

Alchemy 1591

Chapter 1591: Searching for Opponents

Alex walked through the river bank, searching for a person to challenge, or for a person to fight him.

Shan Wangjiu followed him, but he stayed far enough behind that he wasn't intruding on Alex even with just his sense. He too seemed to be looking for people to fight.

"Do you want more fights, Pearl?" Alex asked as they walked along. "If you want to fight someone, let me know. I'll challenge them."

They strayed away from the river some 15 minutes later, making their way into a sparse forest with broken trees covering the ground, with craters on the ground large enough to fit a whale inside of it.

Alex stepped over fallen trees and branches, making his way deeper.

"6 months has passed," Alex said softly. "I wonder how many have left."

There were certainly way fewer people than before. "What were the bets they made again?" he remembered. "I should now have 100 thousand Spirit stones from the Gold King, Silver Queen, the Ivory Queen, and the Emerald King. I can get 150 thousand more from the Azure King when I last 4 more months."

He couldn't help but feel happy about having set up the bet. It was an easy way to earn a lot of Saint Spirit Stones, and god knew he needed them after how much he had spent on the Mountain Crushing artifact.

He had wanted to call that artifact something else, but the name had stuck for now. If it was ever going to change, it wouldn't be anytime soon.

"550 thousand Saint Spirit stones," he whispered to himself. "I just have to last 100 or so more days."

He had no doubt he could do that.

Alex saw multiple people in the forest, but each one he saw was a bit too weak for him to want to challenge. As for Pearl, he didn't seem to want to fight right now.

Alex ignored the weaker people until he ran into an older man with short hair, and thin eyelashes. He remembered seeing this man before; he was one of the people who had challenged him and won.

His Saint Soul 6th realm cultivation base had easily dwarfed his Sword Intent and had taken away the, so he had no chance of winning against him in any way.

The man noticed Alex as well and smiled before giving a slight bow. "Your Majesty! So it is true you have closed up shop," the man said.

"I have," Alex said.

"I heard everyone got too weak for you," the man said with laughter.

"That's not exactly true," Alex said.

The man looked at him, wanting to say something when he paused for a moment. Before Alex could say something, the man quickly responded. "Actually, if you don't mind. I'll be on my way."

"Actually, would you mind fighting me?" Alex said with a small smile. "I haven't fought yet."

The man looked at Alex and grimaced a little. "But you're stronger now, Your Majesty," he said. "What good could come from challenging little old me?"

"A new day has started, and I haven't fought yet," Alex said.

"This... are you looking to get done with your Loss match through me?" the man asked.

"I am hoping to," Alex said.

The man pondered for a bit. "Can I get a pill? Like you did for everyone that lost to you?" he asked.

"The shop is shut down," Alex said. "Unless someone challenges me, I don't plan on giving away any more pills."

The man's face twisted. "Then I'm afraid I will have to refuse. Losing 36 points was not fun, but he had to do it. His talisman buzzed and he bowed toward Alex. "Now, if you'll excuse me."

The man walked off.

Alex stood there, surprised that he had been refused. He had accepted so many battles over the past 6 months that he had forgotten one was even allowed to refuse.

The man had lost points for sure, but Alex hadn't gained any. One didn't get points if the other refused.

He sighed a little. "What about my Loss match?" he wondered. He hadn't earned points, but that didn't mean his Loss match should remain there.

But to his disappointment, it was. He still had to fight someone and win or lose. If he didn't do that, he would gain a Loss. "I should get going," he thought.

He was about to move on when he heard the man speak out loud. "Young man, do you want to fight me?" he asked.

Alex turned around to see what was happening and saw that the man he had just parted with had challenged the one that followed him.

Alex looked at the young man and wondered what he was going to do next. The young man simply grinned. "I accept," he shouted loudly, pulling out a sword that was entirely too large for him.

The sword was nearly 2 meters long and almost an entire arm's length wide at the base. It got narrowed toward the front, but not too much until the very end at which point the blade narrowed to a point.

The cross guard of the blade was equally as large as well, and the hilt another arm's length long.

That was an entirely preposterous sword, which somehow reminded him of the steel sword he used when he was first getting started. Except that had been nowhere near as large as this one.

The young Shan Wangjiu hoisted it up on his shoulder. Anyone could tell that the weight of the blade was a bit too much for him to handle normally.

'He's Saint Soul 2nd realm,' Alex thought. 'How heavy is the sword?'

The battle began with the young man charging first. He swung the sword down, the slow blade easily dodged by the man he fought.

The man then used a technique and created a blue blast that sent the young man flying away, leaving his sword behind.

He had lost so very easily. It almost looked like he had given up on fighting from the very start.

The man looked to himself in a satisfied manner and walked away.

Alex, ever too curious, walked up to where the two had just fought. He arrived next to the sword that was half stuck on the ground.

He grabbed onto it and felt something. The weight of the sword suddenly got so much heavier as well. "I see," he thought, understanding what had happened.

Alex closed his eyes and poured out his Intent to pull the sword up. When he did, it had gotten much lighter.

"Master!" the young man rushed back quickly and stopped when he got close. "Woah! You raise it so easily, Master."

Alex ignored the term the man used and continued looking at the sword. "How did you come to acquire this?" he asked.

Shan Wangjiu shrugged. "I had it ever since I started. It was the treasure I got when I first came here," the young man said.

Alex looked toward the young man with surprised eyes. He hadn't expected it, but it made sense when he thought about it now.

"I didn't realize you were a player."

Chapter 1592: Shan Wangjiu's Sword

"Yes, I am," the young man answered with a grin. "Hehe, Master. You hadn't realized it yet?"

Alex shook his head. "How was I supposed to?" he asked.

"Fair enough," the young man said. "Yes, I'm a player. Why, does that have anything to do with anything?"

"Not with you, but it has something to do with your sword here," Alex said, showing off the large blade toward the young man.

Shan Wangjiu put on a face of surprise. "You truly are strong, master. I was right to follow you," he quickly said. "I've never been able to pick up this sword as easily as you have. Many have tried too, but they had to give up in the end as well."

"Why do you use something that you can't properly use?" Alex asked him.

The young man shrugged. "Because it looks cool," he said. "I remember reading comics about swordsmen with giant swords. They looked epic in those comics, and I wanted to become similar."

Alex couldn't relate, but he could understand what he was trying to say. However, that didn't mean that was a good reason. He had to stifle laughter before it came out.

"So the entire reason you burden yourself with the sword is because... it looks cool," Alex said.

"Uhuh." The young man nodded vigorously.

Alex sighed a little but did nothing more. He wasn't surprised to learn that he had thought using a large sword would make him look cool. He was surprised that he had stuck with it for more than six decades.

"You were about to say something about my sword earlier," the young man said. "Can you continue please?"

"Ah, right," Alex looked back at the sword. "Has anyone told you why you have such a hard time holding this sword?"

The young man thought for a bit and shook his head. "I had a few friends try it out, but none could tell what was wrong," he said.

"What about some seniors or elders?" Alex asked.

"No, no, no, master," he said, wiggling his finger at him. "I might look dumb but I'm very smart. A sword like this, I know it is good. This sort of treasure would be more than enough for anyone to want to steal it. So, I never showed any seniors this sword. I trained with it in secret."

Alex was a little stunned by hearing the young man. It seemed he had more brains than him when they were starting as cultivators. Alex sometimes wondered what would've happened if he kept his knowledge to himself.

"Besides," the young man continued, catching Alex's attention. "I never really had any seniors or elders to show the sword to even if I wanted to."

"No seniors?" Alex looked at him with a confused expression. "What about the higher realm cultivators in your sect, or whatever place you joined."

"Sect?" the man shook his head. "I am a lone wolf, master. I belong to no pack. I joined one early on, but I quickly left it as it was not for me. Too many... rules and strict policies. I would rather be free as the wind."

"When did you leave?" Alex asked.

"Uhh... I was in a sect for half a year," the young man thought. "Then I struggled for another 2 years on my own as a newly abandoned player, and then joined another sect after I wanted to get back on my feet. 3 months after being there, I remembered why I left the first one."

Alex sighed. "I see," he said. "No wonder nobody was there to tell you about your sword."

"Why? Is something wrong with it?" the young man asked before shaking his head. "That's not possible. It's a good news, right? It has to be. I haven't been struggling all these years for no reason, right?"

Alex shrugged a little. "That depends on what you can do with it in the future," he said before swinging the sword around. "This sword... has a Sword Spirit inside of it."

The young man gasped in an exasperated surprise, his hands hiding his mouth and all. His eyes were still wide when he put down his hand and asked, "What's a Sword Spirit?" he asked.

Alex's brows furrowed. "Why did you just gasp if you don't know what a Sword Spirit is?" he asked.

The young man raised his shoulders. "Because it sounded awesome," he said. "That doesn't matter, master. What is a sword spirit?"

Alex sighed. "A sword spirit is a spirit that forms in your sword, either when it was created, or over its lifetime, depending on how well it was used or maintained," he said.

"I want to say this sword was created with a Sword Spirit in it, but it is more likely it became so after someone used it for a long time, pouring their Qi into it, refining it," he said.

"Oh, I tried refining the sword," the young man said. "Many different times too, but it never worked."

"Because the Sword spirit in here doesn't acknowledge you as someone worthy of being its master," Alex said. "You have to tame the Sword spirit first before it lends the sword to be refined by you."

"Woah," the young man whistled. "What then? Would it be stronger? Would I be stronger?"

"Your overall prowess will go up. I know for a fact that fighting with unrefined weapons, especially one that doesn't accept you, makes your damage output lessen a lot," Alex said before pausing a little. "How often have you used this sword?"

"All the time," the young man said. "I even used it the last time I came here."

"You came here last time?" Alex asked with a surprised look on his face.

"Yes," the young man said with a laugh. "I was just a Saint Foundation realm fighter back then."

"I see," Alex said. He was about to hand back the sword when he realized something. He thought for a bit and brought out Midnight.

"Can you hold this for me," Alex asked. "See how heavy it is for you."

"Sure, Master," the young man said, before grabbing Midnight's hilt. Instantly, the weight grew upon the young man and he grunted as he quickly grabbed Midnight with both hands.

He pulled it up, barely keeping it from touching the ground.

Alex looked at the young man in shock. 'He's actually keeping Midnight off the ground,' he thought.

Midnight flew back into Alex and the young man sighed in relief.

"God... damn," Shan Wangjiu took deep breaths. "How... do you fight... with that thing? It's... so heavy."

"My sword is heavy, but that is not the reason why you struggled," Alex said.

"What do you mean?" the young man looked up before his eyes brightened a little. "Wait, do you mean that sword has a Sword spirit too?"

"Yes. One with around the same strength," Alex said. "And from this test, I can tell that your Intent has become a lot stronger after the constant fight with the Sword spirit in your sword."

"If you manage to make the Sword spirit submit, you can finally start your journey as a great swordsman," Alex said.

The young man's eyes were wide as a hawk's. He instantly fell to his knees. "Please teach me how, Master!"

This time, Alex found no reason to refuse.

Chapter 1593: Teaching

Shan Wangjiu walked next to Alex as they made their way through a burning section of the forest. Alex moved his hands once, causing the fire from all around to stop at once. It no longer existed as if it never did.

Not even smoke flew out from the places where the fire was extinguished.

"Woah!" Shan Wangjiu showed surprise. "How did you do that, Master?"

"Fire Dao," Alex answered simply. "Do you know any Dao?"

The man nodded. "Dao of Heaviness," he said. "I can make things heavier if I want to."

"Dao of Heaviness?" Alex thought. "Sounds like a fine Dao."

"It is," the young man said. "But... quite useless as of now. My sword is so heavy that adding any more weight to it won't make sense at all."

"That I understand," Alex said.

"So when are you going to teach me?" the young man asked. "Can we just do it here?"

"Assist, not teach. Let me find someone to fight first," Alex said. "I need to deal with that, and then I can assist you."

"Why not fight me then?" the young man said casually. "I already lost for the day anyway."

Alex paused and turned around to look at the man. He felt like slapping his face for not realizing something so simply had been in front of him the entire time.

"Alright, fight me."

One couldn't even call it a fight. It had ended before it had even started.

Once Shan Wangjiu noticed the missing points, he sighed to himself and looked at Alex once more. "Now can you teach... er, assist me, master?" he asked.

Alex nodded. "Why do you call me master even?" he asked as he searched for an open place without broken trees and branches all around them. "A lone wolf like you should favor not having a master at all, shouldn't you?"

"Being alone doesn't mean I shouldn't have a master," the young man said. "It just means that I don't belong anywhere. Once you teach me, I'll be on my way to becoming stronger all alone."

"So you will get my help and just leave, huh?" Alex asked.

"Uhh... I thought you didn't like my company," the young man said. "Do you want me to stay? I'll stay if you do. I owe you that much."

"I was just messing with you," Alex quickly said. "You can do whatever you want to. But, if you do feel like you owe me, why don't you move to the Southern Continent with me in about 5 years? How does that sound?"

"Southern Continent?" the young man asked. "I will have to think about that."

"I'm not forcing you," Alex said. "Do what you feel is right. I will tell you outright that staying here will give you more opportunity over too."

He noticed an open space, full of short, thick grass. "There," he pointed.

The young man mulled over Alex's request for the first few minutes, but once he was made to sit down and the weapon flew out, all thoughts he held melted away like snow at the first sight of spring.

"Are you aware of what Intent is?" Alex asked the young man.

"Like Sword Intent?" the young man asked.

"No, Intent is more raw. It is a base of your actions, including Sword Intent. It is what makes you use techniques, what makes you use Dao. Intent is what determines the difference between what is living and what is dead."

"Anything?" the young man asked. "Can a stone have intent?"

"It can, from what I hear," Alex said. "Anything can grow to have Intent, although I'm not sure of the mechanics behind it. Qi, for one, is the source of it."

The young man listened to his words intently.

"Since anything with Intent is living, that also means anything living has Intent. And a spirit is far from being dead," Alex explained. "Your sword has a... tug of war with you, each time you want to use it."

"You slam your Intent against it's Intent, and you mostly end up as the loser," Alex said. "I will say it outright. You have nearly no chance of winning against the sword in a battle of Intent."

The young man looked up briskly. "What?" he questioned. "Then how am I—"

"Let me finish," Alex said. "You have strong Intent, courtesy of your battle with the sword, and if you want to win over it, you can fight it with your Intent until the day you succeed."

"But, I suggest you do the opposite," Alex said.

"The... opposite?" the young man asked with a confused look on his face. He thought for a moment and asked, "Do you mean I shouldn't fight with it? Instead, I should... make friends with it?"

"Yes, exactly," Alex said. "Get close to the sword. Instead of trying to force it to submit you, ask it to. I'm sure the sword can see reason. Remember, the sword belonged to someone really strong before you, so it is strong as well."

The young man nodded. "Make friends, right," he thought. "Will that happen fast?"

Alex shrugged "I wouldn't know that," he said. "It all depends on you."

"Ok, ok," he muttered, getting ready to start. He took a deep breath and paused. "What if it doesn't work?"

"Then you go back to the old way," Alex replied. "Fight and force it to submit."

"Right, I should do that," he said. "I can do that."

He sat still and took a deep breath once more before his Qi, Spiritual sense, and even Intent covered the sword that lay by his side. He started talking to it, saying sweet greetings and whatnot.

Alex wasn't sure what he was saying, but he was sure he was doing whatever felt right to him.

He looked around where he was, the forest still around them, and a lake in the distance. Some people passed close by there, but no one ever came to challenge him.

His cultivation base scared most of them away. "I can't leave now," he thought with a sigh. "Not while he's focused on this."

He wondered how long he was going to have to remain here while the young man learned. He wanted to go and find more fighters, but it seemed that would have to wait.

There was so much of the land to still go through, but there was also a year and a half left. So, he sat down on the grass close to the young man and kept waiting.

Night fell soon enough, the silver moon hidden behind the clouds made the night a lot darker than usual.

Alex could still feel the same intensity from the young man beside him, but by now he was getting used to it. Faint lights glowed from the sword sometimes, but that didn't mean anything to Alex.

He called out Godslayer once to ask if he was indeed right in what he had told the young man to do. He knew he was, but he still wanted to make sure.

"The spirit usually copies the Intent of its master," Godslayer said. "Pray that this sword's master wasn't particularly hard to deal with. If not, it should be easy."

Alex nodded. He wanted to ask what Godslayer's master was like, but he felt that was somehow disrespectful. At the same time, Godslayer was always the master in all the times he was held by someone, so Alex wasn't even sure if there was one.

A few hours before dawn, when the night was at its darkest, Alex heard something. His spiritual sense moved out immediately to see what it was that made the noise and saw a group of 8 people making their way through the broken forest.

'That's no ragtag group of people,' Alex thought. Every single one of the people he just sensed wore a robe of white and blue patterns. They were all from the same house or sect.

Their cultivation base ranged from the Saint Core realm at the youngest to one with Saint Transformation 1st realm cultivation base. Alex remembered the person as someone who had fought against him multiple times, winning every time.

He had disappeared some 2 months ago and never returned.

Their trajectory changed after sensing Alex's spiritual sense. They sensed him as well and made their way toward him. They made a swift journey to him, arriving not even a minute later.

"Greetings, Your Majesty. I did not expect to see you here, away from the river bank," the older man with the Saint Transformation realm cultivation realm spoke. The rest of the people remained quiet, only bowing in greeting.

"I left that place," he said, looking at the group. "Are these your juniors?"

"Members of my sect," the man said with a smile.

"Why are you in a group? Are you helping them somehow?" Alex asked, wondering if helping was even possible. If someone interrupted a challenge, one would have to lose points as a result.

"It helps the weaker ones last longer, and get more training in the secret realm," the man said. He looked at Alex for a moment and realized that Alex didn't understand. "If someone comes for them early after a rest, I challenge them before they can get to one of my sect members."

"It's a good way to ward those people off," the man said. "Sometimes, they just leave because they see me. Sometimes I interfere in fights if needed."

He turned back. "Don't worry, though. We're not like those groups that only seek to ruin your time in the secret realm."

Chapter 1594: Acceptance

The old man thought of fighting Alex once, but seeing Shan Wangjiu deep in concentration made him not want to disturb him. So, he left with his group, soon disappearing toward the lake in the distance.

Alex sat back, thinking to himself about what he had just heard about.

"So they've formed groups huh?" he spoke slowly to himself. "Was that why all the stronger ones left not long after fighting me?"

He had assumed they left because they'd had enough of his pills, but now that he heard another possibility, it sounded much more probable.

"What was that about 'those groups?'" he wondered. 'Ruin my time here?'

Thinking a bit, he could imagine what sort of things people could do after coming together to form a large enough group. If one considered the secret realm a game, then playing together gave one a lot more advantages than playing alone.

"Should I look for people to go around with?"

As soon as the question came to him, Alex shook his head. One or two people he wouldn't mind, but a group of 5 or 10, or even more he couldn't handle. It would hamper his freedom a bit too much.

Like it or not, Alex was as much a lone wolf as the young man behind him claimed himself to be. At least in matters like these.

Not an hour after the sun rose in the east, Alex sensed a significant movement from the young man beside him. Turning around, he noticed him suddenly break out into beads of sweat.

The sword was actively attacking him this time around.

He saw the young man hold tightly onto the sword, even as the budding sword spirit assaulted his mind, dreading if he would accidentally let go.

If he let go of the sword, all the progress he had made over the past day would've been for none, and he would have to start all over again. While that would be fine, the young man understood that if he gave in now, the sword spirit would view him as a weakling who wasn't worthy of it.

The young man wanted to show that he was.

"You know who I am," he spoke out loud suddenly, surprising even Alex. "You have seen my journey. I was 15 when I found you. Not even 70 and I'm already in the Saint Soul realm. Could your previous master have done that?"

His pained face grimaced even more as the sword assaulted him even more. Talking about its previous master wasn't the correct way to gain its approval it seemed.

The young man did the bare minimum to not let it destroy him but never fought back. Fighting back was what he was going to do if nothing worked. For now, he still had his word.

"You wanna see the world? I can show you," the young man said. "You wanna fight the world? I can fight with you. Grow to be the greatest sword of all time? I can make you."

"All you have to do is say yes. Say yes and... and together we can conquer the world."

The young man's face let off a hint of relief. He took the opportunity to say a few more things to the sword. Make a few more promises.

And then, not even 10 minutes after he started speaking, he pulled a droplet of blood out of his forehead and let it fall onto the giant sword.

The sword drank the drop of blood and let out a shrilling cry, which surprised Alex as he could hear it too. It glowed a bright yellow, bright even in the morning sun, and then mellowed out until there was no light.

It kept a light hum for a few more seconds before that disappeared as well. And then the sword shrank. Slowly, it got smaller and smaller until it was only a meter long, the rest shrinking in proportion as well.

"No," the young man said with a grin. "I like you big."

The sword immediately shrank back to its original size and the young man stood up with the sword in hand. He moved it around, surprised how light it was, surprised that he didn't have a massive headache for just using it.

"Haha!" he laughed out loud. "I did it! Master, I did it."

"Congratulations," Alex said, happy to have seen such a thing happen. It was quite a sight to see, which he was sure not many would've seen in this world, much less experienced.

Seeing what he saw reminded Alex of the black sword in his own Soul Space, which he would be more than happy to make submit to himself, if not for already having Midnight.

He also left it alone for the possibility of finding exactly who had used it to kill Pearl's mother. All clues as of yet led Alex to the theory that during some conflict, it was the dead Empress that had killed the White Cat.

That was who had the sword last.

"Woohoo!"

The young man's cheerful shout brought Alex back to the present, making him smile at the young man's happiness. He swung his sword around, ignoring Alex for the moment, practicing a few things.

As he practiced, it became very clear to Alex that the young man had no idea how to even use a sword.

Alex didn't know if to laugh at him or feel pity. "Did you never try to use another sword before?" he asked. "A regular one."

"Why would I? I had one of the best swords out there," the young man said as he slashed diagonally with his sword, almost as if he was copying what Alex did with his new unnamed technique.

He couldn't watch it any longer.

"Stop! Stop!" Alex spoke, and the young man came to a halt.

"Hmm? Oh right," Shan Wangjiu said quickly. "Sorry, I was so excited with the sword. That was probably disrespectful to you, Master."

"It's not about disrespect," Alex said. "It's about your lack of sword skill. It seems as though you have trained in swordsmanship for 2 months during your whole life. The way you swing your blade, you will club a man to death before you manage to cut him down."

The young man nodded, understanding his shortcomings. "Is there something I can do about it?" he asked.

Alex nodded. "Of course," he said. "You just have to practice. I'll teach you and you can be a fine swordsman in no time."

The young man looked up. "You'll teach me?" he asked.

"Yes," Alex said with a sigh. "Well, I'm only going to give you some pointers is all. I don't have time to train you all day. I have better things to do than that."

"That's fine," the young man said. "Whatever you can give me. Although, can I get that sword technique you have been using recently? That is what caught my eyes, and why I've been sticking around really."

"That is my creation, and I can't just hand it over to you."

Alex saw the young man's eyes drop in disappointment.

"But, I have quite a few other sword techniques I can teach you that aren't necessarily bad either."

Chapter 1595: A Show of Skill

As Shan Wangjiu swung away his days, Alex made him keep moving through the forest, to the lake and beyond into thick grassland that had more than seen their fair share of battles.

The open space gave way for more people to fight, and Alex managed to find someone after reset who was willing to fight him. The woman challenged him first.

She was with a group as well, although consisting of only 4 people, and had been another one of the people who had fought and won against him. She had to leave to protect her juniors from being

needlessly challenged, but now that Alex had come to her himself, she was more than happy to fight with him again.

Alex brandished Midnight, accepting the challenge that was thrown at him.

The woman used no weapon, fighting only with her skills. She started the battle with a spinning spiral of gold and blue energy that she tossed at him.

The strength of the attack was strong enough that if he did nothing, he would most likely die. His physical strength alone wasn't enough to stop the attack, and he had to use Qi to protect himself.

But Alex felt stubborn.

He grinned, sending out a sword slash that exploded the moment it came into contact with the gold and blue energy.

At the same time, Alex moved to the side, sending another strike toward the girl.

Lightning filled her eyes before thunder filled her ears. A bolt of lightning flew in an arc that a sword slash would follow and got close to the woman.

It was stopped by the woman's armor that she wore underneath her robe. Still, she felt the force of the lightning strike, surprised by how strong the technique was.

Alex stood smiling, looking at the woman who failed to grasp why she, a Saint Soul 9th realm cultivator, was taking so much damage from someone who wasn't even Saint Soul 4th realm yet.

She assumed Alex was doing something here, perhaps using some incredible pill that only he had. She even imagined that he must have been hiding his cultivation base the entire time to play the pig in front of them all.

Whatever the case, she wanted to beat him even more now. She no longer fought for just the challenge.

Alex fought, in part for himself, and in part to show the Shan Wangjiu, who was watching from far away, what it was to be a sword fighter as a cultivator.

Due to the lack of close distance between cultivators during a battle, close combat techniques were mostly useless. Things such as footwork, momentum, balance, and a host lot of other things that were important to know as a swordsman were quite useless when it came to a cultivator battle.

He was still planning on teaching them to him, but he was also preparing him for real fights, which he mostly already knew.

Alex swung a fire slash at one of the incoming attacks that was barely stopped. Then he swung again, a water slash making for the woman.

A water serpent quickly formed around the woman, its tail striking all attacks that came toward her.

Alex saw that as an opportunity and stopped pouring Qi into Midnight. His sword carried only a white light that filled it as he swung it at the snake's tail.

The tail slammed the attack away, which was weaker than all other attacks that Alex had thrown at her, but the relentless attacks that came afterward made it hard for the woman to concentrate on her attack.

He was on the defensive, having to stay inside the blue serpent that wrapped around her and wait for an opening that Alex would give her.

But he never did.

Alex felt his head give a soft thump as the early signs of incoming headaches showed itself. So many attacks filled with Sword Qi, one after another, strained his Intent quite a lot.

It wasn't bad enough that a headache started right the moment he began sending them out, but if he kept at it, it was going to do so.

Still, he continued. He continued throwing attacks, training his Sword Intent to become stronger with each attack. The girl saw an opening or two to throw out her attacks, but on the whole, she was kept to the defensive.

She quickly realized that Alex was too strong for her when he wasn't just keeping himself to Sword Intent.

'Just a little more,' she told herself. 'Just a little more and his pill's effect will run out. Then he'll be weak and I'll win.'

She did not want to give up on the fight when she believed she was so close to victory.

At that very moment, she realized, she found a big enough opening. Alex had stopped attacking, allowing her to attack back. Whether it was a mistake or divine retribution for using a forbidden pill, she did not care.

She made a few hand gestures, causing her Qi to move in such a way that she was able to create a large golden bell above her head.

This was a technique that came from one of the players and was now one of the greatest techniques of her sect.

The bell fell on top of her, forming another defensive structure around her. But it wasn't all defensive at all.

She covered her fist with golden energy and punched the left side of the bell from inside. A loud and sonorous sound targeted Alex and Alex only.

It hit him, sending a wave of nausea that came as a result of the sound. It was a mental attack and the woman was sure he would lose because of it.

She saw no sign of a mental defensive artifact, so she was more than sure it was working.

Then, she moved to the right, slamming the other side of the bell, and sent out another sound. This time, however, instead of being a mental attack, it was a Qi attack.

The attack came in the form of a wave, threatening to destroy everything in its path.

Alex released the breath he had been holding all this time, and with it, he also released the sword strike he had been preparing.

The wave split into two out of nowhere, dispersing violently as if a rock to a flock of pigeons.

Before the woman could understand what had happened, the golden bell split into two and then her armor cracked apart as well.

Her chest opened wide with fresh blood leaking out of the wound and she fell to the ground, no snake or bell around her any longer.

The buzzing talisman was the least of her worries as the woman thrashed around in violent pain that made her nearly faint.

It was only Alex who arrived and fed her a pill that she was finally relieved from all of the pain.

"My apologies," Alex quickly said. "I was trying to hold back, but your sudden mental attack made me throw out a stronger attack than I had been expecting to."

Before the woman could say anything, he hoisted her onto her feet and let the rest of her group take care of her.

Without waiting for a reply, he walked away, taking Shan Wangjiu and his dropped jaw with him.

Chapter 1596: Points

Alex strode through a marsh, the stink of the water only masked by the flowers that seemed to grow here. Even though he hadn't been here for it, he still picked up a few flowers that were Alchemy ingredients.

It was a surprise to him they hadn't been destroyed yet.

Close to 10 months had passed since he had entered the secret realm, close to the day he would pass all of the Monarch's bets and earn himself a fortune, despite the circumstances he had put himself in early on.

Although, he had never given much thought to their bets. He always knew he was strong enough to survive for long. The only reason he even gave any thought to those bets was because of what he was going to get in return.

Shan Wangjiu fought with another cultivator in the back, his sword shining with a white outline as he slammed it onto the cultivator multiple times. Even though his Sword Intent itself wasn't as strong, the strength of his cultivation base alone made him quite a terrifying fighter.

Anyone who lasted this long had to be one.

Alex ignored the young man, making his way to find more fighters. Not many had made their way to him these past few months and he missed the constant battles he had during the first 6 months, even if they had been particularly tiring at times.

Once the sound of the fighting behind him stopped, Alex heard Shan Wangjiu call out to him. "Master! Master!"

Shan Wangjiu rushed to where he was and smiled at him. "I won!" he said with a toothy grin.

"Great," Alex said. "Now fight me."

Shan Wangjiu did his best to put up a fight, but against Alex, he was still too weak. Even Alex alone with Sword Intent was too strong for him now, let alone when he was using Qi.

Alex didn't hold back when it came to sword fighting against the young man as he used every opportunity during the fight to teach him. Outside of battles, he wanted to find others to improve his swords on.

The young man lost, but that was expected. Alex won his first battle of the day as well, and that was something good.

This was the method the two of them had come to settle on in the past 3 months. Every day after reset, they would go looking out for fighters.

Alex would fight the strong fighters, and Shan Wangjiu would fight the weaker ones. Whoever it was that fought, they would either win or lose their first battle of the day.

Then, they would challenge each other, gaining a free win for their first match of the day.

Until today, Alex had received only 1 Loss, only the one he received on the first reset. As for the young man, he didn't tell Alex how many losses he had, but he had lost around 7 times in the last few months he had been with him.

Together, they had managed to go over 100 days with only 7 losses in between them. That was quite impressive, Alex thought.

Alex took out his talisman and looked through it.

Name: Alex, King of the Southern Continent

Acquired Points: 31536

Losses: 1/30

Out of Bounds: 0/5

Origin: Southern Continent

"Hey, Shan," he called out. "How many points do you have?"

"Points?" the young man asked and quickly checked. "2483."

"And Loss?" Alex continued.

The young man simply smiled. "Don't worry about that, Master," he said. "I'll stay with you for much longer."

Alex shook his head. "That's quite the disparity in points still," he thought. He hadn't given much thought to the points for a while now, but seeing how much he was gaining, he felt it wasn't right.

And he had indeed been right in thinking so.

He chuckled a little. "I unknowingly exploited the rules, it seems," he said out loud.

"Exploited? What do you mean, Master?" the young man asked.

"I have more points than that should be possible," Alex told him.

When the young man heard how many points Alex had, he thought he had heard him wrong. He asked him to double-check and was flabbergasted to learn it was real.

"But... but how?" he asked for an answer.

"Whoever made the rules messed up," Alex said. "Or maybe they simply didn't think so far ahead. They never imagined someone like me entering the secret realm."

The young man eyed him with confusion. He wanted him to talk more. Alex did.

"How do you earn points?" Alex asked him.

"Whenever I win a battle," the young man said. It was obvious.

"How many times can you battle?" Alex asked him.

"I don't think there's much of a limit to it." Shan Wangjiu propped his sword on his shoulder, wondering why Alex was asking such a simple question.

"If no one wanted to challenge you, how many times could you battle?" Alex asked.

The young man frowned. "If no one wanted to challenge me? Then none?" he asked.

"No one wants to challenge," Alex said. "Not that they won't accept if you challenge."

"Oh," the young man nodded and thought for a bit. "3 times," he answered. "That's the rule. You can only challenge 3 different times in a single day to earn points. All challenges after that do not give you points."

"Yes, and it is made that way so that a strong cultivator wouldn't exploit his strength and challenge whoever he can," Alex said. "It's a small deterrent to make him choose his first 3 fighters, instead of just challenging any weakling."

"But I ended up having people challenge me all day round, and even come back multiple days in a row. And best of all, I accepted every challenge," Alex said. "So, even on the worst days, I was making points after points."

"I don't think the ones who made the rules ended up thinking one could earn points like this, did they?" Alex asked.

"Hmm, maybe not," the young man said. "Or maybe they left behind a way to get points."

"Maybe," Alex said. "Still, I'm doing quite well thanks to them."

"You are, Master. Those many points and it hasn't even been—" Shan Wangjiu stopped speaking the moment he felt multiple spiritual senses pass through him and focus around them.

Alex looked around and saw a few people from outside the marsh make their way toward them. They landed in front of them, 3 men and 2 women. One of the men was almost as young looking as Alex and Shan Wangjiu, and two of the women looked to be not that old either.

Together, they smiled at Alex and Shan Wangjiu, but not a good smile. It was almost as if they hadn't recognized who he was.

That was not something Alex thought was still possible within the secret realm.

They looked in between the two of them, and with Shan Wangjiu's cultivation base being just 1 realm below Alex, the oldest man of them pointed toward him.

"You! Will you fight me to a duel?" he asked.

Shan Wangjiu hesitated a little seeing the man's Saint Transformation 1st realm cultivation base, but even then he nodded.

"I accept."

Chapter 1597: Wind

Alex saw the group glow up in smiles when Shan Wangjiu accepted the challenge. He took out his large sword and got ready to fight.

The old man stepped forward too and got ready to fight.

Alex watched the fight that never was a fight. It was one man dominating the other with his superior cultivation base. No one was surprised when the old man won in less than a minute.

When Shan Wangjiu had lost and was done with the fight, the old woman walked up front and challenged him.

The young man looked puzzled for a few seconds. "At least let me rest a little," he grumbled before accepting the challenge. The woman was much weaker than the old man, but she was still very much stronger than Wangjiu, and as a result, won her battle against him as well.

She fought for nearly 5 minutes, throwing at him everything she had. Shan Wangjiu came out of the fight breathing heavily. The fight had been short, but he was a little tired and felt drained.

Before he could properly rest, however, the stronger of the younger three, a girl challenged him.

Alex looked at what they were doing with a confused look. Were they trying to force Wangjiu to fight against their weaker ones while tired?

That was the only thing he could think of immediately, seeing the situation. The weakest of the 5 was still quite strong at around Saint Soul's 4th realm, so everyone would have an easy time winning even if they didn't do that.

The fight lasted for nearly 20 minutes, with the girl forcing Wangjiu to pour everything he had out into the battle. Even after he did so, he still lost.

As soon as he lost, just as Alex had expected, the fourth one rushed in and challenged the young man.

"Hell no!" Shan Wangjiu shouted at them. "I won't fight you."

The young man who had stepped forward to challenge with all smiles had his face darkened when he was rejected. He looked confused for a moment before releasing a sigh of understanding.

"We misjudged," he said to the others.

The last girl refused to believe they misjudged. She quickly walked up and challenged him Wangjiu, only to be berated before being rejected. The girl was angry, but she didn't put it out on him.

She turned around, returning to the group.

Wangjiu walked up to Alex, whispering in his ears. "They're mad or something," he said. "What sort of person gets angry after being refused?"

"The kind that doesn't get what they want," Alex said.

"Hmm..." the young man thought. "What do they want."

"As of yet, I'm not sure," Alex said. "But I have a hunch. If it is true, they'll challenge me next."

After talking for a bit, the older man came up to Alex and challenged him. Alex didn't accept or reject. Instead, he asked him a question.

"Do you guys care that I have all 3 of my rejections still left to give out?"

The old man looked at Alex in surprise. "You do?" he asked.

Alex nodded with a smile.

One could only refuse 3 times each day, so Alex had a hypothesis that the stronger people in the group were trying to whittle through the rejections so that the weaker ones could get their points, or even just have a chance to challenge someone weak when they found one.

"But just because I have one doesn't mean I will not accept," he said, drawing out Midnight from his storage. "I haven't met someone as strong as you in a while now. I'm not going to squander away my chances of training. Come on."

Their talisman buzzed and the battle was set.

The old one got ready to fight again, imagining it would be a very quick fight once again. He drew out no weapon of his own and threw out a casual punch that sent out a gust of wind that carried a force with it that didn't feel normal at all.

'Dao?' Alex wondered. He couldn't tell what Dao it was, or if it even was one. If it was, it would be a Wood Dao, and that was his weakest of all the elements.

He had no way of recognizing any of it. His sword flashed, a wave of Sword Qi getting rid of the wind. The old man gave a surprised look before clapping his hands together.

A low hum reverberated throughout the surroundings as it came for Alex. Alex covered his ears with Qi and his mind with spiritual energy.

He felt nothing after doing so. The old man paused again, confused about what was going on. He peered at Alex, trying to search for any sort of artifact that could be helping him, but he didn't recognize any of it.

At this point, the old man didn't know what to do. He pulled out a flat stick with intricate art on it. As if with a snap of a finger, he unfurled it into a beautiful paper fan.

"Oh," Alex said with a surprise. "That looks lovely."

The old man gave no heed to his words and readied an attack. At the same time, Alex put Midnight back into his storage, which confused the old man a little. But he didn't stop.

"I think I'll use this instead," Alex said, bringing out something. "I haven't used it ever in a fight though."

The old man's eyes went wide as Alex unfurled a fan of his own with pictures of clouds drawn upon it. From the fan, the old man could sense quite the intensity.

But beyond that, he could sense his own Dao from it.

"Dao of Wind?" he asked with a look that said he didn't understand what was happening. His eyes became stern and he sent a gust of wind.

Alex made a simple attacking gesture with his fan and winds of green flew out from it, flying toward the old man in the distance.

The two attacks fought each other, one born out of someone with a Dao, and one born out of an artifact that could create the Dao's aura.

In a match of equals, there was no doubt who it would be that would win the fight. There was no way for an artifact to ever be stronger than someone using the might of a Dao they learned.

After all, the heavens would be on their side in that fight.

However, even with the Dao, Alex's attack was stronger than the old man's. And the reason for that was very simple.

This was not a match of equals. Alex was in every way superior from the very start.

The wind of the fan destroyed the winds of the man and flew up to him to attack as well. Having learned the Dao of Wind, the man wasn't as hurt by it as he knew how to protect himself from it.

However, by the time he was ready for another attack, Alex had already taken out his sword once again.

"It's fun using the fan and all," he spoke, giving a gentle smile toward the man. "But I am a swordsman, so I must train with it. And I have much training to do, so don't lose very quickly, old man."

Chapter 1598: Volcanic Eruption

On the 402nd day after entering the secret realm, the ground shook in a roar.

Bird fled and the animals ran. Alex turned to look in the distance and saw a large mountain spew out lava high into the sky. A thick plume of smoke rose high into the sky, lightning crackling from it as if the heavens themselves were angry.

"What was that?" Shan Wangjiu, who had been busy practicing his sword, turned to look in that direction.

"A volcano erupted," Alex said. "I've never before seen such a sight."

He slowly flew to the sky. Not just him, but everyone did the same.

Wangjiu stopped practicing and started watching the sky as it was filled with dark clouds. Many other people were surprised by the suddenness of the situation as well.

"It's in the west," Wangjiu said softly. "Should we go check?"

"I already did," Alex said, turning to look at the young man. "Your spiritual sense doesn't extend as far, does it?"

Shan Wangjiu could only shake his head in horror. He couldn't believe how Alex could see that far. It was over a hundred kilometers away easily. He could only shake his head to get rid of the thought.

There were many things weird with Alex and just one more of it made no difference anymore.

"Why would a volcano erupt so suddenly?" he asked. "I would've expected some rumblings before it did so, but there was nothing."

"It didn't," Alex said quickly. "Zhao Boqin and someone I have never seen before are fighting there. They caused the volcano to explode."

"Zhao Boqin?" the young man turned toward Alex, confused.

"A member of the Talon legion," Alex said. "With Saint Transformation 4th realm cultivation base."

The young man gasped in disbelief. "There was someone that strong in the secret realm?" he asked.

"There is," Alex said. "What I'm more surprised by is that there is someone in here that hasn't lost to him immediately."

Alex could see the ongoing fight not just with his senses, but also his eyes. At a distance of nearly 120 kilometers, Zhao Boqin used a spear to fight a woman with long black hair, with bangs covering all of her forehead to her eyes.

"Fight me like a Legionnaire, Hongxi," Zhao Boqin shouted as he shot a golden dragon through his spear. "Stop running away."

The woman disappeared into the sky above her, hidden in the mist. There she masked herself, fighting back against the golden dragon.

Alex was curious about what was going on. He was more curious that she was another legionnaire. 'Her cultivation base,' he thought. Somehow he was sensing Saint Transformation 2nd realm.

'That shouldn't be right,' he thought. 'How could she survive against him if that was the case?'

But his mind immediately spewed out the possibility. 'She's fighting against someone stronger than herself,' he thought. Even amongst players, this was something special. Only a select few had it, and they could improve their prowess by a certain few realms.

Skipping a realm or two using Dao or certain techniques to improve one's strength of output was normal. But having it be so in everyday life was very, very special.

Some could only do so with a single realm, but there was one man he had met who could skip nearly 3 realms.

Alex couldn't tell if this girl was completely skipping 2 realms or not, but she was close. She was on the defensive in the battle against Zhao Boqin, rarely attacking back, if only to make more distance between the two of them.

Zhao Boqin roared at that and charged even stronger.

'I didn't think he was someone with such a high temper,' Alex thought.

The battle lasted a little longer, but the two fighters left his area of spiritual sense, so he couldn't see them any longer.

"They're gone," Alex said. But the ashen sky remained. Ash would fall from the sky soon enough and cover the ground in soot.

"Let us move too," Alex said. "I saw a few people in that direction. We can see if they are willing to fight."

Shan Wangjiu said nothing but nodded.

Even as they walked, the sky grew red with the sun itself appearing as such. The volcanic eruption was large enough that the ash would soon cover most of the secret realm.

"We're going toward the volcano?" the young man asked after seeing what direction they were walking toward.

"I wasn't intending to," Alex said. "A group of them just happened to be there. But since we are going in that direction, I might as well make use of it. Volcanic soot contains quite a bit of nutrition, so I should gather some."

The young man simply made a sound of agreeing.

As they walked, Alex saw a man walking in the same direction.

"Another fight?" Shan Wangjiu spoke directly into Alex's mind.

"I don't know," Alex replied. "Let's wait and see."

As they continued walking, it became clear soon enough that the two of them were walking in the same direction, and most likely to the same destination as well.

The man arrived close to them and recognized Alex. "Your Majesty," he said softly, his face changing an expression that Alex wasn't sure he witnessed correctly. Even if he did, he did not know what he witnessed.

He recalled the man vaguely as one of the people who fought against him and won. That was very early on though, so the young man wasn't that strong at all. Just Saint Soul 7th realm in cultivation base.

"Greetings, brother," Alex spoke back to him.

"May I ask what you're doing here, Your Majesty?" the young man asked. "Are you two like a group or something?"

"Not exactly," Alex said. "He just likes following me."

Shan Wangjiu shrugged as that was in a way the truth.

"Oh," the man responded. "I'm on my way to see if there are people I can fight. Do you want to join me? 3 gives it a much higher chance."

Alex thought for a bit and shrugged.

"Sure."

There was no point in not joining.

Each person got 3 rejections each day, and if they rejected a challenge, they wouldn't get rejected again. As such, having 3 or more people made it invaluable to find people to fight and not get a Loss in one's account.

There was a day Alex had received a loss like that. It was only a week ago, and they had found no one in their journey who wanted to fight him. Everyone rejected and in the end, Alex decided to take the loss for that.

Shan Wangjiu wanted to take the loss, but Alex could tell that the young man didn't have much longer to stay here if he continued losing. So, he took one for him.

If 4 people were together, one could go to a particular group and challenge everyone until their rejections ran out. Then they could fight.

Alex had learned that over 3 months ago after fighting a group of 5 individuals.

3 wasn't as good as 4 was, but it was better than 2 for sure.

They arrived next to the group some hour later and found nearly 20 people gathered there.

The sky was a tinge of red in what was mostly black. Darkness had enveloped the land hours after the volcano's eruption.

Alex and the tow walked through the falling ash that gathered around their feet and arrived at their destination; a group of 20 cultivators whose cultivation base went from Saint Foundation 8th realm to Saint Soul 2nd realm.

None of them seemed part of the same group or even part of the same Kingdom. Each one wore a different color robe, and some even seemed like they were rogue cultivators.

'So weak,' Alex thought. He had come to challenge stronger people, but it seemed he was mistaken. None of them were as strong as he had hoped they would be.

Alex didn't feel like challenging any of them.

There people there stirred at his sight and some of them quickly greeted him. Most of them were surprised to see him there.

Alex was only about to reply to their greetings when he was cut off.

"I challenge you!" the man that he had arrived with challenged the strongest of the group. The girl that had a cultivation base of Saint Soul 2nd realm looked at the young man with a slightly angry look before rejecting him.

The man said nothing and moved to the second strongest one. "I challenge you!" he pointed and spoke.

That person rejected him as well.

The young man wasn't done yet.

"I challenge you!"

"I challenge you!"

"Fight me!"

"Come on, let's fight."

"Let us see what you've got."

The man didn't stop at all, going through the entire 20 people before he was completely rejected. But somehow that didn't despise the man. He stood tall with a grin on his face.

"Your Majesty, your turn," the man stepped aside.

Alex thought for a bit and was about to say something when Shan Wangjiu looked at the first girl.

"Will you fight me? You seem as strong as me," he spoke to the girl. He wanted to use every possible instance to fight someone close in power to him.

Not only that, he hadn't done the fight of the day either. It was still late in the afternoon, so he had over 20 hours to search for more fights, but the faster he found someone he could challenge, the better it was.

If not, he would have to accept challenges from people that he couldn't win against. He did not want to do that just yet.

Not when he had barely any more Losses left.

The girl looked at him without a word, considering the challenge wordlessly before shaking her head. She rejected that fight as well.

"The next one. That one," the other man pointed Shan Wangjiu toward a man who was behind the girl who had just been rejected.

"No," Wangjiu said. "He's a little too weak. I want to fight someone strong like her."

"Just do it," the man said. "Why are you here if you won't do it?"

"I just follow His Majesty, nothing else," the young man said.

The man looked at him and sighed. "You're not useful at all," the man said before turning to Alex. "Your Majesty?"

Alex thought for a bit and asked. "Are you guys all done with your day's losses?"

The girl shook her head. "Not yet," she said. "We're hoping to meet someone we can win against so that none of us would have to lose."

"You have 20 people," Alex said. "You will last the next 11 months if all of you share your losses."

The girl shook her head. "That would be true if we had no loss. But we're weaker cultivators and have been relentlessly challenged by stronger cultivators. Now, we don't have that many losses available to us."

"What we do have, we have to make use to last as long as possible," the girl said.

Alex hadn't thought of it that way and nodded a little. "So you haven't fought for today. I was hoping to find someone to fight, but it seems I won't have the chance."

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty," the girl spoke and bowed a little.

Alex shrugged. There was nothing he could do here besides forcing them to fight, and he didn't want that.

"You won't fight, Your Majesty?" the man next to him asked.

"No," Alex said. "I'll see if I can find someone else."

"I see," the man said. "Well, you won't have to go far away. You can fight one of them right here."

Just as he said that Alex turned around, sensing an aura that was quickly moving in this very direction. His spiritual sense covered them and it was a man and two women who were flying in this direction with an incredible speed.

None of the 3 of them were from the same group or sect; Alex could tell at least that.

They arrived and landed next to the man, their faces in a wide grin. "Woah! So many," one of the girls said excitedly before turning toward Alex. "Oh, His Majesty is here too."

Alex was a little curious about how everything was going to play out next. He had an idea where everything was going, so he had to just wait and see.

After they greeted him, they turned toward the group of people, and the girl challenged the strongest girl.

Challenged for the third time, the girl from the large group frowned and rejected the challenge. But immediately the newly arrived man requested a battle as well.

That the girl couldn't reject.

She reluctantly accepted and fought. Against the group of strong individuals, she lost very quickly.

Having won his fight of the day, the man laughed excitedly. But it only lasted as long as it took for one of the girls to call out his name.

"Do it already!" the girl said and the man nodded.

Then, he challenged another person. He was rejected by the next person in line and didn't want to lose. And then, the man moved on to another.

The girl who had just lost understood what was happening. Panic filled her heart at once.

"I challenge you!" the girl turned to one of her friends at once.

The group of 4 realized that she realized as well. "Faster! She'll go through them quickly!" the man who came with Alex shouted.

Chaos began.

A race began to see what would happen faster. Would the outsiders challenge them first after getting rid of their possible rejection, or would the group manage to get done with everyone's first fight by the time it had all ended?

Alex watched in amazement as challenges were thrown around one after another, the grown-up men and women acting like children to do so.

In the end, the outsiders managed to give 4 of the 20 people Losses before everything was calm once more. The 20 of them glared at the 4 of them, and some even glared at Alex and Shan Wangjiu.

Then, the four people turned toward Alex as well.

Alex grimaced. It was fine if they challenged him, but if they challenged Wangjiu, it was very much possible that he would be taken out of the secret realm.

Alex doubted he had any more Loss he could afford to gain.

Chapter 1600: Green Flames

4 Challengers and 2 possible rejections meant Shan Wangjiu would have to fight someone here.

"I challenge you," the man who had come there with Alex and Wangjiu was the first to send out a challenge.

And to Alex's surprise, the man pointed at him.

"You wish to challenge me?" Alex couldn't help but ask curiously. He had expected the challenge to fall on the weaker of the two.

"Yes," the man said. "Do I still get pills when I win?"

"You do," Alex said, hiding his relief from his voice.

'This is good,' he thought. 'As soon as I win, I can challenge Wangjiu and lose to him. He can get saved on getting however few Losses he can still get.'

The thought was fleeting, but it brought Alex some sense of relief. He had been about to accept the challenge when he heard someone else speak next to him.

"Do you want to fight me?" one of the girls with Saint Soul 5th realm cultivation base called out to Wangjiu.

Alex didn't turn around to look at her or Wangjiu, but his spiritual sense reached out to him and told him what he planned.

'I'll finish it quickly. Drag on the rejection and I should be done by then,' he told the young man. Once finished, he turned back to his own challenger and spoke.

"I accept."

"I accept."

Almost at the same time, Shan Wangjiu's voice floated next to him, almost like an echo, surprising Alex.

"What are you doing?" Alex asked, turning to look at the young man. He hadn't realized when it was, but over the past half a year he had been with him, Alex truly had ended up thinking of the young man as more than just an acquaintance.

"What's the point of rejecting, master?" the young man asked with a smile on his face. "I came here to fight and grow. Can't do that without actually fighting, now can I?"

Alex felt a little stunned, and then he smiled.

"You're right," he thought. "You don't need me to save you."

"No, you don't," the young man said excitedly. "I'm not so weak that I will lose without putting up a good fight."

"Your Majesty," the young man that challenged him spoke. "You should focus on your own battle."

He attacked after giving only moments for Alex to pull his attention back into their battle.

Four horses made of dense Fire Qi galloped from in front of the man, running toward Alex at a furious speed. Alex only punched once, four golden spears forming at his punch, each easily targeting the four horses to destroy them.

Not a shred of the horses remained.

The young man looked surprised, but it only lasted for a moment before a serious expression replaced it. He brought out an artifact.

A copper lantern with a black roof and a golden handle at the top with 6 sides of glass hung from the man's hand, with a small flame of green fire burning inside of it without any source.

Alex looked at the flame in quiet curiosity. It reminded him of the Zhou family's White Flame back in the Western Continent before it did Phoenix fire.

'A different type of flame?' Alex wondered. He wondered too what the properties of the flame might be. As an alchemist, he was told he would need unique flames to help him during his Alchemy sessions for better results.

Would this sort of flame help him in any way?

The young man poured Qi into his lantern and one side of the glass opened up, releasing a green flaming bird that flew out of it and charged toward Alex.

The bird seemed nearly corporeal, its form more real than any beasts he had seen made out of Qi. The bird was a hawk with nearly 3 meters of wingspan. Green flames burned from the corner of its eyes that stared at Alex.

The hawk flew right toward him.

Alex did everything in his hand to hold himself back from attacking the bird or destroying it. The only thing he did was make his body more durable with Qi and then let the bird smash into him.

Green flames covered him. Hot fire burned at every inch of his body, prickling all over his skin even though he had the True Fire Dao.

The flames were hot, much hotter than normal flames, but nowhere near hot enough to compare to the Phoenix fire. Also, while it pricked all over his body, it didn't exactly hurt.

The flame had a higher temperature, but that alone should not have made it special. One could just use a technique that increased the temperature of flames or even just use a Dao.

There was something about the fire that was abnormal for sure.

Alex looked for understanding in his Flame Dao and reached it in the Dao of Burning.

Burning.

The fire burned for much longer than normal.

'So that's it,' Alex realized.

Despite the temperature of the fire, it didn't burn what it was on. The parts that it consumed, it consumed slower so that the flames could last for much longer.

'It takes time to burn through things, so the heat ends up dealing more wounds than normal,' Alex thought. 'Not very useful for Alchemy.'

It wasn't even very useful for anything for him given that he had the Dao of Burning in his True Fire Dao.

With but a thought, the flames vanished from all around him. Countering the green fire's traits with his Fire Dao, Alex easily got rid of it all as if it never existed.

Darkness returned in the ash-covered land as Alex stood there with no harm to his body at all.

Everyone, including Shan Wangjiu and his challenger who were supposed to fighting on the other side, looked at him. Some had eyes of fear, some of confusion.

None expected what had happened to happen.

"Your majesty," the young man slowly called out before gulping heavily. "Are you okay?"

"I see," Alex said. "I must have scared you all. I was only inspecting the green fire. No need to get scared. My talisman would've saved me had I needed the help."

The young man in front of him couldn't believe it. His lantern was something he gained after killing someone long ago, who he now guessed was a player. Since then, since he refined the artifact, there hadn't been anyone who was his equal, or weaker than him that could stand those flames.

And yet... Alex had somehow managed to do that while being nearly 4 realms weaker than him. How was that possible at all?

"This is your first battle of the day, isn't it?" Alex asked the man.

The man listlessly nodded. He had been challenging everyone, but everyone had rejected him. He had paved the way for his fellow cultivators to gain the points.

"A shame," Alex said. "I do not know how many losses you have gathered in the past year, but here you will have to gain one more."

"No," the man said softly, the possibility not making sense to him.

"Unfortunately," Alex replied. "You lost your right to win the moment you challenged me."