

Alchemy 1361

Chapter 1361: Hall of Fame

Alex walked into the Hall of Fame as the mayor took him in. The elders followed behind him and arrived in a giant open room where very few paintings were hanging from the wall.

There was a circular set of stairs that went around the walls of this massive building, and along those very walls was where the paintings were.

"Right this way, your majesty," the headmaster said and took him to the stairs, where Alex could start his journey of viewing the paintings in the room.

"There are a total of 12 paintings in the Hall of Fame at the moment," the headmaster explained. "Each one better than the next. We will be starting off with the older ones and going halfway up to the stairs where the latest ones are."

Before they arrived at the first painting, the headmaster paused and turned around. "I must warn you your majesty, some of these paintings might be hard to view due to the subject of the painting itself and the Intent that accompanies it."

"If at any point you feel like you are hurt or disgusted by the feeling, simply close your eyes and look away. The Intent won't affect you if you stop looking at it," the headmaster said.

"Thank you for your concern, headmaster," Alex said. "I shall do as you say."

The headmaster nodded and took him to the first painting.

Alex glanced at the painting and started feeling a mix of warmth and heartache at the same time.

The painting was a picture of a small girl in a white dress with a bright smile, playing in a field of flowers. The entire painting looked so beautiful, and yet... the ones looking at it could only feel the sadness.

"This painting is called The Summer's Dream. It was painted by an excellent painter over 17 thousand years ago, and the subject of the painting is the painter's daughter, who he lost to some incurable physical conditions."

"He made this painting as a method of moving on from her death that had affected him so much at the time, but also as a way of never forgetting her."

"This is truly a masterpiece and is the painting that made the people at the time start the hall of fame to commemorate the painter at the time. He never made anything as good from what we can tell, but he certainly created precedence that allowed 11 different painters to send their names down the annals of history.

Alex stared at the painting for a while, taking in everything. He thought he saw the flowers move in the wind, the girl swinging on the swing. He could hear happy, cheerful laughter from the girl and could tell that she was very loved.

This was a truly moving piece.

After looking at it for a while, they decided to move on.

The second painting was from 12 thousand years ago, a whole 5 thousand years after the first painting.

It was a piece called 'The War God's Fury', and it depicted a man killing an army of thousands of cultivators in a single strike.

Apparently, it was made by a man who once had to fight against an entire sect of cultivators to rescue the woman he loved that had been kidnapped. However, before he could rescue her, the sect killed the woman, earning the man's fury.

He had fought them all in a bloody life-and-death battle where he had killed them all. The painting obviously depicted a rather exaggerated version of the events, but it still managed to send across the feeling of fury and anger through the painting.

Alex could feel his heart beat faster as his own fighting spirit was touched on after looking at the painting.

He closed his eyes and calmed his feelings before opening them. "Truly magnificent," he said.

They moved on to the third painting and Alex stopped as he looked at it. As soon as he looked at it, an odd feeling had grown inside of him.

It was a painting of a mountain, nothing else. It was a single mountain on a white background that wasn't even properly colored in at all.

The mountain was without any greenery, so it was entirely brown in color, and it also wasn't the best-looking mountain at all.

However, the Intent that came through the painting was not something Alex had expected. Even more than the first two paintings, this was something else entirely.

"The piece is just called the mountain," the headmaster said. "It was created by a painter who—"

The headmaster stopped when he saw Alex put his hand up to make him stop. He didn't want a description now. He simply wanted to see this painting.

It was possible for him to tell what was happening here to some extent. This wasn't a painting made by a painter at all, but rather someone very amateur. However, the heart and soul they had put into this painting made it come out quite well.

And the Intent that was driven into the painting made this a masterpiece.

The elders and headmaster stopped looking at the painting and started looking at Alex instead. The headmaster above all was surprised to see Alex's reaction as he understood what it meant for someone to view this painting in particular with such high attention.

He slowly stepped back and asked the elders to step back with him. They left Alex alone to view the painting for a while.

Alex wasn't even aware of what was happening around him. He knew he was safe here, so he had completely focused on the painting itself.

The more he looked at the mountain, the more he thought he understood what it was trying to convey. The more he looked at the mountain, the more he understood the mystery surrounding it.

After staring at it without moving for nearly half an hour, Alex reached into his ring and pulled out a bottle. Then, he pulled out a pill from inside of it, one with 8 veins on it.

The elders immediately recognized the pill and were surprised at what Alex was planning on doing. As Alex ate the pill and sat down, the elders requested the headmaster to move even further away.

The headmaster was more than happy to comply. After all, it wasn't an uncommon scenario to see someone learn some mystery into the unknown after looking at that painting.

After all, that was why this was placed in the Hall of Fame in the first place, despite the obviously bad art in the painting itself.

The three stood there, watching Alex meditate on the knowledge he had just acquired. They were silent the whole time through, not speaking a single word from start to finish.

The headmaster had shut the building down, not allowing anyone from entering for the time being. He wasn't sure how long it would take for Alex to learn it, or if he could even learn it, but he was ready to give him as much time as he needed.

The three started sitting down and cultivating as well, waiting for Alex to be done.

A little less than a day later, the three of them looked up into the sky where they could feel the fluctuations in the aura.

The two elders felt nothing weird about the situation, other than thinking that their king was going to learn another Dao.

However, the headmaster of the school was a different case. He had seen people learn Dao from a painting, but it was never something that happened on a single day.

It took months, if not years to properly learn everything about a Dao before learning it. Had Alex been trying to learn this Dao for a long time and this was his lucky break?

It was possible, which would mean that he was lucky to have come here and witnessed this painting. However, if that was not the case then... had he just called down the worldly laws just by meditating for a single day?

The truth was in fact somewhere in between. Alex hadn't tried to learn this dao at all, but he had gained some insight into it for a while now after all the pills he had made that used this very element.

Coming here and seeing the painting was in fact a fortunate encounter that had helped him push himself that much further into looking into the mysteries of this Dao.

On top of that, an 8-veined Dao pill helped him a lot with processing the knowledge he had just learned, which allowed him to call the Worldly laws down so early.

The worldly laws descended onto Alex, helping him learn about the Dao. At the same time, Alex's mind grew lucid as the pill's effect wore off a lot, which allowed him to grasp the opportunity that was provided to him.

While he tried his best to learn the Dao, he also used the opportunity to start cultivating as this was the best moment to do so.

It had been a while since he had entered the 6th Saint Core realm, so it was about time for him to go that much further.

Half an hour later, the worldly laws descended back into heaven and its aura fully disappeared from the world afterward.

Alex took a deep breath and opened his eyes now that he was done with it.

Using the random coincidence as a catalyst for it, Alex had broken through to the 7th Saint Core realm.

And at the same time, he had also learned the Dao of Earth.

Chapter 1362: More Paintings

The headmaster couldn't hide his surprise as he congratulated Alex multiple times for breaking through and learning a Dao at the same time.

Alex gave a small smile, apologizing for causing a commotion.

After the few finished discussing, Alex allowed the elders to view the painting as well, but since neither of them needed to see it, they moved on.

The 4th painting, after the mountain, was a canvas with no paint at all. Alex was at first confused about what was going on, but the Intent of the painting made it somehow clear to him what it was.

Snow.

The canvas was supposed to be full of snow. He could feel the bone-chilling cold coming from the canvas that held nothing. Someone really had managed to place their intent on the pages without putting any paint in there.

Alex thought it was an incredible feat and looked to the headmaster for an answer.

"This is a painting from 9 thousand years ago called White. It depicts a snowstorm that his previous majesty and the majesty had to go through in the Northern Continent when they went to take part in the first InterContinental Competition.

"InterContinental Competition?" Alex looked at the Headmaster. "What's that?"

"It was a competition that only lasted a single time that took place in the Northern Continent. It was created to bridge the gap between the youths of the various continents if I'm not remembering wrong," the headmaster said. "Apparently the one who drew this painting had been part of that group."

"There was something like that in the past, huh? And it took place in the Northern Continent?" Alex asked. 9 thousand years ago would be when the Snow Immortal sect was still the ruler of the Northern Continent. He could see why the knowledge of that time was gone.

"Well, I am only letting you know what I know, so I can't really confirm the truth on this one, but I don't see why it could be a lie," the headmaster said. "Especially given this Intent. It's quite hard to fake an Intent, you know?"

"I see," Alex said. "But then... why was it a one-time thing? They should've continued it," Alex said.

"Well, that's because..." the headmaster hesitated a bit before speaking. "Sigh, it's apparently because the youths taken from the Eastern Continent were so strong that they defeated all the other competitors from the other 3 continents without a single loss. With that sort of result, they saw no reason to carry on the competition."

"Ah!" Alex chuckled a bit. "That actually makes a lot of sense. Thank you for telling me that."

The 5th painting in line was a piece from 8 thousand years ago called The Emperor's Ascent. It was a piece depicting the glorious day when Long Tiankong was crowned the Emperor of the continent after his father gave up the throne to enjoy the last of his life in peace.

The painting detailed the tremendous amount of people that were gathered in the square where the coronation had taken place, and even the silhouette of the Azure Dragon hung in the sky.

Cheers, Glory, Excitement. Alex could feel it all through the painting, reminding him of the day he himself became the King of the Southern Continent.

He could feel the aura of the dragon in the sky, blessing the new emperor's ascent to the throne.

"Not bad!" he said softly. "I kinda got to see his majesty's coronation." He chuckled a bit and moved on to the next painting.

The 6th painting was from 7 thousand years ago and depicted a person's battle against a sea monster. It was an incredible-looking piece of art that most definitely belonged in the hall.

The 7th painting made Alex feel like he was standing in an inferno. It was a painting that was drawn with the Fire Dao Intent woven into the paintings, so anyone who looked at it could feel the Intent of the Dao coming through it.

If Alex didn't have any Fire Dao right now, he might have learned it all right there.

The 8th painting was from 6 thousand years ago and depicted an execution.

"It's called 'When the Kingdom Dies'. It's a painting of the execution of the 5 kings that tried to dethrone his majesty 6 thousand years ago. From right to left, we have King Fang, Queen Fen, Queen Jang, King Lin, and King Xuang. All 5 kings were executed back then, their kingdoms replaced to mere colors, and new kings and queens placed on the throne."

Alex looked at the painting as the haunting sense of dread flowed from it. The crimson color on the canvas and the color of blood made him smell iron. The faceless crowd made him feel suffocated, and he could almost hear the cries of the kings and queens who were executed that day.

The raw emotions on the page weren't something Alex had expected to feel so deeply, but he did. He could almost sense the painter's lament at what had happened.

After viewing it for a little longer, they moved on to the 9th painting.

This painting depicted the Azure dragon and some raw sketches of a bird, snake, and tortoise, all of whom were standing in front of a dead white tiger.

"It's called 'The Oathbreaker'," the headmaster said. "It depicts the time when the White Tiger broke his oath to not interfere in this realm and tried to take over. Fortunately, his majesty, the Azure Dragon, and the other rulers of the continents went and defeated him."

"I see," Alex said, saying nothing more. It was neither the right time nor was he interested in revealing the truth of what happened to the world back then. They were free to believe what they wanted to.

Alex looked at it for a while, enjoying it as nothing more than a piece of painting. He moved on to the next one, and as soon as he looked at it, he nearly vomit himself.

The image depicted of the Dragon Emperor with a giant sword, swinging it around, killing a black panther beast in the process.

"This painting is known as the 'The Moment of Victory'," the headmaster said. "It depicts the war that took place in the Western Continent where all 3 continents joined together to go and destroy evil," the headmaster started explaining.

"It's the moment in the war against the Central continent where our emperor won a decisive battle against one of the White Tiger's subordinates. This was the battle that turned the tide against the beast, allowing us to fully defeat them back then."

Alex looked at the image that gave a feeling of excitement and glory. However, feeling those feelings while watching who was most likely the Black Jaguar's father wasn't that exciting or glorious in his eyes.

He would rather not look at this painting at all.

He nodded while the headmaster explained a bit more about the painting, but he wasn't listening at all. He was waiting for the next painting, so he walked up as long as soon as he could after the headmaster was done talking.

Then, they finally got onto the 11th painting.

Chapter 1363: Tian Honglui

The next painting in line, the 11th one was named 'The Players' Descent'.

Alex looked at the painting in a bit of confusion as there wasn't anything in that painting that made him think of players.

The painting was instead just a piece of art with a landscape view of the city, with the sky wide above it. In the sky was where the clouds were marked in lights of bright green and deep gold, surrounded by lightning that seemed to scar the sky itself.

The wind seemed to blow the clear clouds, while lightning snaked around it scattering through the sky. The golden light shined from nowhere and brightened everything in the vicinity.

The city was colored green and gold, reminding Alex of the cauldron his master had given him so long ago. The lightning seemed normal, not like when one was breaking through or forming pill clouds.

It also only remained in the sky, never falling down.

Alex could feel the awe and shock the painter had felt when he drew this. He had wanted to transfer all that he felt at the time into the painting and he had done so successfully.

The Intent was quite strong with this one and definitely gave a surreal feeling when looking at it. Alex could even feel his fear.

There was no elemental Dao aura from this one, which was a missed opportunity to better enhance the experience, but the Intent alone was enough to make it a masterpiece.

Alex stared at it for a while, and the headmaster finally spoke.

"Ah, the Player's Descent. One of our newest masterpieces," he said. "After over four thousand years, when everyone had stopped expecting masterpieces to exist, one person came and made this."

"A truly talented young painter from the Gold Kingdom, Tian Honglui of the Tian family."

"A young painter? This was made by someone young?" Alex asked.

"Yes, young," the headmaster said. "Although, by your majesty's standard, he might be quite old."

"How old is he?" Alex asked.

"Hmm, about 400 years old I believe," the headmaster said. "He's quite young for a Saint."

"He is," Alex said. As long as he stopped comparing humans from the central continent with these people, he could see how talented these folks were.

Alex looked back at the painting and said, "Explain to me what this is about."

"Right," the headmaster said. "The Players' Descent marks the day of the arrival of the players. The phenomenon that you see here heralded the arrival of those players. The painter was able to capture the exact feeling everyone had felt that day, a sense of awe and wonder, which is why it is in here."

"Oh," Alex said with a surprised look on his face. "It heralded the arrival of the players, you say."

"Indeed," the headmaster said. "This phenomenon appeared one day, and 2 days later we started getting Players. If that wasn't a signal for their arrival, I don't know what is."

Alex got curious and turned back toward the two elders who were equally confused. They shook their heads toward Alex, telling him no such thing had happened to them.

And from what he could remember no one talked about those things back in the Western Continent when he was just starting out too. Then why did such a thing happen here?

Alex fell into thought for a while, wondering about all the things that were different in the Eastern Continent from the other continents.

The number of players for one was certainly different. They singlehandedly had more players here than anywhere else in the other continent, holding way more than the other continents combined.

The Eastern Continent was also a way better place for one to grow, so it could be that the senior did something to prepare them for what was going to happen here.

Or maybe the Eastern Continent had somehow interacted with the teleportation formation? Causing some sort of phenomenon to occur before the players arrived.

Alex searched for answers, but it seemed like there weren't any. He shook his head confused and annoyed. "Let's move on," he said.

"Yes," the headmaster said and walked up front.

Alex walked too and before he could even look at the final painting, he could feel an aura that he hadn't felt in a very, very long time.

He looked at the painting as his eyes slowly started widening in shock.

The painting depicted of a single thing, a single giant white line that went from the sky to the ground in a single stroke. A lightning strike.

Just from the shape and size of the lightning, as well as the fear and destruction intent that came from the painting, he could tell that it was neither the Tribulation lightning nor the Pill Cloud lightning.

The painting he was looking at depicted what was most definitely a Heavenly Judgment lightning.

"Here we have another painting by our friend Tian Honglui. He was so talented that he managed to make not one but two paintings that made it into the Hall of Fame."

"This one is called the 'The Lightning God's Anger'. It depicts a rather weird instance that we are not sure what exactly it was," the headmaster said. "The empty sky suddenly turned dark and cloudy and the lightning bolt dropped from the heaven."

"Where did it drop?" Alex asked the headmaster.

"Hmm? I don't think we know exactly. But it was somewhere in the east of here," the headmaster said. "As you can probably tell from the lightning bolt, the aura of the lightning was so threatening that it scared so many."

"Even this artist himself didn't attempt to draw the lightning from that time for almost 5 years before he eventually couldn't hold himself back," the headmaster said.

Alex knew what the Heavenly Judgment lightning was as he had seen it happen to Ren Xiao firsthand. The elders knew what it was as well as they had seen it happen to Scarlet firsthand as well.

However, it didn't seem like any of these guys knew what exactly this lightning was.

"Was there a single lightning strike?" Alex asked.

"No, there were 3," the headmaster said with a surprised look. "How did you know, your majesty?"

Alex didn't answer. "And the date, when exactly did this happen?" he asked instead.

"The date?" the headmaster turned around and looked at the painting. "It was... ah, right. It was about 2 months after the events of his first painting. It's about that time frame, yeah."

"2 months after the players started coming into the game?" Alex repeated the man's words as a timeline slowly formed in his head.

Less than 2 months after the players had arrived on this continent, something had happened that had caused the Heavenly Judgment to fall, and if he didn't know any better, he would guarantee that the one that was hit by it was none other than the Azure Dragon.

That was to say, until about half a century ago, the Dragon was still alive.

However, that wasn't even what perplexed Alex the most. The thing that made his head hurt was the fact that this event was so incredibly close to when Pearl and his mother were sent to the Western Continent.

That was to say, the Azure Dragon might have been involved in some form in the attack that led to Pearl's mother dying at his hand.

Chapter 1364: Qi Lines

The Azure Imperium had a hand in Pearl's mother's death, and it happened around the same time the Azure Dragon had died.

'Was the Azure Dragon involved? Were the humans acting under the Dragon's orders?' Alex thought. He tried to make sense of the information and that was the only thing he could come up with right away.

Given that the Heavenly Judgment had fallen in the east, it was either in the Dragon's own secret realm, or towards the Beast Paradise where Pearl must have been born.

"What do you think, your majesty?" the headmaster asked. "Amazing, isn't it?"

Alex quickly stopped thinking for now and nodded. "Yes, it's quite amazing," he said.

"Yes, he's a gem, this Honglue kid," the headmaster said. "Truly one of the most amazing individuals in the entire continent."

"He is," Alex said. "I would love to meet this person."

"I'm sure he will meet you if you request for him, your majesty," the headmaster said.

Alex nodded. "I'll think about it. Thank you for showing us the Hall of Fame. This was truly quite an experience," he said.

"Haha, it was my pleasure, your majesty," the man replied happily.

Alex left the hall along with his elders and made his way back to the palace. He had no intention of visiting any other place today as a lot of things were on his mind.

Once he was in his room, he called out to Pearl and told him what he had witnessed in the 12th painting, the one that was called The Lightning God's Anger.

"Do you think the Azure Dragon had a hand in my mother's death?" Pearl asked.

"I think so, but it's hard to tell," Alex said. "In the first place, it could also be a coincidence that these two things were happening simultaneously, but I don't think it was."

Pearl stayed quiet, not knowing what to say.

"I think we have to find your grandmother first if we want to know anything more about your parents. If all is well, she should still be in the beast's paradise, but... with your mother being attacked, I can't tell."

Pearl nodded. "Either way, we cannot ask for any sort of help from anyone that is remotely connected to the Emperor and the royal family, right?" he asked.

"Yes," Alex said. "We will have to do it all on our own. Let's see when we can go to the Beast Paradise. I will have to wait for a while so the emperor doesn't get suspicious of why I'm trying to visit that place right away."

"Where do we go next then?" Pearl asked.

"The Emerald Kingdom, as I told the Crown Prince," Alex said. "But before that... I have another school to visit, and learn some more."

Alex planned on visiting the Royal School of Artifacts.

He went there the very next day and quickly joined them. A normal person would have to take part in the test to at least reach Level 1 to become part of the school, but Alex got to join without it.

He was given a bit of an introduction to the school by the headmasters, and following that, Alex started learning how to make the artifacts.

This was the first time he was learning about making artifacts and not just about making swords and armor which was a smaller section of making artifacts.

Artifacts were a weird thing. Sometimes they were difficult to make. Sometimes they were not. It all depended on the material used to make the artifact as well as the addition made by the creator that added something onto the artifact.

The additions were usually made to allow for Qi to be accepted and then used by the artifacts in case their materials weren't able to. Such a thing could be achieved either by carving formations onto the materials that had made the artifact or by using Qi lines.

There was also an increasing number of people advocating for runes to be used instead after Scripts were made popular by the players.

They each had their own advantages and disadvantages to them and one could choose what they wanted for their artifacts based on what they needed it to do.

Qi Lines were carved directly into the object to just hold Qi. This was what was used most of the time as it was a path for Qi to enter an object and then be used as the maker wished.

It could also be deliberately made into shapes that could allow for things to happen that wouldn't require the user's intent. The shape of the Qi line was for each line, and the more complicated it was, the more things it could do.

In Midnight's case, Alex had made Qi lines inside of it with Godslayer's help such that when he poured Yin Qi into it, he could use the God-Rending Death Blade technique. If it was made into other shapes, he could probably use various other techniques.

And all it would require was for the user to pour in Qi. That was perhaps the biggest advantage of Qi lines when compared to the other two.

One did not have to worry about how they used their Qi to activate them. As long as the Qi flowed into it, it worked.

However, there was a reason why they weren't the only things used. In fact, there were 2 reasons for it.

First, the Qi lines needed to be in specific shapes, and as such you couldn't necessarily fit it all into a single object. For example, the Qi lines for armors wrapped around the armors while making various shapes.

That sort of shape just wouldn't fit on a sword. Similarly, a sword's long Qi lines wouldn't fit in armor either.

So, if one wanted their artifact to do something very specific, they needed to be aware of what sort of shape they would require and had little freedom regarding that.

Second, the Qi lines were permanent and you couldn't do anything about it. Every time you poured in Qi, the Qi lines would activate no matter what. So, if one ever needed something changed about the artifact, the only way to do it would be to break the artifact down and rebuild it.

Also, there was the fact that there wasn't that much information on Qi lines in this realm, so it couldn't be used to its full potential.

In opposition to that, there was a lot known about Formations and Scripts.

Formations could easily be replaced with another one and made to work differently if set up that way.

Scripts could do a lot more than either Formation or Qi lines could do with little material to work with.

Many items from Pill testers to flying boats used formations and scripts in them. They were widely popular for most things, but that was not to say they weren't without flaws.

Neither of those things could work on their own and always required spirit stones to activate them.

In formation's case, you couldn't even activate it if it wasn't metal. Anything else needed either careful pouring of Qi which was pretty much impossible or a direct connection to some other form that was connected to a spirit vein.

In the script's case, it simply couldn't be used without resonating spirit stones or veins with the object and was impossible to power up in the midst of battle if the spirit stones ran out.

Alex continued learning a lot more and very soon he started making things as well.

Chapter 1365: Making Artifacts

A month or so had passed since Alex had started learning about artifacts. He had mostly stuck to the knowledge part of the learning where he was making sure he knew all the materials and Qi lines he needed to know before making the artifact.

Today was the first day when he decided to make an artifact himself.

After a lot of deliberation of what he should make, he decided to start with something small, but useful.

A storage bag.

A storage bag consisted of exactly 1 material. A leather from any beast that could handle Qi lines.

Alex had a small circular piece of leather that was about 20 centimeters in diameter in front of him, and a random piece of string to tie the pouch.

The leather came from the skin of a Stringhorned Deer and was an above-average leather when it came to making storage pouches.

He remembered the method to make a storage bag.

First, he had to make circular Qi lines inside the leather while heating it up to make it possible. Then he had to tie up the pouch and plate it on the formation. Then, he needed to activate the formation.

He didn't have a formation, but he didn't need it. Compared to other people, Alex was going to have an easier time with this for sure.

He was in a private room, so he had nothing to worry about and started making the artifact.

First, he took the leather and started pouring Qi lines into it. The Qi lines were slightly complicated, but Alex found them easy to form. The heat required came from his Dao and it easily helped him keep the leather hot and highly flexible without burning it.

With the heat in control, he made multiple Qi lines through the entire leather. The more Qi lines he made, the larger the storage would be, so he only stopped when there was no more space.

Once he was done with making Qi lines, he let the leather rest and cool down as the Qi lines were set up. Alex sped up the process slightly, but not a lot as he didn't want the leather to start having cracks in it. That would destroy the entire thing.

After a few minutes, it completely cooled down, so Alex wrapped it around with the string, making it look like a normal storage pouch. However, it couldn't store in objects just yet.

It didn't have any space in it.

That was where the formation would come in, but Alex didn't need a formation to use space.

The moment he started using his Dao, the space inside the room started turning and twisting as it was slowly pinched and threaded into the storage bag.

At the same time, Alex started pouring Qi into the leather to activate the Qi lines in there.

As the Space went in, the Qi lines started holding onto it. That was a quirk of the beast leather that made it possible for Qi lines to be used in a certain fashion.

Each Qi line could only hold so much space, however, so after a while, it started rejecting Qi that was poured into it one by one.

Alex continued pouring in the Qi and space until the storage bag could no longer handle any more space. When he realized his Qi was being rejected due to the lack of any functional Qi lines, he stopped.

He also stopped dragging in the space. The moment he did so, the excess space burst out into the room, shaking it a bit before passing through the objects, replacing the space within them.

Alex ignored that and looked at the storage bag he had made.

The storage bag looked no different from the millions of other storage bags he had seen. The leather and strings' color were always different, but fundamentally, they were always just storage bags.

Alex then poured Qi into the storage bag and realized that it was surprisingly quite big. He had managed to add a bit more Qi lines than an average cultivator most likely could, so it turned out better than most.

The storage bag had enough space to hold something as large as two spirit veins coiled together. It was as big as one of the larger storage bags that could be bought in the market.

If Alex wanted to make a larger storage bag, he would have to use leather that could function much better with the Qi lines, as well as make more Qi lines, which would require the leather to be slightly larger.

Once he was done, he reviewed his work for a while before being satisfied with it.

Once that was over, he started moving on to bigger things one by one.

The next item Alex made a few days later was a pill tester. For a pill tester, whether it used fog or directly showed the harmony of the pill, he needed 3 things.

A glass container where the pill would go, a formation that actually tested the pill, and a small metal compartment that connected the two.

Alex could've used any sort of glass from outside, but he decided to make it on his own. He learned to forge glass and then blow it into shape. However, it was only later that he realized that he didn't need to do that sort of thing.

The glass came from sands which were part of Earth. And as someone who had recently learned the Dao of Earth, Alex could freely manipulate it to a certain degree to whatever shape he wanted it to be, as long as no one had any Qi or Intent acting on it.

Once he made the glass, he made the compartment that would attach to the glass. It required some Qi lines which he added and then moved on to making the formation, which was beyond simple. He carved the formation himself and attached it to the back of the glass where a metal compartment was already attached beforehand.

Once that was done, he placed the spirit stones into the metal compartment and closed it.

The formation remained idle when there was nothing to test. When a pill was finally placed, the Qi lines recognized something was different and took in Qi around them and activated the formation that immediately gave the Harmony of the pill.

Alex tried it with the pills he had and found that it was quite accurate, which meant that another one of his artifacts was successful.

After a bit of testing, he agreed with the information he had learned about the lifetime of the pill vessel. It had said that on a single spirit stone, it could last for months of very active usage, and years of passive usage.

It seemed true.

Alex spent the next couple of months making bigger and bigger things, even going so far as to make swords that were just as good as Midnight, without the artifact spirit in them of course.

After he was certain he knew a lot, he finally decided to take a test and on the very first test, he surprised the teachers after reaching Level 6 at once.

Once he achieved that, Alex happily left the school as he had no longer much need for it.

Chapter 1366: Greenheart City

The Greenheart city of the Emerald Kingdom was its capital. Located around the center of the kingdom, it was one of the biggest cities in all of the empire.

Also, being located right next to the Beast Paradise as well as the fact that it had the Hundred Blossom Valley, it was also one of the main hubs where alchemists gathered to learn and share their craft with others.

Alex arrived outside of the city on a rather fast-flying boat that was used by the army on which he was escorted. After learning that he did not wish to use the teleportation formation and instead wanted to fly all the way here, the Crown Prince himself had ordered the men to send him here this way.

Alex landed outside of the city with 3 members of the army walking with him. 2 of them were of lower status, but one was a general who was made to guard Alex and the two Elders that had come with him.

"This is the Greenheart City, your majesty," the general said as they walked through the grassy land before arriving on the rocky path.

The general had introduced himself as General Fan of the Tail Legion, so Alex didn't really know what his full name was. Also, as a member of the Tail Legion, he was nothing but someone waiting to be put to use, and he finally was.

Alex looked around at the people that lined up to enter the heavily guarded capital of the Emerald Kingdom. He saw a few people looking at him and then pointing at him to show their friends and families.

"Sigh, I should have worn a different face for this exact reason," Alex thought as he was worried that the information about his arrival would quickly spread.

He had left his face as it was so that his cousin could know that he was here, but that still made him feel annoyed as he didn't wish to be treated as a King, but rather a normal person that would walk by this place.

Unfortunately, such a thing would never have been possible in the very first place.

As Alex walked toward Greenheart City, he saw a group of people that walked toward him.

"Wait, I thought they weren't supposed to know about my arrival," Alex turned to the general and asked.

"Hmm, his royal highness must have notified them of your arrival," the general said. "It's a good thing, your majesty. It's hard to tell what sort of problems we would face on our own. Having the King's help is very welcomed."

Alex sighed and put on a smile as he met with the king.

"Your Majesty, you're finally here," the jovial giant king of the Emerald Kingdom, Jin Xiaojian spoke up. "I had hoped you would come earlier, but this is fine as well."

"Greetings, King Jin," Alex greeted. "I'm sorry for not letting you know I was coming earlier. It must've been troublesome to find out at the last moment."

"Nonsense," the King said with a mighty laugh. "We have been prepared to receive you for the past 3 months since we knew you would come for the Endless Shadow Abyss."

Alex nodded. "That is part of the reason why I am here," he said.

"Hehe, you don't have to tell me the other reason, your majesty. I've already been notified about it," the King said. "She will come to the city soon for the Abyss's opening, so you can meet with her then."

Alex questioned what he was talking about for a second before realizing it. 'Talia' he thought. 'The prince must've told him about her.'

That was a little troublesome now that Alex thought about it. He hadn't really planned on talking to this girl if possible, but it seemed now he had to, even if for appearance's sake.

It would've been so much easier had the Dragon Emperor and his family not been so shady with their past actions. But, asking an Emperor of any sort to not be shady would be an impossible task.

One only had to look at how they had to survive in the family to become the Emperor before realizing what had shaped them to be what they were at the moment.

"I am looking forward to meeting her," Alex quickly replied to the King, who simply laughed out loud.

"I'm sure you'll find her delightful. Everyone in my Kingdom likes her, from old to poor. There is no one that will tell you that she isn't the perfect match," the man said.

Alex smiled. "We'll see," he said.

"Let us leave then, your majesty," he said and took Alex in.

Alex got onto a carriage that was previously prepared for him. Nearly 10 men rode in that carriage and Alex started speaking with the king while looking around at his city.

The Greenheart City looked a lot more... natural than the Dragon Capital appeared to be. It didn't look overly planned and instead what a city would come to be if people just settled in one place over time.

The buildings looked more or less similar to what he'd seen from the architecture of the Eastern Continent, only a lot greener as trees and plants were planted all across the sidepaths, giving the city a natural feel.

From what he could gather, it seemed that everything had been like this ever since the days of the Fang Kingdom that was there before this one.

After looking at the city, he closely looked at the king and his retainers. The King himself was at the upper realms of the Saint Soul realm, but his retainers were strong with both having above Saint Transformation 3rd realm cultivation base.

That was quite surprising to Alex to see a King that wasn't that strong. But then... neither was he, so he didn't bother asking.

Instead, he asked about how the king came to become a king.

"We were chosen from a young group of talents and put on the throne by the Emperor himself after the near-rebellion last time," the King said.

"I see," Alex said. He had learned about that info already, but he wanted to learn more.

"How does that work exactly? If you don't mind me asking," Alex said. "As in, is there a time period for how long you can be a king or is it forever?"

"It's... technically forever," the King said.

"Technically?" Alex asked.

"Yes," the king said. "There are a few instances where I will have to let go of the throne. Mostly 3 main ones."

"First, if the emperor wants me removed from the throne, I get removed. Well, I can't do anything about that one but just leave."

"Second, if I myself want to no longer be a King, I can step down from the throne, in which instance the Emperor will find someone else to replace me," the King said.

"Finally, if I were to ever wish to have kids, I will have to leave the throne as well," the King said. "We all swore an oath about all of this and there's really no way out of this."

Alex was a little surprised about that. "I can understand the first two, but... kids? Why?"

Chapter 1367: King Jin's Palace

"You aren't allowed to have children as a King?" Alex asked King Jin with a quizzing look on his face. This was one of the weirder things he had heard in recent times for certain.

In most other places, including his own, Kings, and Emperors would be heavily suggested, almost forced to reproduce so that they could have heirs.

And yet, to hear that such a thing was not what happened in the Kingdoms of the Eastern Continent was certainly weird.

The king shook his head in response to his question. "The moment any of the 6 of us wish to have offspring, we must put aside our crowns," he said. "That is the vow we made to His Majesty."

"But why?" Alex asked. "Did he give any reason?"

"No, not really," the King said. "We have a few speculations, but there is no concrete answer."

"What do you think the reason is?" Alex asked.

The king looked at Alex, and then at the two retainers he had by his side. Seeing them all, he wondered if it was a good idea to reveal the information. In the end, as long it didn't harm His Majesty, then he didn't see how it could be bad to share.

"Well, it most likely has to do with the previous kings who were thinking of rebelling against His Majesty," the King said. "It is said that one gets greedier when they have children. They no longer just have themselves to think about, but their offspring too. As a result, they start daring to defy and do things for themselves."

"His Majesty might believe that to be the reason why the previous kings tried to rebel against him," the King said. "As a result, he no longer allows the Kings who sit on the throne to have someone to change them."

"I... see," Alex said.

"Well, it could also be that he doesn't want the Kings to get distracted. That might be the case," the king said. "Either way, it's all speculative. I'm sure His Majesty had compelling reasons to stop us from having children."

"Do you want to have children?" Alex asked.

"Hm... that's not something I can answer right away," the King said. "I still wish to be a King for a long time, so I haven't really thought about it. Hehe, maybe I'll get a family once I too go to the Immortal lands."

The king's hearty laugh made everyone feel cheerful again.

While others moved on the front of the topic, Alex continued wondering why the Emperor would ever not want the Kings to have children. Was he really worried about another rebellion?

But that shouldn't be the case. As Alex could see, the two strong individuals next to the King were definitely not under him entirely. If he wasn't wrong, they were from the Head Legion and directly reported to the Emperor.

'Weird,' he thought and stopped wondering about it after a while. The carriage passed through multiple bridges and past a few gardens before arriving at a massive gate that lead to the King's palace.

The palace was fancy, just as fancy as Alex's own palace.

It was a large palace, nestled within lush emerald gardens that still managed to show off its awe-inspiring grandeur. Alex walked through the intricately carved wooden doors that held a golden figure of an Azure Dragon on them.

The insides of the building were made with white marble, and the walls were adorned with jade figures with green silk tapestries hung from the wall.

He could already smell some sweet aroma that permeated the air inside.

Alex looked around at everything he could see, most of which was green in color.

"Is there a reason why your kingdom is called the Emerald Kingdom?" Alex asked. "The information I received said that it was something that was made so you didn't have any connection to it in the name."

"Yeah, that's about it," the King said. "Also because of the Hundred Blossom Valley with all the greenery. The Emperor just chose the colors that matched some important features of the land."

"Oh, so the other kingdoms match their colors too?" Alex asked.

"Yes," the king said. "You'll see it in due time."

Alex was then taken to a hall where he sat and conversed in detail with the King about various things. The King was extremely friendly, as someone would have to be in front of an Alchemist as terrifyingly talented as Alex.

He tried to mix in a few hints of him wanting some pills from Alex, which Alex gave up in the end and promised to give a few pills to aid with cultivation.

After a few more hours of conversation, Alex retreated to the room that he would be staying in for the foreseeable future.

After a brief search of the room, he called out Pearl and Whisker. "Are we there?" Pearl asked, looking around the room.

"Yes, we're at the Emerald Kingdom," Alex told Pearl.

"And are we going to go to the Beast Paradise next?" Pearl asked. That was the plan they had made since it was quite close.

"We'll have to see. As long as I can make an excuse to go there, I will," Alex said. "Given how close it is to the Azure Dragon's secret realm, it might be a little harder than we are envisioning thought."

"No, I'm sure we'll succeed. We'll have to believe in ourselves," Alex said. "But that comes later. I have to spend the next upcoming month preparing to go into the Endless Shadow Abyss."

"Prepare well," a voice spoke from his mind. Godslayer had been listening to his conversation as well. He had woken up a long time ago and was now slowly helping Alex where he could.

There wasn't much for him to do, so he lay low for now, asking Alex to feed him a bit of the Death aura whenever he could. However, lately, he had started getting a little more active after hearing about something from Alex that had caught his attention.

"We should take it all away," he said. "We can't let any stay in there. I want it all."

"We will see how it works," Alex said. "I'm not even sure if the reports are correct or not."

"Doesn't matter," Godslayer said. "We'll try our best. The Endless Shadow Abyss's darkness aura must all be taken away."

Alex sighed. He had read in one of the books that the reason why Endless Shadow Abyss was called such was that it used Darkness aura to create the world.

Alex wasn't sure how strong the object that created the world was, but he was damn sure he would find it and have Godslayer consume it.

With both Darkness and Death aura being consumed at once, Godslayer would improve his strength to a level that hopefully rivaled when Alex first met him.

Afterward, Alex went back to cultivating with the rest of them, waiting for tomorrow to come so that he could go roam the city.

However, come morning, the King arrived outside his door with good news to deliver to him.

Thanks to the news of his arrival in Greenheart City, the elders at the Cloud Iron sect had hurried and sent over Talia, who had arrived in the city last night.

Chapter 1368: Emerald Vine Restaurant

"Your majesty, do your best. It will be great if you two can hit it off," Elder Liang excitedly spoke as Alex prepared to leave.

"Don't worry, elder Liang. I'm sure his majesty will capture young Talia's heart with his charm," the king said.

Alex turned around to look at both of their overly excited faces and sighed. Even Yao Ning held a small smile, hoping that Alex would truly

He shook his head and turned around, placing a mask on his face before walking out of the palace. The elder still wished him luck as he left and only stopped once he left the gate.

Alex walked through the busy street of the city that was starting to get a little less crowded as the morning was ending and midday was starting.

He made his way to the east of the town, toward the crossing on the 4th street. The King had set up their meeting location, and it had been a prestigious restaurant belonging to the Azure Imperium, but currently under the King himself.

The only staff members in the kitchen that was allowed there were people above Level 6 in cooking, so the food there always came out great.

Alex grumbled a little under his mask to himself. He did not want to go through with this at all. However, he had to show that there was some purpose as to why he was looking for strong, young girls so that he could quickly find his cousin.

He was already worried that his cousin wasn't trying to meet him in some way, with the worst possibilities playing out in his mind all the time, so he did not want to add regret to all of that by not doing the best he could at finding her.

If he couldn't find her by the time he was to leave this continent 20 years later, he was even prepared to ask the Emperor for some help in finding anything that was known about her.

His mind wandered to the things that were happening around him, keeping a mental note of all that went on in the city. He wanted to learn what he could from here to become a better king when he went back

Unlike the Dragon Capital, the Greenheart City had a surprising number of mortals living here. While surprising, Alex found it quite understandable as well. While it was still a capital, it was not the capital that everyone cultivator wanted to live in if they could.

Alex also saw multiple Alchemy and medicine stores, even more so than the Dragon Capital. As one of the hubs of alchemy, there truly was a lot going on in this city.

He arrived by 4th Street about 15 minutes later and took out a small token given to him by King Jin.

The token had a small ladle wrapped in vines, almost emulating the Azure Imperium's insignia, but in its own unique way. On the opposite side, it had two numbers.

Alex looked at the massive restaurant that was in front of him, on top of which rested the restaurant's emblem. Next to it was the restaurant's name written in a large text.

Emerald Vine Restaurant.

Alex walked up the stairs along with quite a few people that were going in and out of the restaurant and was greeted by two staff at the door.

Alex handed over the token to the guards, who seemed to realize the importance of it and immediately bowed.

"Show me the way," Alex said from within his mask.

The guards instantly nodded, calling a pair of female staff that came to take him. They were very respectful to him, which made a few people wonder who exactly he was.

Some made accurate guesses, but others simply wondered if he was one of the many important youths that would have started arriving for when the Endless Shadow Abyss was opened.

Having no verifications, those guesses just remained as that.

Alex was taken to a side of the room that had a functioning elevator. These were one of the influences that the players had had on the empire at an architectural scale. Many such changes were happening around the continent, all of which were possible because the Players were strong and had a word in what happened in this world.

The places where the old ones were in control such as the Royal schools and sects hadn't yet chosen to make the changes, but the commercial buildings, especially tall ones, and especially ones that mortals visited had started accepting these changes.

Alex could hear an audible tone ring out every time he passed and floor, and he heard that tone 5 times. On the fifth ring, the doors opened, letting him walk out onto a large, open balcony-like area with a rather intimate table in the center.

And on the table was already seated a young woman with prettily tied black hair, who turned around with an expectant expression. Her expression died a bit when she saw Alex, but that was only because she couldn't really see him.

The female staff quickly walked out and started preparing Alex's seats before he even walked over. By the time he walked close to the girl, they had already walked back into the elevator.

Alex walked over to the girl, who still hesitated a bit, and removed his mask. As he did, the girl finally got to see his face and her expression improved drastically.

"Your majesty, I am Talia Hoffner, the disciple of Ming Wuling from the Cloud Iron sect," the girl immediately bowed and introduced herself. "I am honored that you are allowing me to meet you here today."

"You don't have to be so stiff, Miss Talia," Alex said as he cupped his hands in greeting. "It's good to finally see you as well. You are prettier than what I saw in the pictures."

The girl blushed a little. She wore a mostly green robe with a head full of gold jewelry and stark white pearls. She was an entire head shorter than Alex, but that only added to her charm.

Her gray eyes stuck out the most among her other physical traits, grabbing one's attention immediately.

As for her cultivation base, it was in the Saint Core 8th realm, a step above Alex. It had increased in the past 6 months since Alex had found her information, which was already from the Endless Shadow Abyss opening a year ago.

"You are very handsome yourself, your Majesty," the girl quickly said.

"Please sit," Alex said and let Talia sit back while he went over to the seat on the other side of the bare meter-long table and sat.

Talia was all smiles, excitement, and maybe even a bit of nervousness.

Alex got comfortable and decided to start with some small talk. However, before he could do that, the girl spoke immediately.

"Your majesty, if you don't mind, I have a confusion that I hope you can clear up," she quickly said.

"Sure, ask away," Alex said.

"Can you tell me how you know about me?" the girl asked. "I don't think I've done anything recently to be famous enough for you to be noticed by you or anyone important."

Alex was a little surprised. "Do you... not know why you're here?"

Chapter 1369: A Date with Talia

"I'm here because you wanted to meet me, didn't you?" the girl asked with a quizzing look on her face. "My master said that you wanted to see me, which is why I came."

"Did you not want to meet me for something?"

Alex was a little surprised. "So they didn't tell you why I wanted to meet you?" he asked.

"I... I just assumed it was because of something I did in the past. Or maybe... its embarrassing to say this but... maybe because I'm pretty?" she asked.

Alex chuckled a litle when he heard that. "So they did not tell you that I'm looking for a Queen?" he asked.

"Oh, are you? They only told me that—" Talia paused for a momenta as the realization of what she had just heard hit her.

"Q-queen?" she asked. "A-are you saying that you're here with me because I— am I going to a queen?"

"No, you're not," Alex said quickly to calm her down. "You're not the only choice, and I came here today to see how you are in person. Please, be yourself."

It felt bad to lead a girl on with hopes of something that she could never achieve, but Alex did so anyway.

The girl nodded and sat back on the chair with a somewhat astonished face. While Alex asked her to be herself, it was impossible for her now.

Just the prospect of being able to become the queen of an entire continent was something that she started thinking about, which caused her to be more nervous.

Alex waited for her to speak, and it took an entire minute before she calmed down enough to start speaking.

"So... I was chosen as the candidate to become a queen?" the girl asked just to make sure about it again.

"Yes," Alex said.

"Why me?" she asked without waiting.

Alex paused for a moment. "Uhh... I had a few criteria, and the Crown prince found you to be one of the few that matched what I wanted in my queen," he said.

"How small is the list?" the girl asked.

"5 people," Alex said.

"Can I ask who they are?" she asked.

"I don't know if I can answer that just for the other's privacy," he said.

"Okay, what makes us 5 different from the rest of the many girls that are clearly better than us?" she asked.

"Because you're a player," Alex said.

The girl finally paused her non-stop questioning. "P-player?" she asked. "That's it?"

"That's the criteria that cuts off most other people," Alex said. "To be more precise, I wanted someone that is just as young as me, and that ends up not being many people."

"Oh," the girl said. "I... am indeed young. Oh right, you are a player yourself, aren't you, your majesty?"

"I am," Alex answered. "I come from the Central Continent, just as you all," he told her.

"The Central Continent," the girl thought. "I've heard of that. Is that really where we all came from?"

"Yes," Alex said. "I returned there about a few years ago, and so did everyone from the rest of the 3 continents. If you guys can make enough of a noise, you might get the Emperor to send you all back as well."

"Oh... well, I don't know if I want to go back," the girl said. "It's been so long, I do not see the point of going back at all."

"That's understandable," Alex said. "I only went back because I wanted to see how it had all changed for the most part."

"I see," the girl said. "And you got to come back?"

"Yes," Alex said. "We were allowed to. But... let's not talk about that for now. That's not what we're here for, are we?"

"Oh, right," the girl said.

Alex smiled a little. "Shall we order some food then."

They called for some staff and ordered a few dishes that caught their eyes before continuing the conversation.

Alex did what he thought was what someone looking for a wife would do and started asking questions about her likes and dislikes, about her interests, her dream, and whatever else he could think to ask her.

She asked him quite a few questions too. After the food arrived, their words slowed down a lot.

The food itself caught their attention nearly as much as they did each other. The staff had prepared the best of the best dishes for the two of them.

"Oh right, your majesty. You're an alchemist as well, right?" she asked. "I remember hearing about what you did in the competition... what was it a year ago?"

"I am," Alex said. "Did you not watch the broadcast?"

"I was in closed cultivation at that time," she said. "I had recently left the Hundred Blossom valley and was busy making pills of my own."

"Ah, you are an alchemist as well?" Alex asked with a surprised look. She hadn't mentioned it yet.

"No, I'm not," she said. "Well, I guess I am now. I recently started and it will take me a long time before I can get anywhere. I can barely make Earth grade Saint pills for now."

"I see," Alex said. "Well, keep going at it. You'll do good I'm sure."

Talia didn't seem interested to talk about alchemy with him, which surprised Alex a bit. It didn't look like she wasn't interested in alchemy altogether, which made him think that she didn't talk about alchemy just because she was being considerate and didn't want to come off as someone that wanted something from him.

After a while, they finally decided to leave.

They went down the elevator together, and Alex pulled out his mask that he placed on his face. Talia noticed it and said nothing. She could understand the reason easily.

The door opened and the two of them walked out.

Most people were busy in their own world, but a few noticed Talia and recognized her. In the Emerald Kingdom, she was quite popular after all.

People noticed Alex too, but they couldn't tell who he was, especially since he had been wearing something very different from what he normally appeared in.

They walked outside, and the girl spoke up.

"Do you have any plans for the rest of the day, your majesty?" Talia asked after they were out.

"Hmm, no, none," Alex said.

"Oh, then... um... would you like to go somewhere with me? I promise it won't take longer than an hour," she said.

"Sure, I have time to spare," Alex said. "Where are we going?"

"Oh, its close by," she said. "Should I call for a carriage?"

"Whatever you want," Alex told her.

"Oh, then let's walk," she said. "Its good to walk after a hearty meal." She smiled and started walking ahead of him.

Alex followed behind her, curious where he was being taken to. He could sense someone following him already in the distance, and from what he could see, it was one of the king's guards.

It seemed he was there to look after him.

A few minutes later, Talia stopped by a large, but poor looking building close to the edge of the town. He looked at what the place was and was a little surprised to what it was.

An orphanage.

Chapter 1370: The Orphanage

"An Orphanage?" Alex asked. "What are we doing here?"

"I'm just meeting up with the kids," Talia said. "I come here every now and then when I have the time, so in a way, it's kind of a hobby of mine, I suppose."

"I see, let's enter then," Alex said and walked into the old orphanage with Talia.

As soon as they entered, the people inside greeted Talia. She seemed to come here enough times for people to recognize her.

"Sister Talia!" a few of the kids ran toward her in a jubilant manner.

"Oh wow, look at you all. You've grown so big," Talia said. "Just a little bit older and you guys can join the sects too. Which sect do you want to join?"

"The Cloud Iron sect."

"We want to follow you, sister Talia."

The kids answered.

From what Alex could tell, the kids were mortals with absolutely no cultivation base at all. "Why aren't they cultivating? Do the people here not teach them?" he asked the girl.

"No, the kids are sent to various sects when they reach 15 years of age, in which case they are taught there. Most sects want the kids they get to not have already started cultivating just in case there is a talent amongst them that could be ruined by having them cultivated by someone who's obviously not very experienced," the girl said.

Alex looked around the orphanage, seeing the many people that worked in it. Most of them were barely in True realms as anyone stronger than that would not waste their time in an orphanage.

"And you come here once a year you say?" Alex asked.

"I try to," Talia said. "Whenever I decide to come to the Endless Shadow Abyss's opening, I visit this place. I usually get around 1 week of time which I can spend with these kids, and I do that."

Alex gave that some thought. "I see," he said. "May I ask why you started this?"

Talia paused for a bit, hesitating to answer his question instinctively. "It's..." she forced herself to speak. "It's because I am an orphan as well and used to work in one even after I left."

"Oh," Alex was a little surprised.

"Yes," the girl said. "It might make you think less of me, but I don't wish to lie to you about who I am just so I can appear better in your mental image of myself."

Alex chuckled a bit. "I do not know why you would think that I would think less of someone for helping others," he said.

"I thought you wouldn't like the part that I was an orphan," she said. "Most people think that orphans don't have manners or any sort of knowledge just because they lost their parents at a young age."

Alex got a little serious after hearing that. "I come from a farm in such a corner of our world that I had to be homeschooled just because the school was too far away," he said. "Just because I was lacking some knowledge about this world, people assumed I was dumb in general. I'm sure even my own master was frustrated by what I did."

"Of course, I wasn't dumb. Just lacking a bit of knowledge and experience, which my master helped me get. Once I did that, I improved a lot."

"I'm still far from better, but if you compare the current me to the one that had just started cultivating, you will find that we are miles apart."

"What I'm trying to say is, I don't judge people where they come from, only where they are," he said. "And where I see you right now is someone at the top, looking out for the young and helpless ones far below them, just so they could have a little easier time climbing to where you are."

"You are humble and kind, and nothing can take that away from you, especially not the fact that you are an orphan," Alex said. "I hope you can remember that and hold your head high the next time you talk about this conversation."

Talia's face showed a small sign of shock before her face glowed up with a bright smile. "Thank you, your majesty," she said. Despite the hours-long talk they had, this was the first time she felt seen and heard by him.

Alex smiled beneath the mask as well. "So, how does this work exactly?" he asked. "Do you just talk to them, or do you help them with something else as well?"

"Well... I just do what they ask me to do," Talia said, which usually ends up being playing some sort of games or telling them stories about my hunts, the sorts like that."

"Oh," Alex said. "That sounds fun."

"Doesn't it?" Talia said. "Let me gather up the kids, you can tell them a story."

She quickly left, leaving Alex alone to himself for the moment.

He watched her walk away and couldn't help but feel some sort of guilt... as well as a sense of loss over knowing that Talia could not ever be the queen.

She was certainly an incredible woman, and would perhaps even be a great queen. Of course, he didn't feel anything more than just a bit of fancy toward her attitude toward the people, which was why he thought so.

It would take a lot more than just that to make him fall for her, which he already knew was impossible. Still, he wouldn't mind taking her to the Southern Continent with him, just because of how she was.

A group of young children all walked out of the various room, gathering behind the orphanage.

Talia came a moment later and called him over. He quickly followed her outside where the kids were expectantly waiting for the two of them to start with a story.

Seeing Alex arrive, most of them looked at him in surprise as he still hadn't taken off the mask. Some of the kids were worried and only didn't freak out because Talia vouched for him.

There were about a hundred different kids in front of him, each of which ranged from 8 to 12 years old. He didn't see anyone that was younger or older.

Alex saw Talia being taken away by the staff for some reason, so he was left alone in front of the kids. He thought for a moment what he could tell them, and decided on one.

"Alright, who here wants to hear about all the amazing places that exist outside of the Eastern Continent?" he asked, suddenly getting a few curious looks and raised hands.

Seeing that enough of them were interested, he started. "To begin with, let me tell you about this amazing place that exists in the Southern Continent, known as the Sundering Sanctum."

"It is located in a place called the Sundering City, also known as the First Shadow..."

He told the kids what it was and what its purpose was. He didn't tell them what it was like to be inside or what he had experienced.

Hearing about something that they did not know about, made the kids feel way more excited to learn about what Alex was telling them, and he could see that.

So, Alex continued for a long time, waiting for Talia to come back.