he said, "I guess this is all I can do."

Then, he exploded.

Chapter 1084: Core Explosion

Qiu Hanyu tapped her shoes on the floor of the stone platform with impatience. She looked at the 23 people beside her and couldn't help but be even more frustrated the longer it went.

"Just where the hell are they? Did they forget?" she asked. Her annoyance made the other people not want to answer just so they wouldn't be caught in her anger.

Harry looked around and through the open door that lead to the secret realm and was a little worried. 'Where is he?' he wondered.

It wasn't just Alex that was missing, there was one of the four people from the Alchemy association that had entered with them as well but had yet to come out.

The sect leader entered the portal for a second and spread her spiritual sense all around to check on Alex and the other person, but no matter how far she spread it, neither Alex nor the other person was in her vicinity.

With the lack of knowledge of where they were, she couldn't even go away to check it. She especially couldn't because she was the only one capable of opening the gate on the outside. If she were to be stuck here, it was likely that they would forever be stuck in this land.

She walked back out and checked the remaining period of time before the gate closed. "Just 2 more minutes," she said. "Goddamn, these two. They better not make me have to open the gate afterward."

She waited for a minute more when suddenly she noticed something. There was a violent change in aura somewhere in the secret realm that she could sense.

It wasn't just her. All the saints that were standing there could feel it.

"Someone's fighting," she said with a darkened expression. "Are those two in a fight?"

She wanted to go in and check, but the portal was going to close at any moment now.

"I'll go in and check," Harry said.

The sect leader frowned for a bit and nodded. "We'll have to open the gate anyway it seems. You should—"

Suddenly, a massive sound came from inside that shook the very space around them. The ground shuddered and so did the cultivators standing on it.

The True realm cultivators fell to the ground in fear at the aura that was just released, and even the elders couldn't help but show shock on their faces.

"That..." the sect leader spoke with eyes wide open. "That was a Core Explosion! Someone exploded their Golden Core."

If someone had to go so far as to explode their golden core, then things were serious. And if someone was caught in the vicinity, she didn't expect anyone to be able to make it out alive after that.

They all stood in shock, unable to say a word, and in their shock and hesitancy, the gate closed.

The sect leader finally spoke. "Get everyone out of here," she said in a serious tone. "I will have to go in and check."

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All colors from around the man vanished all of a sudden as it was consumed by the man's body. Alex saw the shift in color and was surprised, wondering what he had just done.

However, at the next moment, his vision exploded with color again, horribly bright color.

Alex felt the shockwave hit him the moment he saw the color. Before he could do anything else, the remainder of the explosion hit him.

The blast shot Alex into the sky, half dazed, half unconscious. Terrible pain flared all over his body with even Alex unsure of where they originated.

A few seconds later, he hit the ground with a massive impact, creating a small crater.

Alex tried to move his body, but all he could do was involuntarily cough up blood. He tried to move his arm, but neither of his arms was there with him.

His right leg was torn from the knee as well.

He used his spiritual sense to check the rest of the damage and was horrified by what he saw.

Aside from the missing limb, his skin was in tatters, even muscles destroyed, with bones showing in some places like his chest.

His nose was completely destroyed with the skins on his face split at various different places, bleeding profusely.

He couldn't even if his left eye was okay or not as he couldn't even open it.

He tried to breathe, forcing his chest to move up and down. Slowly, air filled his lungs again and he coughed out more blood that was filling his chest.

Alex tried to ignore all the terrible pain and concentrated on his chest. He used his blood manipulation to try and pull the blood out of his lungs.

The blood flowed out through his throat and fell onto his chest, where it started seeping into his chest.

His breathing became easier and finally, he could focus a little more. Fortunately, his dantian wasn't hurt, so the Qi in his body started moving quickly to heal him.

His Undying Physique worked as best as it could and he started growing the part of his body that had gone missing.

Alex lay on the ground in pain while his body healed bit by bit. A few minutes later, it was finally fully healed.

He stood up from where he was and checked himself. His clothes were barely on him and most of his body parts were regrown, so he was all but naked.

His hands had blown away as well, so the ring on his finger had gone somewhere as well. Fortunately, the body parts that had been ripped off were still around in chunks, so when he used his spiritual sense, he quickly found it.

It was a kilometer away from where he was, out on a hill away from the flatland where they were fighting.

Alex called out Whisker and had him go retrieve it. At the same time, he checked his sides and saw that his storage bags hadn't taken any damage.

He sighed and looked toward the direction where the explosion had happened. That was not an explosion he had ever seen in his life before.

"That... that must have been what they call a Core Explosion," Alex thought. "He exploded the core in his dantian so he could kill me in a suicide attack."

Alex sighed once more and looked around. The blood beasts that he had brought out to corner him were dead. They were some of his best beasts and they were gone just like that.

'I will have to go get some more,' he thought. He looked around for a bit and put out his hand. Midnight flew into his grip and Alex checked it. As expected, his sword had no damage on it.

"His storage bag must have been destroyed in the explosion as well," Alex thought. "Shame, I could have learned something about the assassins."

He couldn't help but shake his head.

Whisker returned not long after and Alex ate a healing pill that was in his ring just in case. Then, he pulled out the storage bag where he was keeping the World Defying Mushroom.

Seeing that they weren't damaged during the fight, he went back to the forest to gather some more.

He left Whisker there to look around just in case he missed something. He had scanned around as well as he could, but he was definitely in shock, he hoped he really did miss something.

About 10 minutes later, he was done collecting all the mushrooms. By then, Whisker was back as well, and together they flew towards the gate in the center of the secret realm.

Alas, before he could even reach the center, he could see that the gate had already closed. He had been late.

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Everyone but the sect leader and a few key elders of the Flowerhall sect were on the platform outside the Forbidden Orchard.

It had taken them some time to send everyone away and prepare a spirit vein so that they could open the gate for an extended period of time.

The spirit vein that was connected to the platform would have been enough to open the gate normally, but with what they had sensed inside, they felt that they needed something stronger to keep it open for a long while.

An elder flew out of the lake and landed on the platform while rubbing the water from his face. "I've attached the extra spirit vein to the ends of the original one. We should be ready to go," he said.

"Good," the sect leader said. She then pulled out her medallion and fiddled with it for a moment to open the gate. However, right as she was about to activate, she heard a buzz to her left.

They all did.

Quickly, they turned around to look at what was making that noise, and couldn't help but be surprised to see a bit of light shining from the crack that was supposed to have fully closed.

In the slit of the closed gate, they could see a few fingers peeking through. They extended further before half of the hand was outside the slit.

The people gathered there looked in shock and were ready to take action if needed.

In the next moment, their eyes went wide in shock.

The two hands grabbed either side of the gate and pulled it apart like someone was opening a curtain. The gate was wide open and Alex walked through in a rough state.

He looked around at the elders and sect leaders that were gathered and bowed a little.

"My apologies for being late. Something had come up that needed taking care of."

Chapter 1085: Back to the Association

"Y-you... how did you?" one of the elders asked with a trembling finger pointed towards the closing gate behind Alex.

Alex looked back at the gate and turned back around to say, "I have my ways."

The sect master was dumbfounded as well, but she quickly got a hold of her emotions. "What happened inside? We sensed someone dying," she said.

"Someone did," Alex said. "I would like to speak in a little more private scenario if possible."

The sect leader frowned and looked at the elders beside her. He gestured for them to leave and everyone flew away.

"So, tell me what happened," the sect leader asked. "Did you kill the other person? That's not a crime I can help you get away with."

"I did kill the other person, but you don't have to worry. It was no crime," Alex said. "The other person was an assassin that had gone in to observe me for some reason. He seemed to be part of the same group as the Jade-Faced assassin."

The sect leader looked around hurriedly before speaking in a lower voice. "Another assassin? Who was it this time?" she asked.

"I am not sure," Alex said. "He was wearing Harry's face when I met him, so he really could be anyone."

"Dammit! I will have to consult with Granduncle about this. He told me to just look over you after the first assassination. He won't be happy after hearing you were the target of another one," she said.

"I technically wasn't a target of an assassination today," Alex said. "He said he was there to just observe. I think they want something from me, so they are waiting for some reason."

"Alright, we will talk about this later. You seem to have gone through a rough day for now. Go take some rest, I will let the council elders know about what happened here," the sect leader said.

Alex thought for a bit if that could go bad in any way, but he ignored that thought. He was already a target of an assassination, how much worse could it even get?

"Oh right, I forgot to mention one thing," Alex said right before he left. "This man I fought, mentioned that he was part of something known as the Dark Phoenix. Do you have any idea what that is?"

"The dark phoenix?" the sect leader's eyes went wide in surprise. "No way! You are being targeted by the Dark Phoenix? I must let granduncle know about it immediately."

Alex saw the urgency in the sect leader's eyes and frowned. "Are they what I think they are?" he asked.

"They are an assassin group, one that has lasted for a very long time. Unlike other assassins, this group is known to have very few members, but each one of them is deadly in their own way," the sect leader said. "I see, the Jade-Faced Assassin must have been from this group as well."

Alex nodded. "So the best assassin group in the entire continent is after me?" he asked.

"The best assassins are after you... dear lord," the sect leader realized how much more severe the situation was, much more than what she had thought. "Go back, I will contact the council elders. They will make a decision for you."

Alex didn't show any other emotion and simply nodded before flying away. Whatever it was he was going to have to do next really didn't matter to him at the moment.

As long as they didn't stop him from being able to make pills, train, or find his father, he was up for anything.

Alex arrived back on the shore of the lake in the Flowerhall sect and found a few people waiting for him.

"Alex! You're back," Harry said with a worried look. "Are you alright? We heard some explosions."

"I'm fine," Alex said. "I wasn't hurt."

"I see," Harry said.

Alex sneakily used his eyes to see Harry's aura colors and finally relaxed a little. It really was him.

"What do we do now?" Alex asked.

"Well, you came back. Is the other alchemist not coming?" Harry asked. He was trying to learn if he was the one that had exploded for some reason.

"He's not," Alex said. "We should return."

Harry hesitated for a bit and nodded. There was nothing else for them to do anyway. Everyone else had already returned, so he should be returning as well.

They walked out of the sect and made their way through the streets to return back to the association.

Harry tried to ask what happened inside, but Alex dodged the questions as best as he could. He didn't want to talk about it with anyone except the leader for now.

Instead, to occupy Harry's mind from getting overly curious, Alex asked, "oh right, what about our competition? How many ingredients did you prepare?"

"Hah! You actually have the guts to bring that up huh? You must have acquired enough to be the one to bring it up," Harry said.

"I found a few," Alex said, not giving away anything else.

"Fine, bring yours out and I'll bring mine. We will check each other's," Harry said.

Alex nodded and handed over a talisman and a storage bag, and took the same things handed over to him by Harry.

He started checking through the talisman list and was quite surprised. 'He managed to find so many,' he thought.

There was a number on the top that tallied up everything noted in the talisman, and that number came out to be 9,563. It was quite a lot of ingredients to have gathered in just 7 days, but only about 5 percent of that number was Saint rank ingredients.

About 30 percent were True rank ingredients, and the rest were common ingredients.

"This is quite good," Alex said as he looked through the names on the list. He was really just interested in the Saint rank ingredients, so he looked at them only. "You did amazing."

Harry smiled with a proud face. "You did not bad yourself either," he said, handing back the storage bag and talisman. "8 thousand is not a bad number at all, especially for someone that is new to all of this."

Alex smiled. "I tried my best," he said.

"Although, I didn't see that Willow tree being listed here," Harry said. "Does that mean you failed to get it? That was the one thing you wanted to get in there, right?"

Alex gave a surprised look. "Oh, silly me. I was so excited about finding the willow that I forgot to note it down," he said. "Although, I wouldn't win against your list with just 1 more ingredient."

"Of course not," Harry said as he patted Alex's shoulders. "But I'm happy that you found what you went in looking for. You don't have to win every competition you face anyway."

Alex smiled and nodded. He didn't feel that bad about losing the competition at all. Rather, he didn't feel bad at all. He was instead very happy.

'Hear that Whisker? You nearly collected as many ingredients as an actual human alchemist. That should tell you how good you are,' Alex said to the little guy hiding in his robes.

Whisker made some small sound of happiness and Alex placed the storage bag back into his robes, handing it over to him.

After all, these were just the ingredients Whisker had found after all.

Alex himself hadn't bothered making a list at all. After all, he was there to only get Saint-ranked ingredients and maybe a few True rank ingredients if they were usable in a recipe.

Even then, he had collected about 2300 ingredients alone. If he had gone all out, 20 thousand wouldn't have been a hard number to reach.

The two of them finally arrived at the association and Alex went over to the leader who was expecting him.

"Are you okay? I heard there was an explosion inside. Did you have a fight with Han Nixie?" the leader asked.

"Who?" Alex gave a confused look.

"Han Nixie. You know, the guy who exploded himself inside the secret realm," the leader said. "They told me it was a Core explosion, and he was the only one in there with a core amongst you two."

"Oh, that's who he went in as," Alex said, finally understanding a little.

"Went in as? What are you talking about?" the leader asked.

"How old would you say this Han fellow is? How long has he been in this association?" Alex asked.

"Um, he was a later generation than me in the Flowerhall sect, and he joined here right after graduation, so about 600 years? Give or take," the leader said.

"I see," Alex said. "I don't know who this Han Nixie person is exactly, but the man that died inside wasn't him. It was an assassin that came to observe me after the Jade Faced assassin died."

"What?" the leader stood up from his chair. "An assassin?"

"Yes," Alex said.

"A Saint core one at that," he said.

Alex continued nodding.

The leader was flabbergasted. "There are more after you then," he said. "Wait, how did you escape him? Rather, how did you force him to a point where he had to destroy his own core? He must've been desperate to do so," he said.

"I've told you this before, but I'm stronger than I look," Alex said. "I'll tell you more later. For now, check on this Han Nixie fellow. He was either killed and replaced, or he is being detained someplace. You will need to find out."

The leader nodded. "What about you?" he asked.

"I... I will get some rest," Alex said. "Then, I will have to spend a lot of time making the pills now that I have the ingredients I need."

Chapter 1086: A Few Changes

Alex was called over by the leader the next day.

"You were right," he said the moment he entered the room. "We found Alchemist Han dead and buried in the corner of the garden. If we hadn't searched for it explicitly, we would have never found his corpse."

Alex gave a grim look and said nothing. This proved that someone was out there waiting to kill him, and they were going as far as they could to try and figure out more about him.

But why?

"Sect leader Qiu messages me earlier. Senior Qiu Jianhong will be here at any moment to take you to the Sunborn Sanctuary. You are not to leave or meet with anyone until then."

Alex nodded. "I understand," he said. He was still not sure if he could trust the council members at all, but at the very least, not all of them would be trying to kill him. With their strength, he would be safe there than anywhere else.

"What about the event? Will we be canceling that?" Alex asked.

"We have to, don't we?" the leader asked. He didn't feel good about ending something so important to the association, but he didn't feel like he had any other choice at all. Especially with Alex's life on the line.

"Very well, let's end it," Alex said. "We can stop this for a few years at least and see if it all blows over. Hopefully, by then I will have found my father and a way out of this continent."

The leader was disappointed to hear that Alex still wanted to leave this continent. But there wasn't anything he could say, so he kept quiet.

Alex talked with the leader for a few more minutes and by then the old man had arrived.

Both Alex and the leader went out to greet the senior from the council, and Alex got onto his boat before flying away.

"Tsk. Whatever did you do to get a target on your head?" the senior couldn't help but ask.

"Who knows," Alex said. "I don't remember offending anybody— well, that's not true." He sighed when he remembered the Huang family and his oath against them.

"It must have been the Huang family if anyone," Alex said. "They are the only ones that could possibly have any resentment against me."

"No, its not them," the old man said.

"Huh? How do you know?" Alex asked.

"After learning about your conflict, once he was done cultivating, brother Huang returned to his family to give them a piece of his mind. The current family head has changed as well and they have been ordered to not create any more conflict. I doubt it's any of them honestly."

Alex gave a thoughtful look. "I didn't hear about this," he said.

"They've been keeping this under wraps for now. This sort of information is devastating for them, especially in the hands of their rivals in the business, so they will hide the change until the family has stabilized a bit more," the seniors said.

"I see," Alex said.

"Besides, I don't think the Huang family has nearly enough money to commission people from the Dark Phoenix to assassinate you. Their family isn't as rich as they hope to be," Qiu Jianhong said.

"So it is someone rich," Alex asked.

"Yes," the old man said.

Alex nodded. The old man didn't know about the additional information that Alex had, so he didn't realize that Alex's suspects had gone from 20 to 18. Maybe even 17 if the Flowerhall Sect truly wasn't part of it.

'Someone rich and with connections,' Alex thought. It could be any of the 17 if he was to ignore the other 3.

'I'll have to research a bit more,' Alex thought.

The two soon reached another city where the teleportation formation had been ready for them.

They got on top of the formation and at the next moment, they were both in the Sunborn Sanctuary. They flew over to the palace where Alex hadn't been for nearly half a year.

He met up with the elders that were there who told him that he would be safe in the palace. Alex wouldn't have doubted that, but he knew a few pieces of information that were keeping him from fully believing in them all.

He retreated back to the room he had before so he could make some pills. They let him do what he wanted, but also requested some other pills for their cultivation. They had used up quite a lot of them and were only now realizing just how good they were.

Alex agreed to their requests and retreated to his room where he rested for a while, and then began his long alchemy session.

* * * * *

A woman wearing a dull robe with a hooded face walked through the morning crowd to go somewhere.

There was a small bee flying in front of her, and while most people would've swatted such a bug away, she showed no reaction to it.

In fact, she even looked at it from time to time to see if it was still there.

She went where the bee did, following it through the crowd. Finally, she arrived at a carriage station where people got onto large carriages to go to a different city.

The bee went through an open door in the carriage and the woman walked into it as well. She climbed up the carriage and found herself an empty seat.

As for the bee, it was nowhere to be found at all. She tried searching for it with just her eyes, but it wasn't visible.

There were a dozen or so people in the carriage and they either rested or talked to other people. Not a single one seemed to be paying attention to her at all.

The carriage started moving. It left the city to go to the next one.

Five minutes passed and the woman saw nothing. No signs or anything. She was starting to believe that she had done something wrong when a middle-aged man in front of her dropped something to the ground.

Before she could see what it was, she smelled something... weird and immediately stopped breathing. The people around her noticed it as well, but they were very late. Before they could realize it, they were unconscious.

"No need to hold your breath, this smoke only makes non-saints unconscious. You are fine," the middle-aged man said. He crushed the small grass that was burning on the carriage floor and tossed it out the window.

"We have 10 minutes," he said.

The woman frowned a little when she heard that. "Why did you contact us?" she asked. "I thought that pink-haired girl said that we would only communicate with talismans until the job was done."

"That was the plan, yes," the man in front of her said. "But things have changed a little."

"What has changed?" the woman asked.

"For one, the importance of the target has changed," the man said. "He is now worth a lot more than he previously did."

"What?" the girl said in an angry tone while keeping her voice barely above a whisper. "Why would his worth change? He was already valued very high to begin with."

"Yes, I won't deny that, but his value had increased even more," the man said. "After all, either he or someone around him has managed to take out 2 of the assassins we sent after him. Do you know what that means?"

The woman's eyes went wide. "I thought all 7 of your members were supposed to be some of the best assassins. How could 2 of you have died?" she asked.

"They did," the man said. "The Faceless Assassin was supposed to have contacted us 3 days ago, but there is a rumor in the Flowerhall sect that not everyone who entered the orchard this time around managed to come out. We suspect that he died in there."

"What? We ordered you not to do anything until way later," the woman said.

"We weren't doing anything but gathering information. However, Faceless still died, which means he was likely caught and had to fight back," he said. "As for the other one, Jade hasn't been in contact since we put him on the task nearly 3 months ago. Considering him anything other than dead would be a mistake at this point."

"So..." the woman asked.

"So, the price is going to have to increase again," the man said. "There are only 5 of us remaining, so both we and the target are worth more now. That is... if you still wish to continue."

The woman thought for a bit and shook her head. The loss would be too great at this point to go back on the assassination attempt.

"No, keep at it," she said. "But the actual assassination has to happen in the Sanctum itself. Anywhere else would cause too many questions to be asked."

"Speaking of which," the man said. "The council members have taken him away. We don't know if we will ever see him again or not."

"What? No way!" the woman practically shouted this time around. Fortunately, no one woke up.

"The target is inside the Sunborn Sanctuary and... I don't suppose you want us to sneak in to kill him?" he asked.

"No," the woman said.

"Then unless he comes out, it will be hard," the man said. "Also, since the old foggies are involved, we are going to have to go underground to not get caught. We will come out when the sanctum opens but until then... you better hope the target will be there too."

The woman thought very hard for a minute or so before saying, "Don't worry about him. I'll find a way to get him there."

She had a plan in her mind for that.

Chapter 1087: Upgraded Pill

Alex finished making the pills for the elder and handed it over to them. Once done, he finally started working on the True rank pill for the Earth Spiritual Root.

There wasn't much for him to do here but just make the pill once. It took him maybe 15 minutes to be done with it, and after that came the actual task.

He took the True rank pill and ate it. When he did, he felt the energy from the pill dissipate in his stomach, mix into his blood vessels, and find their way to his dantian.

Once there, they then moved to his Earth spiritual root where they began affecting it. However, since his root was already improved by them once, they didn't really affect it anymore. Not to mention the fact that the energy in the pill itself was way too weak for it to be effective anyway.

Having refreshed his memories on the pill, especially with his improved senses, he now had to translate everything to the Saint rank. Meaning the energy he felt, the ingredients he used, everything would have to be ranked up to the same level as a Saint rank pill.

'Let's see...' he thought as he felt the energy in the willow. He quickly got the energy constitution of the willow and used that information to find similar saint-rank ingredients.

There were tons of ingredients in his storage bag, some he was given by the council members, and some he found himself in the Orchard.

It took him the entire day to go through the whole the many earth element ingredient he had before he found about 6 ingredients that sort of made sense to be a better version of Willow's bark.

The only problem now was finding out which one of the 6 was truly the best one. Even amongst the 6, there were 2 very close ingredients that Alex started with.

He made the pills with just those two pills at first while being as close to the original recipe as possible.

The shape of the powder wasn't something he had learned yet, so he couldn't do it as well as he would have wanted it to. In the end, the first pill came out to be around 59%.

"That's alright, I should focus on figuring out whether the pill works or not before fixing the pill itself," he thought. That was slightly problematic for sure as he couldn't guarantee whether or not the pill did anything bad to him.

"Sigh, I will have to make a Nullifying pill for this as well," he thought. Before making those, he made the rest of the pills with the remaining 5 ingredients, each of which came out to be about the same range as the first one.

By the time he was done making all the pills, he felt tired. More tired than he would have been normally just making the pills. The mental exhaustion from having to sort through the many ingredients was hitting him harder than he had expected.

He sat on his bed and ate a cultivation pill before starting to cultivate. For the next 2 days, he spent the entire time just cultivating. He could feel that he was getting so close to breaking through once again.

'Not even a year has passed since the last time and yet...' he thought.

Once he was done cultivating, Alex got back to work. He prepared his ingredients to make the second-best Saint Nullifying pill he could make since pill veins were out of the question at the moment.

Saint Nullifying pills were immensely volatile and could get destroyed at any moment if one was not careful. So, Alex had to make sure he was very careful while he made it.

He made sure to move the ingredients no more than they were required and even after he did, he carefully controlled the energy before combining them all to make a pill.

The moment he completed making the pill, he immediately took the pill bottle that was next to him and dumped the pill inside directly into his mouth.

He swallowed the pill and quickly brought out the Saint Nullifying pill as he got ready to use it. He closed his eyes and felt the energy that was inside his belly at the moment.

The energy released from the pill made its way into his bloodstream. From there, they would go to the locations where his blood vessels and meridians were connected. Using the meridians, they would then go to his dantian and—

Something went wrong.

The energy went right past the meridian and continued down his bloodstream to go somewhere else.

Instantly, Alex at the pill in his hand and used its energy as fast as he could. The nullifying energy flowed through his body, countering every other energy in him. Within seconds, the energy from the Earth pill was completely destroyed by the nullifying pill.

Alex felt very drained when all the energy in his body was gone. "That wasn't right," he thought. The nullifying pill had gotten rid of more energy than just the pill, so he didn't want to start right away.

He spent a bit of time trying to understand what went wrong and what the pill was actually trying to do. He got some idea, but the only way to know if they were real was to test them completely on himself or on pill swine. He would rather do it on pill swine than himself.

After a while, once his meridians weren't so drained of Qi, he started making the Saint Nullifying pill once again.

He kept the 2nd pill ready to eat and finished making the nullifying pill. As soon as he was done, he ate the Earth element pill. Once again, the energy from the pill entered his bloodstream and he watched where it went.

It went through his vessels and right at where it was supposed to take the turn to enter his meridians... it did. It went through his meridians down to his dantian.

Alex slowly placed the nullifying pill in his mouth, ready at any moment. He felt the energy reach his dantian through the non-elemental spiritual root, and once it was inside, it started moving toward the Earth elemental spiritual root.

Alex swallowed the nullifying pill right before it was about to take effect and canceled out the energy that was in his dantian, even getting rid of some of the Qi that was inside of him.

"Phew!" Alex took a deep breath as that was way too close for him to be comfortable at the moment. If he had let it go any further, his spiritual roots would have been improved, that too by a pill that was barely in the Heaven grade.

However, even with that, he couldn't stop a smile from appearing on his face.

"I did it!" he thought.

He looked at the other 4 pills he still had to check and wondered if he should try them out as well.

Since there was nothing wrong with doing so, he spent the rest of the day testing them. In the end, the 2nd pill was the only one that worked. As such, that became the new Saint Earth Spiritual Root enhancing pill.

Once he was done completing the recipe, his next task was to improve said recipe so that he could make one with pill veins in them.

It took Alex about 2 days to completely learn the various powdered structure and form a composition that worked best for that recipe.

Once he was done, he started making the pills. He made the pills day after day for the entire week until he no longer had any ingredients for the pill anymore.

Only then did he leave his room and met up with the two elders that were currently out.

"Senior Liang, senior Hou," Alex greeted the elders.

The two elders looked at Alex and smiled. "Did you need something little brother?" they asked.

"I have a pill here that I believe you guys will like," Alex said as he brought out the storage bag that was full of pills.

"What pill is this? Is this the water spiritual root one?" Liang asked.

Alex shook his head. "I will still have to work on that," he said. "But this is not that different from it. These are pills that will improve your Earth spiritual roots. I do not know how many of you have it, but this will help any of you who have it a lot."

"Wait, did you really end up making these?" Hou Xinya couldn't help but put on a surprised face.

"Yes, senior," Alex said. "It's a shame I took such a long time, but at least it's here."

"What? Nonsense. You took what? 5 months? That's nothing," Liang Shufen said. "You could have brought this to us a decade later and we would have told you that you didn't have to hurry."

Alex gave a small smile and thanked them for their kind words. "Please share it with the others," he said. "Also, I was hoping you could help me with selling the rest. I can't leave the city, so I don't know how to do it myself."

"Don't worry, we will do it," Liang Shufen said.

"Thank you," Alex said. "Now, if you will excuse me, I have a small thing I've been ignoring for some time that I will have to attend to."

Hou Xinya gave a weird look. "Are you leaving the palace?" he asked.

Alex nodded. "I need to go to the Insight pavilion."

Chapter 1088: Zhu Shaofan

Liang Shufen was probably the prettiest of the four female council members with her pink robes that were full of frills, and a smile forever tugged at her fair face.

Her age showed through the small hint of wrinkles on her face, but that did not stop people from staring at her on the streets with wide grins as they greeted her.

"You're quite popular, senior," Alex said. "Not even senior Yao got this much of a greeting from the people."

"It's less about popularity, and more about sister Yao being slightly unapproachable due to her look," she said. "They see an old woman that they know is strong and try not to bother her if possible. Still, I'm sure she gets a lot of greetings too."

Alex nodded. She wasn't wrong.

They walked through the streets of the city as they made their way towards the insight pavilion.

Alex had wanted to go there alone, but the seniors insisted on at least one of them going along for his protection, so he had let her come along.

"Aren't you excited to take your pill, senior?" Alex asked. "I'm sure you could've let me come here alone while you improved your spiritual sense."

"Haha, you're not getting rid of us that easily," Liang Shufen said with laughter in her voice. "Besides, I don't have earth spiritual root, so that pill is useless to me."

"Oh, I see," Alex said. He quickly used his Demon Eyes to check, and as she had explained, she did not have any muddy brown colors around her. He did see quite a lot of blue, however.

"Then I'll try to make the water pill as soon as I can, senior," he said.

"Oh, that will certainly help me a lot," she said, not realizing that his words weren't coincidental at all.

They soon reached the pavilion and Alex walked in. He asked to see the one that managed this pavilion and waited for the old, bald man to come down to stairs.

The man came down not even 10 seconds later, surprising Alex, and behind him was a slightly younger man who looked like he was 40 years old at best in mortal years.

The bald man stepped aside and let the middle-aged man walk up front.

"Sister Liang, it has been a while," the man said with a small bow.

"Oh, little brother Zhu! I didn't realize you had come back to the city," she said. "I wasn't expecting to see you here today."

"Certainly my presence won't ruin your day, would it?" he asked with a small smile.

Liang Shufen chuckled as well. "Don't try to be cheeky now," she said.

The man laughed and looked at Alex before giving him a greeting with his hands cupped. "You must be the famous Alchemist Alex. I've seen your faces too many times in the recordings, but they fail to capture all of your handsomeness," he said.

"Your words are kind, senior," Alex said.

"This is Zhu Shaofan," Liang Shufen explained. "The owner of the Insight pavilion."

"Ah!" Alex exclaimed when he heard that. "My apologies, senior. I'm ignorant and didn't know who you were."

"You aren't ignorant," the man said. "I simply like to stay out of the public's eyes. I never cared much for the public's perception of me. Besides, with the establishment I have managed to create, I've come to learn just how troublesome it can be to have your information so easily available for others."

Alex nodded. These past couple of months he had been slightly regretful of giving away his image to be spread throughout the continent in hopes of finding his father.

That was what had made it so easy for the assassins to target him.

If he was given the chance to do it all over again, he would certainly still do it just for the sake of finding his father, but he would be careful to use some other faces in most public scenarios.

"So, what are you guys here for? Are you looking for something?" the man asked.

"I have a package bought to gather information monthly, I am here to get it," Alex said.

"Oh," the man turned towards the bald man that was staying to the side. "Please set it up for our little friend."

"Right away, senior," the old man said and walked away.

"Let me treat you to some tea while we wait for it to be prepared," the man said and took them upstairs.

They sat down on some fancy chairs and started drinking tea. Alex was a little surprised by the taste of the tea and realized that he was actually drinking coffee.

"Where did you find this?" he asked.

"The black tea? I found a group of people making these and took the product from them. It doesn't have any nutritional value to a cultivator, but it does taste quite good with some sugar in it," he said as he drank.

Alex nodded. He wasn't really a coffee drinker back when he was a mortal, but the times he did, he remembered liking it.

"So, when did you come back?" Liang Shufen asked.

"Uhh... about a month ago, I believe," he said. "Brother Gong was there to greet me when I came."

"I see," the woman said. She sensed his aura and smiled. "You've grown quite strong too."

"Haha, yes I have," the man said. "And it is all thanks to little brother Alex here. I've bought a few of his pills and they have been immensely helpful in recent times."

"I know, right?" Liang Shufen asked. "We must have done something right to have such a blessing fall on us."

"Indeed," the man said as his smile disappeared a bit. "But I doubt our bad deeds will ever be outweighed."

"They will," Liang Shufen said. "At least, I believe they will."

The man smiled again. "Ever the optimist you are, sister Liang," he said.

They talked for a few more minutes about a few more stuff, of which Alex only understood half. Then, the old man came with the prepared talismans and handed them over.

"Alright, you got your thing. We should return now," the woman said.

Alex nodded and stood up to leave.

"Young brother Alex, I wanted to ask you something," the man suddenly said.

"Yes? What is it, senior?" he asked.

"So, there's been a rumor spreading recently that I wanted to ask if it's true or not," the man said.

Alex's eyes narrowed when he heard that. Had the assassination attempts on him become public knowledge now?

"I hear that you won't be making pills indefinitely, is that true?" the man asked.

"Oh, where did you hear that senior?" Alex asked.

"There are rumors that the Alchemy Association won't be holding the quarterly event with you, and with you being here, I'm worried that is true," he said.

Alex sighed. "I'm afraid that it is, senior," he said. "I won't be making pills for a long while."

"I see, that's a shame," the man said with a downtrodden expression. "I was looking forward to it as well."

"He can't help it," Liang Shufen said. "The Dark Phoenix assassins are after him."

"What?" the man's eyes narrowed. "Those bastards are after him?"

"Yes, so we can't help but hide him here," the woman said. "As a result, he won't be making pills for the public for a very long time."

"I see," the man said with conflicted emotion.

Alex was simply surprised that the woman was giving out the information so freely. Shouldn't the knowledge of him being a target from those assassins be hidden or something, at the very least from the literal owner of the biggest information trading agency in the goddamn continent?

Going around giving away the information was telling the assassins that he knew who they were and that they were after him. That would certainly give them the advantage and let them know that he had killed two of their members already.

"So you are protecting him, huh?" the man asked.

"Yes, that's all we can do for now. Going after those bastards would be useless after all. Who knows who they even are?" the woman said.

"That is true," the man said. Suddenly, his eyes widened. "Little brother, I might not be able to help protect you, but I should be able to still help you."

"Oh, and how is that, senior?" Alex asked.

"Give me some time. Maybe a couple of weeks or maybe even months. I will gather the most comprehensive piece of information about the Dark Phoenix I can, especially their assassins, and hand it

over to you," he said. "Even if it won't help you fight them, you should be able to not get caught off guard."

"Oh!" Alex thought when he heard that. He had thought of buying information on them, but he was trying to not give away information that he knew they were after him. But, if he got it through a middleman, that would certainly be helpful.

"Thank you, senior. I will really appreciate it," Alex said. "In return, please let me make a few pills for you. Just tell me what you want and I will have them prepared within the week."

"Really?" the man was excited. "I just need the cultivation pills and maybe a few healing pills that's all."

Alex nodded.

"Also," the man continued. "Don't worry about your information leaking. As of today, I will keep a tight grip on your information. Anything that hasn't already been shared will no longer be shared around."

Alex gave a grateful smile. "That would be truly helpful, senior."

Chapter 1089: Test Number 1

"Was it a good idea?" Alex asked. "Giving away my information so frivolously?"

"To little Zhu? That's alright," Liang Shufen said. "Don't worry about that."

Alex couldn't help but worry. "You trust him enough to give away such crucial information?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. "He's one of us after all, or at least in a way he is."

"One of us? Meaning... the council?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman said. "You can think of him as the phantom 11th member of the council that never was."

"Can I ask you to elaborate a little bit more?" he asked.

"Hmm, let's see what I can tell you," she said. "Little Zhu comes from the Zhu family, although I'm not sure if that family even exists anymore. He was there thousands of years ago during the time when we formed the council. He was one of us and could have become one of us right now, except he didn't join."

"He's not known to the public as anything other than the founder of the Insight Pavillion now though," she said. "He's made sure to not be associated with us so he can keep his free lifestyle."

"What was his reasoning for not joining? If I may ask." Alex was getting a little curious now.

"Let's see... for one, he was too weak at the time. He was merely a Saint core realm cultivator and... he simply happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. He got roped into what we had to do and as such, you can even say he was forced to make the oath with us," she said. "As for the other one, he might have thought that we— "

The old woman suddenly clutched her throat. "Oops, can't say that," she said with nervous laughter. Her oath had tightened its grip around her just then.

Alex noticed it but acted like he didn't. "Was he there when you went to attack the Western continent?" he asked.

"He wasn't there during the decision-making. He liked to stay in the mountains to the north where his home was," she said. "But since the plan involved bringing spirit veins for the place around his home, he went along as well. Well, many did. Most didn't have a choice."

Alex solemnly walked as he listened to her.

"And he opened the Insight Pavillion afterward?" Alex asked.

"Yeah, it was... a few years after we invaded the western continent, I believe," she said. "He was smart to have done that. Look at how big it is now."

Alex nodded. That was indeed smart.

"So I won't have to worry about him spreading the news of me being here?" he asked.

"Is that what you were worried about?" she asked. "Don't be worried then. Little Zhu is an honorable man. At the very least, he will keep his word. Besides, those bastards most likely already know about you being here."

"Really?" Alex was surprised.

The woman nodded. "You did teleport here, after all. People would have seen you and spread your information already. Not like we're hiding your presence here anyway," she said.

Alex nodded when he heard that. It was indeed true that the dark phoenix most likely already knew about him.

They returned back to the palace where Alex returned to his room to start looking through the talismans. He looked through the ones that had names in it so it would be easier for him. Looking at the ones without names would be useless for him anyway.

He didn't expect the dark phoenix assassins to use the information from the Insight Pavilion, but he did expect the people that commissioned them to.

At the very least, he hoped that they weren't aware that he knew who they might be.

The Dawn Immortal sect, the Jade Fire sect, The Yao family, the Kang family, and others. Alex especially took notice of them when looking through the talismans, but nothing came out of it in the end.

"I will just have to keep at it," he thought and put everything aside to start with the pills.

He relaxed for a bit to get his headspace in order before he brought out the ingredients. There were 6 water ingredients already on the recipe that he was supposed to use, but Alex was starting to wonder if he should confine himself to half a recipe or not.

He had tested half the recipe and had realized that the way the energies mixed together was totally different than the one for the earth pill. Which was to say that he couldn't just mimic that pill and fill in the blanks on the recipe.

Since that was the case, he had 2 ways to proceed from here at the moment, neither of which he was sure would work.

Either, he could continue down this path and try to figure out the remaining ingredients.

Or, he could discard the recipe completely and do everything by himself by using the earth pill's recipe as a model and copying it exactly, except with ingredients with water energy.

He wasn't sure if that would work, but he was happy to have that idea in case the first one didn't work.

"Sigh, it's going to take a while," he thought. Then, he began the tedious task.

He brought out every single water ingredient and checked its energy constitution. Once he knew about it all, he then tried to formulate a recipe in which the energy reacted with each other.

As he thought about the reaction, his mind worked in mysterious ways to quickly think of how the energy interacted with itself.

His Dao of Five Elemental Interaction was helping him in coming up with answers that would have otherwise taken hours to think of. Maybe he would even have to use the ingredients to learn about it.

Still, there was just too much to think about. A single ingredient could have a different rate at which its energy was diffused out of it. Every single variation of this diffusion would lead to a variation of energy that would have to react to another variation, making it infinitely hard to calculate with so many variables.

Just a week later, Alex had to stop as simply thinking about the energy wasn't working for him. Not only was there just too much to think about, but even if he did think about it, he still didn't know what the pill would do in the end.

He had a general idea, but it was still better to check for himself.

Alex brought out the cauldron and chose one of the combinations in his head that he was sure gave stable energy in the end.

He did not care about following the recipe properly, only having the resulting energy be usable. Even if it turned out to be less than 20% harmony, he was fine with it.

The first 6 ingredients and recipe were with him, so he followed it quickly. Once that was done, Alex followed his own made-up recipe.

Since there were ingredients that he hadn't worked with before, he had to adjust to their energy release rate on the go. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. Still, in the end, he managed to create a combination of water energy that could be put into a pill.

And so he did.

He quickly formed a pill with his newly found recipe and looked at it. With the pill in his hand, he could feel the energy structure in it, not that he could learn anything from just that.

He would need a lot more experience for that to work.

"Do I eat it?" he wondered. He could eat it with a Saint Nullifying pill, but doing so for every pill out there would be very complicated. Instead, he wanted to get through with the various pill he would be making without stopping at all.

"Can I use a pill swine?" he thought. Pill swine were very close to humans in their physiological makeup, but not all of them had water spiritual roots, so getting just those ones would be hard.

"Well that's not my problem to worry about," he thought and went out to request exactly that.

The swine were brought along the next day and kept behind the palace. Alex hadn't been to this place yet, so coming here was a new experience for him.

The small garden that was behind the palace wasn't anything special, but the giant, bronze dome that was beyond the garden was.

He saw some sort of giant door near the dome that was the path to inside the actual Sunborn Sanctuary.

Unfortunately, he had to ignore it for now. Not that he could open it even if he had the time for it.

Alex went up to the pill swine that were kept there, wasting no more time. He fed the pill he had to the swine and let his senses go deep into the swine as far as he could.

To his surprise, the swine were easy to see through with his senses due to their pitiful cultivation. He saw the water energy go through its body and go towards the core-like dantian at its navel area.

However, after going there, it disappeared. He saw nothing come out towards the pill swine's water spiritual root. The energy was absorbed by the swine, and turned into Qi for it to use to break through.

This one had been a failure.

But, he wasn't expecting it to be a success anyway so he was fine with it. He was simply going to have to try over and over again.

Chapter 1090: Test Number ???

It didn't take Alex long to realize just how much time he was going to have to spend on this one pill. He was thankful that he had realized that very early, so the months he would have to spend in his room working on it would no longer affect him as much.

Day after day, week after week, Alex continued trying out different pills he made the swine eat almost daily.

The only freedom he was even getting from this was when he was making pills for the others, or getting his information sent to him from the insight pavilion. Other than that, he spent every single day making these very pills.

Each variation brought out a different result and each result needed checking. However, no matter how much he checked, none of the pills actually worked at all.

He went through all the pill swine that were brought here and had to replace them too. Still, he wasn't successful.

At some point, Alex decided to stop what he was doing and try out his other method. He wanted to make a pill from scratch to follow the earth pill's recipe.

However, not even a month later he was forced to stop. Unfortunately, the two energies were fundamentally different and too unique to try and copy what one did for the other.

He was trying to use equivalent ingredients for each recipe to copy it. Instead of Earth energy, it would be Water. Instead of Metal and Water missing, it would be Wood and Fire, leaving Earth and Metal energy which would be the equivalent of Wood and Fire for the Earth ingredient.

He found a few such ingredients and was happy to start working on them when he noticed something. The water ingredient equivalent of an earth ingredient did not have anything in common at all.

Those two ingredients did something completely different from each other and had zero connections between them.

When Alex realized this, he was frustrated. He was frustrated that he had to go back to the first method, which was basically trial and error.

At least, he was getting better at it.

His mental simulation of a pill being made with the recipe at hand was getting improved by what he was doing. Experimenting with every possible variation he was thinking of made it easier for him to iron out the few errors his mental simulations had.

He was getting to the point where finding errors between the pill in his mind and the pill in his hand.

After months of experimentation, he was starting to have to rely less and less on actual pills, and with each answer, he was getting closer and closer to the correct one.

More time passed and he broke through to Saint Foundation 2nd realm at this time, but for some reason, he couldn't find himself to be excited about it. His days had been consumed by this one pill and he worked towards it all the time.

He was more excited about the fact that he was getting ever so closer to the water spiritual root pill.

It had been nearly 400 days since he started working on it, and on this day, after thousands of different variations, Alex came upon one that just felt right.

There were about 7 additional ingredients for this recipe in addition to the 6 that were already there.

He got very excited about it and quickly started making it. He still struggled with making the pill due to his lack of experience with the ingredients that were involved, but that did not stop him from doing his best to make the pill.

About 15 minutes later, he had a pill ready to be used. He instantly teleported outside the palace and ran up to a pill swine that was being kept there.

He fed the pill to the swine and excitedly waited for the energy in the pill to make its way through the swine's body.

It went through its meridian down to its core-like dantian. Most of the pills failed here as they were either absorbed by the dantian or flew out to either do something else or cause havoc on the swine's body.

Alex waited patiently. For a moment, it looked like he failed again, however, a moment later, the water energy burst out of the dantian and into the swine's spiritual roots.

It lingered there for a moment before disappearing completely.

Alex's eyes went wide when he realized that the spiritual root had absorbed the water energy... and had improved.

The water spiritual root had improved because of his pill.

"Yes!" he couldn't help but exclaim in happiness. So many days of work, torturous days had finally paid off.

He had found the recipe.

He checked the swine for a bit longer and waited to see if there would be any lingering changes that came with the pill. There were none.

Immediately, rejuvenated by the discovery, Alex returned back to his room and made the pill again.

The pill came out to be around 43%, nothing good in his eyes, but it was still good enough for him to test with.

This was the final test that would tell him how good the pill was. He knew the pill worked, he just wanted to know to what extent, and see if there was anything else it did to a human that it didn't do to a pill swine.

While pill swine were almost the same as humans, the 'almost' made all the difference. He needed to make sure one could use the pill even as a human.

He quickly cleared his cauldron and brought out a separate group of ingredients. This one was going to be used to make a Saint Nullifying pill for himself.

He wasted no time and made the pill. It took some time since this was a pill he couldn't hurry with, but he still made it relatively quickly.

Once the pill was ready, he ate the water pill in his hands and brought out the nullifying pill as he got ready for the water pill to take effect.

Similar to the earth pill, the water pill also diffused into his bloodstream and found its way through his meridians going down to his dantian. Unlike a swine's dantian, Alex's was clear and could be seen through, a sign that he was in the Saint realm.

He saw the energy go through his Qi nearly unobstructed and came back out through either water spiritual roots.

Alex quickly swallowed the pill in his hand before the water energy could take effect. He sensed the water energy start its process to improve the spiritual root, but before it could do so, the volatile energy from the nullifying pill quickly erased the water energy, leaving simply neutral energy behind.

The neutral energy didn't do anything helpful or harmful, so Alex quickly circulated it out of the spiritual room and pushed it into his dantian.

His dantian had grown a bit stronger now, having thicker crystal pillars made up of Qi, so they could store a bit more Qi as well.

Alex ignored that for now and simply held a satisfied smile. It worked exactly as intended.

"I should finish it all quickly," he thought and started working on the recipe.

He had the recipe, so now it was time to improve it. Surprisingly, he was done with it before he could even realize it.

He had been working nonstop for so long that this small stretch of time went by in a flash for him. Now that he was done with it, he finally had the perfect recipe.

So, it was time to make the pills.

Alex wasn't sure just how many of the pills he was supposed to make, so he decided to do the same thing as he had done with his earth pills.

He was going to make as many as he could with the ingredients he had, and then sell them. He had received a hefty sum of money for the last ones he had sold, so these ones should sell quite well too.

He started making the pills and a day or two later, he was done with it. There weren't many ingredients for him to work on, so he was done quite quickly.

Now that he was done, he left his room.

Kang Xuefeng and Gong Liuxian were meditating in a lounge area in the palace when they noticed Alex's arrival. These were the two people that were not in deep cultivation as they were in charge of taking care of the continents in case of some emergency.

"Senior Kang, Senior Gong," Alex called out as he walked in.

"Young man, what are you doing here?" Kang Xuefeng asked. "Do you need something?"

"No, I'm here to give you these," Alex said as he handed over a storage bag to the old men.

"Hm? What's this?" one of them asked.

"It's the pills I've been working on," he said. "The one that improves your water spiritual roots."

"I see— wait, you did it?" old man Kang couldn't believe it.

"No way! You finished the recipe?" Gong Liuxian asked.

"Yes," Alex said. "Where is senior Lei? He will be happy to know that his broken recipe is now full."

"He's in deep cultivation, and won't be out for another 8 months," old man Kang said. "But don't worry, his excitement won't dwindle when he finds out about the pill."

Alex nodded. "Please give it to the others who can make use of it," he said. "As for the rest, can you help me sell them?"