

Alchemy 1601

Chapter 1601: Shan Wangjiu's Battle

Alex half-heartedly fought his challenger, using Sword Intent alone to fight him. His Sword Intent was just strong enough to match Saint Soul 7th Realm fighters, so it was enough in his eyes.

Most of his attention was focused on Shan Wangjiu who had resumed his fight.

His giant silver sword glowed with Sword Intent, now stronger than ever and matching his cultivation base of Saint Soul 2nd realm.

Fighting against a Saint Soul 5th realm cultivator though was not easy even with it.

The girl used a rather unorthodox weapon. Her two hands wore two massive metal claws, each of which had 4 golden blades coming out of them.

The girl swung her hand and golden slices flew through the air.

Wangjiu prepared his sword, slicing in an arc, sending a wind slash flying in the direction of the 4 golden slices.

The attack he used was the sword technique which was the first good sword technique Alex had learned. It was the Elusive Heavenly Sword technique, which consisted of 3 different Sword slashes.

One used regular Qi, the 2nd one used weaker Wood Qi which could only be used by someone with an Inferior Wood Spiritual Root, and finally one last slash that was the most powerful of all but required one to have a Superior Wood Spiritual Root.

Shan Wangjiu had that and two more superior roots.

The wind attack struck the incoming 4 slashes at once, destroying them all. Carrying his Sword Intent along with them, the attack was strong enough so that nothing followed through.

Shan Wangjiu activated his movement technique. A burst of energy sent him propelling forward for a short distance. He had control over which direction he moved toward, but little in terms of adjustments.

He brandished his sword high above him and slashed down as he arrived next to her.

The girl moved, dodging the incoming attack, but it had been close. The speed at which her opponent moved was not something she could react to in time if she had been careless.

'So fast,' she thought. It was fortunate he made no changes to the course he moved at or she would've been hit.

She swung her claws again, sending more slashes flying toward the young man.

Shan Wangjiu struck aside the slashes before moving toward the girl at a brisk speed. He once again propelled forward in a burst of energy, and this time the distance was too close for the girl to dodge.

She placed her two claws above her, stopping the incoming slash.

Metal rang as the sword hit the 8 blades and the girl grunted. 'So heavy,' she thought in surprise. It was rarely that she met someone using such a heavy sword, and not a single one of them had been this heavy.

Her feet moved, kicking toward the young man. She kicked him in the stomach, but at the same time, lightning shocked her as well.

Wangjiu flew back, crashing onto the ash-covered land, sending it flying everywhere. He felt a burning pain in his stomach where he could feel metal Qi dissipating slowly.

The attack the girl had made had been a random one, but it showed the disparity between the two of them. She was stronger than him easily, and he had to be careful.

The girl on the other hand was hurt much less, but it was still damaged. She was furious in thought that this damage had come for her from someone 3 realms lower than her.

But it felt as if he was 2 realms lower than her. When adding on his Sword Intent, it was as if he was only a realm lower than her.

'What is wrong with these two?' she wondered, her eyes glancing at Alex who was to the side, playing with his challenger. She had joined the group after being defeated by that same man, and now he was being played with.

'We should've never come here,' she thought.

Her distraction lasted not much longer as she saw a red sword slash fly toward her. Sword Slashes were dangerous, so she focused her attention on it, ready to strike it away.

She was a little late, but not enough that she couldn't protect herself. She used her gauntlet with claws again, using the technique carved within it to send out more blade slashes.

The Fire slash struck the golden claw slashes, but this time something was different. The clash resulted in an explosion that rattled the sky. The thunderous sound of the explosion caught her off guard and she even felt a bit of force from it attack her.

'What the hell was that?' she wondered, only for a moment before panic filled her. Through the explosion, through the smoke, Shan Wangjiu propelled himself forward, arriving in front of her.

Water Qi encircled his blade and he slashed, sending a torrent of water down on the girl. The girl protected herself, but it was a little late this time.

The water struck her, sending her flying away. She only managed to stop it a distance away.

Angry, small flowers blossomed around the girl. At first, there were 2, then 4, then 8. Soon there were 16 flowers, that became 32.

More emerged, becoming 64.

Shan Wangjiu wasn't sure what was going on, but he understood somehow that this was a very strong technique.

The flowers the woman made doubled to become 128. Each one was a bellflower, opening up like an upside-down golden bell around the woman. The petals split off from each of the flowers, becoming their own thing.

Then, the girl pointed at the young man and the petals followed her finger.

Hundreds of petals, made of Metal Qi rushed toward the young man like a swarm of insects. The young man stood in the air in panic and only managed to raise his sword in time before he was struck.

Golden color filled the black sky as the torrent of flowers crushed him from all sides. The girl sent the petals until none remained. She did not hold back at all.

If the young man was injured, he would be saved by the talisman. She was sure of that.

The golden light remained in the sky for a moment before dimming, but not all light dimmed. In the lack of the golden light, one light remained.

A green, mostly transparent light that covered the young man in a bubble around him. The young man held his sword in front of him, which too glowed green right now.

The green light of the sword faded and the bubble around him disappeared. The young man looked out from the barrier, breathing heavily. He was more scared than he was hurt.

"It worked!" he shouted softly, surprised even himself. He looked at the sword in glee. "It worked! You did it!"

The sword hummed in silent response.

After refining the sword, the young man had figured out the technique carved into the sword. It was a defensive technique that could be prepared in advance and then launched in battle without having to prepare it once again.

Ever since learning that, the young man had practiced it many times, but one thing had been in his mind all that time.

If he could prepare the technique beforehand, did he have to be the one to use it? The answer had made itself clear today.

He didn't.

The Sword Spirit could use the technique as well.

Chapter 1602: Learn

Shan Wangjiu's excitement didn't lower even as he returned to the fight. He fought, giving his all to the battle, and tried his best to win.

In the end, the cultivation base disparity between him and his opponent made it a little difficult for him to do so. He lost in the end, not because he couldn't fight anymore, but because the talisman he wore deemed that he had lost in the match between the two.

After the girl got used to his tricks, she rarely managed to let him get close, and the barrage of attacks that came afterward sealed his fate.

The group of 4 quickly left before Alex challenged them in revenge or just for point, leaving the rest of them behind.

"Are you alright?" Alex asked Shan Wangjiu who slowly walked back toward him.

"I'm fine," Wangjiu said, wiping the ashes from his clothes. "Did you see that, master? My sword used the technique on its own."

"That I did," Alex said with a hint of a smile forming on his face. "I've had Midnight for a while now, and even it hasn't done something like that, not that I can think of an opportunity for it to."

Wangjiu started paying attention to his sword again, happily speaking to it.

"How many more Losses?" Alex asked him.

"Don't worry, Master. I will—"

"How many?" Alex asked again, this time his voice stern.

The young man paused, realizing the seriousness of his question. He sighed in the end, taking out his talisman before answering.

"1 more."

Alex nodded silently. "I don't have much to teach you anymore," he said. "But since you followed me all this time to learn about my nameless technique, I will do you the honor of giving you your final Loss tomorrow."

"I will be showing you the technique I created. Make sure to do your best to learn what you can from it," Alex said.

The young man's face turned firm, all forms of excitement melting away from him as only grim expression remained. "Tomorrow?" he asked for a moment before shaking his head. "No matter. I will learn what I can."

Alex nodded back.

He turned around to look at the group of 20 that were together on the ashfallen ground, all of whom were still filled with nervousness and anxiety regarding what had just happened that day.

Seeing Alex turn to them, their panic returned in full fury and a few of them began bracing them for a battle.

Alex's eyes went to the girl with the Saint Soul 2nd realm cultivation base.

"Do you mind if we spend the night with you all here?" he asked them. "Just until noon tomorrow."

The girl frowned a bit and Alex quickly added.

"We will leave before the reset happens."

The girl could only sigh. "We can refuse your request just as much as we can reject your challenge, Your Majesty," she said softly. "Please stay. We will consider it our honor."

Alex smiled and sat close by where everyone was gathered.

Shan Wangjiu sat too but away from Alex to focus on the last day he had in this secret realm. At least for the next 30 years.

Alex talked to the girl, trying to learn a bit more about the group, and how people that were not aligned with each other were together here at all.

"We don't belong to the same sect or family, Your Majesty," the girl answered. "But we do have the same goal, which is why we stick together."

"And what goal is that, if I may ask."

The girl shrugged. "To stay in here as long as you can," she said.

Alex was a little stumped. He gave a weird look before trying to think of what that meant. "But you don't fight to gain points, do you?" he asked.

"No, we don't care about points," the girl answered. "Just how long we stay in here."

"But the ranking outside is with points unless I'm mistaken somehow," Alex said. He didn't believe he was wrong, but what would he know? He was an outsider.

"The ranking outside indeed considers points as the system of ranking, Your Majesty," the girl answered. "But not our sects. Not our houses."

Alex's eyes narrowed before widening in understanding. "Ah, I see," he said. "Is there some sort of ranking back in your sect based on how long you last?"

"For some, yes," the girl answers. "Each one's situation is different, you see Your Majesty. In my instance, my Nine Rings sect has promised to give us rewards depending on how long we last inside the secret realm."

"So, I plan on lasting for as many days as I can," the girl answered. "The longer I can last, the best the reward I can get."

"I see," Alex said. "I wish you luck."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," the girl replied. "I will need it."

The girl went on to tell him how hard it had been for them to stay for long. Those 4 that came during the afternoon weren't the only ones that were hunting for groups like theirs.

They went around searching for them as they were weaker and they liked hunting weaker ones as they would last longer because of that. Their group had been hunted like that nearly 20 different times.

Their group had initially consisted of nearly 30, but after so many targeted attacks, they had dropped to 20. And they were constantly lowering in number.

"Most stop after getting a single victory, since that is all that they want," the girl said. "But there are some, like the ones that we saw today who like to get rid of us as fast as they can. They just like attacking us regardless of whether that would help them or not."

Alex nodded vaguely. He talked for a bit longer and in that time 3 more people came to their group to challenge them.

The people only challenged some of the weaker fighters, who no longer had any reason to reject their challenges.

The fight lasted not for long, but the people who came did nothing more after winning and left.

The morning sun shone through the sky, the volcanic clouds already disappearing to almost nothing. The sky still seemed to be filled with smoke, but it mattered little for Alex and the others.

Alex cultivated the entire night and cultivated even as the sun moved up on the horizon. As it got closer and closer to noon, the girl and the others started looking at Alex and Shan Wangjiu warily.

Alex sighed in the end, knowing he couldn't stay there any longer.

"We should be leaving," he said as he stood up.

The girl said nothing else but a small farewell as she bowed toward him. Then the two men flew away, leaving the group by themselves.

"Where do you want to go?" Alex asked Shan Wangjiu.

The young man looked from the sky and saw an open grassland in the distance next to a giant chasm. They landed there and waited for the reset.

"Have you truly taught me everything, master?" the young man asked.

"Everything I can teach as a namesake master," Alex said. "You're not my direct disciple, so I have no reason to pass you everything."

The young man chuckled. "Would be nice though," he said. "What are you still holding back, if I may ask."

Alex thought for a moment and nodded. "You have the Wood, Fire, and Water Spiritual roots, so of those I have taught you everything I know or is useful. But of the techniques that are from other elements or have no need for an element, I have taught you nothing."

Alex pulled out Midnight, which shined with golden light. Alex rotated his wrist around him, moving the sword in an arch, like the hands of a clock.

5 golden swords formed like images left behind by midnight. "This is a technique I couldn't teach you, even though I wanted to," Alex said. The Pente-Sword technique flew out past the young man, flying into the chasm where it struck something with a damning boom at the bottom.

Alex snapped his finger and 74 different swords flew out around him, forming an array of swords circling above him.

Alex let go of Midnight and it flew up to the front, becoming the spearhead of the formation.

"This is a technique that you simply cannot learn because you do not have enough swords to learn it," Alex said. "Although I might end up providing you its weaker version."

The swords all flew back into Alex's storage. All but one.

Midnight remained, and Alex grasped it again.

The young man looked forward to what he was going to see next. An Earth-based sword technique? A Metal-based sword technique? Or a special sword maneuvering skill?

All such thoughts left the man's mind immediately as he saw what Alex did next.

Alex covered the sword in another type of energy, but it was not one that he had ever seen being used like this.

The sword glowed a light white as Spiritual energy covered the sword, forming its shape like a glove to a hand.

"This is one you can learn," Alex said. "But I will not teach you. Consider this my greed to be the only one to use it."

The spiritual energy dissipated from the sword, forcing the young man to gulp at the impossibility of it all. He couldn't imagine such a thing was even possible.

Both of their talismans buzzed at once as the reset was there.

"Finally, there is my new nameless technique," Alex said. "I won't teach it to you, but learn what you can from it."

The young man nodded furiously.

"Your final hour in this secret realm is here," Alex said. "We shall begin."

Chapter 1603: Shan Wangjiu's Final Hour

Alex stood on the barren land, the chasm to his left. He held Midnight in his right hand, the dark blade with glittering white specks in it made from starforged tungsten.

He stood calm and collected, as if not a single thought concerned him at this moment.

On the other side of him, with the chasm to his right stood Shan Wangjiu. His gray robe flapped in the wind, a look of nervousness and excitement both filling him from head to toe.

He held his sword in front of him which was nearly twice the size of Midnight.

"I'm ready," he spoke with no audible hesitation in his voice.

Alex cracked a small smile. "Then watch carefully."

Shan Wangjiu poured every ounce of his Qi into his sword and it drank it all. It consumed the Qi until it could accept it no longer. Full, the budding sword spirit was half aware that it could use the technique carved into it, should that be necessary.

His face grimaced as Alex started using Qi. What was he doing? How much Sword Intent was he using? What elements was he using?

The young man tried to see it all, learn it all. That was why he was here after all. To learn. To understand what it was that made Alex's technique seem so strong.

The technique that had made him decide to call him master.

The young man was slightly disappointed to see rays of golden light as Metal Qi was being used in it. He had seen those glows before but this was the first time he actively tried to figure out every step.

He was disappointed because someone without any Metal Spiritual would have no chance of using the technique should he ever figure out how exactly it worked.

'Wait,' Wangjiu thought as something caught his eye. Something he hadn't noticed until now.

The Qi being used was of Metal element certainly, but it didn't just come from Alex. It came from the atmosphere itself. From the air, from the ground.

'Dao,' the young man understood. 'He's using Dao.'

If it was Dao, then the young man had a chance. Without a Metal Spiritual root, it was nearly impossible to learn any Metal Dao, the young man knew. And that was what gave him hope.

It was nearly impossible.

Not absolutely.

'If there's a chance, I will find it,' he thought.

His thought lasted only for a split second as he saw Alex's sword move. He got ready for the attack as Alex swung his sword.

And then...

Part of the cliff crumbled and fell into the chasm behind Shan Wangjiu. He stood still, unsure of what happened. He slowly moved his head to the right until he was looking behind him.

He saw a large gouge on the cliff until the end where it crumbled. He gulped a little, looking at the damage.

He hadn't even seen the attack coming.

Judging the trajectory of the attack, the young man knew that it must've passed right next to his hands. Yet he never sensed it at all. Was that what happened to all the people who fought against this sword technique?

He gulped.

All of this time, he had been on the outside watching where he could see the challengers get taken out by the sword strike. He had always wondered how good the technique must've been to do so.

This was the first time it was used against him and he finally understood why they were all caught off guard as if unprepared.

For all his preparations, he hadn't seen it coming at all. No, there was no attack at all. Was there? The young man started getting confused.

"Did you get that?" Alex asked from the front.

The young man could only breathe. "It... I didn't see it at all. It was like... like it didn't exist at all. Not until it struck the ground behind me," the young man said. "Did it teleport or something?"

Alex chuckled. "Nothing of that sort," he said. "I have just been working on compressing it as much as possible. It's also fast on top of that, so you might have missed it."

The young man nodded.

"I'll try to make it weaker now," Alex said. "See if you can stop it."

Shan Wangjiu gulped quickly and nodded. He tried his best to let go of all his thoughts and concentrated on Alex once again.

He saw the golden light, he felt the metal Qi. And he saw the compression.

'The compression,' the young man thought slowly. 'So I should compress it.' That was the only thing he got away from it.

'Do I need Metal Qi to compress it?' he wondered. He didn't think that was necessary, but then what did he know?

'Focus!' he told himself and looked back at the sword.

It glowed with faint light, almost nothing. No doubt all the energy was compressed to the point that nothing leaked. He saw something else he hadn't noticed the first time around.

It was the look of concentration on Alex's face as if he had to force himself to do what he was doing. 'All this time and he still has that face,' the young man thought. 'How much Intent does it require?'

He was catching onto things that he wouldn't have had he remained on the sideline.

"Careful," Alex suddenly spoke. "This is coming for you."

The young man felt a tinge of panic flare up within him which he quickly calmed down and looked in front of him. He nodded slowly and took a deep breath.

He put all his attention into Alex's sword and for the first time, he actually saw the technique through his spiritual sense.

An attack that was thinner than a hair flew toward him, its power seemingly warping space itself where it moved. It cut space with its raw power, but not to the point that space couldn't immediately mend itself.

A thought flashed in the young man's mind to let his sword handle the defense portion, but he felt doubt there. Without waiting, he flared up his Qi and the defensive bubble of the sword formed around him like a protective barrier.

Even through the barrier, the young man saw the attack pass right through it, hitting him in the chest. Pain flared on his right side from the cut that was skin deep and only then did the barrier begin shattering.

The attack had been so sharp that the barrier then took a moment to realize that it had been cut.

Even as Shan Wangjiu fell to the ground, he could only think one thing.

'Incredible.'

His talisman buzzed as he skidded along the floor, stopping right before he fell into the giant chasm. He slowly stood up, his sword still in hand.

'We lost,' he thought and the sword sent back a vague impression of understanding. It was meant to happen.

Light sprung forth from inside his robe as the talisman sent out silver light that quickly covered him. He had reached his limit of 30 Losses.

He readied himself to leave.

Alex appeared in front of him and quickly hoisted him up. "How was it?" he asked the young man.

"Incredible, master," he said. "I can't imagine how you ever managed to think of it"

Alex smiled. "I had a bit of help," he said. "And the Dao I knew helped me create it."

"Dao?" the young man asked. "May I ask which ones?" The Silver light had surrounded him by now, but it didn't seem to tug him along, so he spoke casually.

"3 as of now and I won't tell you which ones. Those are my secrets," Alex said. "If I find I need more, I'll add. At that point, if you are around, I wouldn't mind showing it to you."

Shan Wangjiu gave a dry chuckle.

"3 Dao?" he asked. "That's more than what most people learn in their lifetime and you used it one a sword technique." He shook his head. "It must take a lot of Intent."

"It does," Alex said. "Using Dao simultaneously uses up more Intent than using it one after another as if the heavens do not like the idea of us using it at once. And I have to use 3 at the same time."

"Not all is bad though, it is because of the Dao that the attack is strong. It's because of it that I can do what I can do," Alex finished.

"I see," the young man said and thought of things to ask, but looking at the silver light surrounding him, he feared he didn't have much time. He only had one thing to say.

He bowed deeply with more respect in that bow than to anyone he had ever shown that respect, even to Alex. "Thank you for all that you have done for me, master. You may not consider me a true disciple, but I will always consider you my master."

Alex paused for a moment, thinking of what to say, and then said. "I had as much pleasure teaching you as I could've had in this place. Thank you for being there for me for the past 8 months."

The young man looked up.

"I will meet you again, master," the young man said with a bright smile.

Alex smiled back. "See you again."

The young man felt the tug of the silver energy appear suddenly, missing the small hand gesture Alex had done to no longer keep the young man there.

Shan Wangjiu left the Martial Transcendence ground and Alex was left alone by the chasm.

"Now then," Alex turned around. "Time for more training."

Chapter 1604: Meeting Again

Alex struggled to find any person for Pearl to train against. It had been as such for the past few months, but now it was exceptionally so.

Not a single person remaining was any weaker than Saint Core 5th realm if there were even that anymore. If they were, they were most likely hiding somewhere, inside formations that covered their tracks.

Alex wondered if he should go look for barriers or disturbances in the surroundings.

Pearl walked by his side and Whisker was on his shoulder. With Shan Wangjiu gone from the secret realm for the past 3 months, they were Alex's only companions on his journey through the vast land.

With a size of over a hundred kilometer on all side, Alex was certain there was still places here that he hadn't seen, which he wanted to.

As they walked, Alex sensed something in the distance. There was a disturbance in the sky to the east as if the heavens itself had descended.

"Dao?" Pearl looks to his left. He too sensed it.

"Maybe," Alex said. It was close, as close as 50 kilometers could be to a man, and his spiritual sense reached the aura. He tried to sense for any sort of Dao that descended. He sensed nothing out of the ordinary.

"Huh," Alex said softly, catching Pearl's attention. "Not Dao. Breakthrough."

It was hard to discern between the two and the only difference one could use to figure out which one it might be was to look into the aura and search for a singular aura that was revealing itself to the person trying to learn it.

"It's a breakthrough, I'm certain of it," Alex said. "But quite the strong one. I wonder who is breaking through."

Curiosity took hold of Alex for a moment before he let it go. It would not be right to take a peek at people breaking through, not that he wanted to. He shrugged slightly and left.

He fought a few times along the way in the next 3 days, making sure to not gain a loss. Then, he arrived at a large mountain with no tree but a grassland that sloped upward. He slowly walked halfway up the mountain when he suddenly sensed a few people's aura popping up in front of him.

As if walking out of a fold in space, two men came out not even a mere 100 meters away from Alex up the mountain slope. Until the two of them were seen, Alex hadn't sensed them at all.

That was more than enough to make Alex wonder who they were and what they did to hide themselves so well. It took only a moment for Alex to guess that there was most likely most sort of formation behind the two men.

As for who they were, the old man on the left wore a long-sleeved robe folded halfway up his bicep, which was as well kept as anybody cultivator. His long royal blue robe gave him a look of youth that directly contradicted the gray-haired and gray-bearded face the old man had.

Next to him stood a young man that Alex knew by name if by nothing else. Teng Xuegang. He was a young man from the Realms Beyond Sect and had a cultivation base of Saint Transformation 1st realm.

The last Alex had seen of this man had been during the first month of his entrance to the secret realm when he had given Teng Roukang's staff to him. The next time Alex had come out, the young man had no longer remained there.

"Your Majesty," the old man in the Royal Blue bowed in front of Alex. "This one is Long Bolao, of the Imperial Azure family. May I ask why Your Majesty has come to this mountain?"

Alex eyed the man for a few moments, recognizing what his introduction meant. This man was of the royal blood of the Azure Empire, only it was so far gone that he was nothing more than just someone with blood.

However, that didn't make him any less impressive with a cultivation base of Saint Transformation's 2nd realm.

"I came here perchance," Alex said. "I only wished to pass the mountain and see what lies beyond. Nothing more, nothing less."

The old man gave a long look, thinking to himself of something, or maybe communicating to someone, before nodding. "I see," he said. "Then would His Majesty be willing to go around the mountains and the valley if he were to know that it has been occupied?"

"Occupied?" Alex asked curiously. "May I ask by whom?"

"Just a few of us who wish to leave out our time in peace," the old man said. "If Your Majesty needs to win a match with a loss, then this old man can help you with that. I've already completed by matches and—"

The old man's words stuck to his mouth and his face changed. The younger man looked at him too, and a few seconds later, another young man popped out of seemingly nowhere, his cultivation base appeared just the same as the two others.

"Your Majesty!" the young man called out with a smile. "I thought I wouldn't get to see you again."

"Oh, brother Yingkong!" Alex said with a hint of surprise in his face. He hadn't expected to see the Silver Queen's brother here at all.

They had been separated nearly a year and a half ago when they entered the Martial Transcendence ground and this was the first time he was seeing him since then.

"I heard you were still here, Your Majesty, but it's hard to believe it without actually seeing you," the young man said with a happy smile. "My sister must be seething to know that you haven't lost by now."

"I wouldn't know," Alex said but everyone could see that he agreed as well. "You never came to meet me."

The young man scratched his head in a slight hesitation. "I... found out where you were a week or two after we arrived, and by then I saw no point in going to you. It seemed you had everything handled."

Alex nodded.

"Still, it is good to see you again," the young man said.

Alex remembered something. "Didn't you say it would be difficult for you to last an entire year?" he asked him.

"By myself, yes," the young man said. "I decided to join a group, so I can last much longer now."

Alex could see that.

Another figure walked out from out of nowhere, this time a woman. It was Fang Yimu of the Cloud Iron sect.

"Lady Yimu, you're here too?" Alex was surprised to see her there. This was quite the ground.

"It's nice to see you again, Your Majesty," the woman said meekly. "I have been asked to ask something of you."

Alex looked at her curiously. "Go ahead," he said.

"Have you come here on your own, or were you sent here by her, to ask for peace?" Fang Yimu asked.

Alex saw as much as he felt the air around them getting tense all of a sudden. Even Mao Yingkong, who had all smiled previously let go of it to look at Alex.

Alex on the other hand no idea what they were talking about.

"Who is 'her'?" he asked them.

"Shang Hongxi," Fang Yimu said with a stern voice as if that name meant something big.

"Shang Hongxi?" Alex asked her with a confused look on his face. The name tugged something in the back of his head, but he wasn't sure exactly at what.

"Shang Hongxi..." he mouthed the word trying to remember such a person. A woman.

Just then, he remembered where he had heard of the name. He hadn't heard of her full name, but he had heard of Hongxi. "Is she a legionnaire by any chance?" Alex asked the group of 4.

The group looked even more serious, so Alex had to butt in.

"I don't know why she makes you scared, but I only remember the name because it was what was shouted on top of the volcano that exploded a few months back," Alex said. "She was fighting another legionnaire at that time, someone—"

"Me," a voice drifted out of nowhere and a man walked out from inside, making a total of 5 people there. This time around though

Alex couldn't help but show some shock on his face when he saw Zhao Boqin walk out as well. Someone with a cultivation base of Saint Transformation 5th realm.

'5th realm?' Alex thought in surprise. 'Last time I saw, he only had a cultivation base of...'

A thought came to his mind.

"Was it you, brother Boqin, who broke through a few days ago?" he asked the man.

"It was me," the man said with a hint of pride on his look, a smile tugging the side of his lips.

"I see," Alex said. "Congratulations."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," the young man said. "Still, we will have to return to the topic with the same question. Were you sent here by Shang Hongxi?"

"I have never met Shang Hongxi, and nor do I know why she would send me here," Alex said. "As I mentioned to these two, I came here per chance. Due to the lack of people in the secret realm, I've been forced to go around looking for people to challenge. Me arriving here was a result of me roaming as such."

The group of 5 watched him for a few seconds before Zhao Boqin spoke. "I see," he said. "Then you are welcome here, Your Majesty."

Chapter 1605: Leader of the 8th Battalion

Alex found it hard to hide his surprise when he entered the valley where everyone stayed.

Inside was a rather small valley with less than a few hundred meters of distance between the mountains, and in it remained nearly 30 different people, each with a cultivation base in the Saint Soul realm.

Alex found out soon enough that his was the lowest cultivation base of all, even the other lowest being an older man with hair on the fringe of graying, and Fang Yimu, who was younger than a lot of them here.

"Welcome to our group, Your Majesty," Zhao Boqin said, walking down the mountain along with him.

People looked up to stare at the incoming group. Alex looked down at them. He was surprised to find he recognized quite a few of them as well.

Tan Huanglin of the Crystal Dawn sect, a youthful man with a cultivation base of Saint Soul 9th realm stood to one side, talking to a woman next to him.

The woman was a cultivator of the Drifting Demon sect, someone with a cultivation base of Saint Soul 7th realm.

An old man with a cultivation base of Saint Transformation 1st realm stood to one side. He was from the Yang family of the Silver Kingdom.

A woman with ageless beauty followed him with his eyes, someone he remembered only introduced herself as Fairy Gao of the Brushing Glacier sect of the Ivory Kingdom.

Qiao Zhengshen of the Autumn Abyss sect of the Emerald Kingdom glanced at him before looking away. His was a cultivation base of Saint Soul 8th realm.

Other few people looked at him as well, and Alex was surprised just how many he recognized. Either from their feats that made them known throughout the continent, or through their fights less than a year ago when they came to fight him.

He managed to recognize most of them.

He took a deep breath, taking in the power of everyone that was here. Every one of them here was what one would call the greatest of the current generation, even though a few of them seemed a little too old to be considered part of that generation.

"Such a gathering of people," Alex said, looking at everyone. "I had never hoped to see this many strong cultivators gathered in one place. I must say, I am surprised."

Teng Xuegang walked next to him, shrugging as he did so. "Of course, we have to," the young man shrugged. "What else could we do?"

Alex didn't understand what he meant by those words. They held implications that made no sense to him just yet.

'You can just go out, can't you?' Alex wondered. 'Or does this have something to do with the Hongxi girl?'

He walked a little more, arriving by the valley itself, and looking at the many people there. Quite a few of them walked up to him to exchange greetings and most of them returned. A few even looked at him as if he was trying at something.

'God, they're so on edge. Do they think I came here with an ulterior motive,' Alex wondered and then remembered the conversation he had outside the formation. 'Of course they do.'

"What exactly is the problem?" Alex asked the man next to him. He understood that if he wanted to learn more, he was gonna have to dig them out from within these people.

"Surely Your Majesty doesn't know—" Fang Yimu was speaking when she cut herself off and answered herself. "No... they wouldn't target you."

"This girl named Hongxi?" Alex asked.

"Not just her," Fang Yimu said. "The ones that she's formed a group of her own with. Players."

There was a hint of anger in the way she said that not bothering to hide it as much. The others nodded to her words, a slightly hateful look forming on their faces as well.

The situation didn't seem dire as if it was a matter of life or death, but it did make every single one of them get annoyed enough that they did feel hate for the others.

'Players...' Alex mused to himself and was reminded of something. "Where's Talia?"

"Gone," Fang Yimu said without looking back. "She was too weak to begin with, and the girl is an alchemist, not a fighter. She left the secret realm over half a year ago."

Alex was surprised. "You didn't help her or anything?" he asked.

"Why?" Fang Yimu chuckled a little. "There was nothing for her to gain here except experience, and that she got."

Alex thought for a bit and nodded. "Well, as long as she got the experience," he said.

They walked along the valley until they came upon an open spot where Zhao Boqin sat down and gestured for Alex to sit as well. Alex followed his lead and sat down, a few others closing in to try and find if they could hear something.

The man spoke about what Alex did for the past few months, trying to find out if he truly spoke the truth or not.

Alex answered it all without hiding anything, even telling them all about Shan Wangjiu and how he taught him the sword.

"I remember the fellow," one man chimed in. He had met Alex on the outside a few months ago and had indeed seen Shan Wangjiu. "He had a huge sword."

Zhao Boqin nodded. "And was he a player too?" he asked.

"He is," Alex said. "I can guarantee that. Why do you ask?"

Zhao Boqin said nothing, but his silence told Alex what it needed to. 'He still suspects I was working with that Hongxi girl,' Alex thought. The thought was amusing as much as it was annoying.

They would always be on guard against him until they were certain of the truth. Alex didn't know how to prove to them that he wasn't hiding anything.

They talked for a while, a few people asking Alex various questions. To Alex's surprise, quite a few wanted to know about the Southern Continent too.

Alex answered them what he could, even telling them how he came to be the King of the Southern Continent. The beginning of that story was usually a lie, but everything else there was true.

As they talked, Alex managed to divert the story back to what they were initially talking about. "This Hongxi girl," he spoke. "She is a legionnaire too, is she?"

"Yes," Zhao Boqin said, a slight grimace on his face as he said so.

"From what I recall," Alex spoke. "You are a leader of a battalion of soldiers in the Legion, aren't you brother Boqin?"

"I am," the man answered.

"What rank does this Hongxi girl stand in?" Alex asked.

Zhao Boqin took a moment to think if he wanted to answer or not, but decided to do so in the end. "She is one of my soldiers," he said.

Alex was taken aback to hear that. "I'm sorry, your soldier? You mean she's from your battalion?" he asked.

Zhao Boqin nodded grimly.

"That is... certainly surprising," Alex answered. "I would've sworn you two were leaders of the rival battalion in the Talon Legion, the way you were shouting above the volcano at that time."

Zhao Boqin didn't give much of an expression, but he was surprised to learn that Alex had heard that. He hadn't paid much attention to the surroundings back then, so he threw away his thoughts.

"She is part of my battalion, but that doesn't mean she's not my rival," Zhao Boqin said. "I don't know how it is in the Southern Continent's legions, but in the Eastern Continent, the leader of a Legion is the one that has managed to prove themselves the most from that group."

Alex listened intently.

"There are 13 battalions in the Talon legion, and once you join it, you are never transferred elsewhere," the man said, before quickly adding, "not counting Royal decrees, or age that forces a man to leave the battalion. Even then, they usually change the Legion itself, and not the battalion."

"Mine is the 8th Battalion, and after my leader died over half a century ago, I managed to be chosen as the battalion leader. The work I had done and my strength was certainly enough to make enough to get the leader role."

The man seemed so proud to talk about how he came to become a leader of a battalion that he missed the slightest change in Alex's expression and his momentary lack of focus.

'A Talon legion's leader died over half a century ago?' Alex wondered. 'Surely...'

"But then 3 decades ago, that girl joined," Zhao Boqin continued. "She was only a Saint Soul realm cultivator back then, even a weak one, and was of no notice to me."

"But then her explosive growth caught me by surprise. Whatever it is that makes p— people from the central continent that strong," Zhao Boqin said. "After she entered the Saint Transformation realm, she had been eyeing my leader role. And as if god was on her side, the secret realm opened right on time for her to..."

The man sighed. "She's trying to take advantage of that I can't reject any challenges to make me fight her until she beats me. She's trying to show the world that she is good enough for me."

Alex wondered what it was that had to do with him forming a group, but another thing caught his attention first.

"What do you mean you can't refuse?" he asked.

Zhao Boqin paused for a moment and spoke. "Oh right, you don't know this," he said. "It is only known to the Saint Transformation realm cultivators, but people who enter the secret realm with Saint Transformation cultivation base cannot refuse any challenges, no matter what."

Chapter 1606: Rematch

Zhao Boqin went on to explain how due to the lack of rejection, his subordinate named Hongxi had been constantly trying to challenge him to see who was stronger of the two.

While doing so, she had ended up revealing the the truth about Saint Transformation realm cultivators not being able to reject, which made group after group go after them.

To save themselves from such groups, the cultivators had to group up themselves to fight back against the load of people who wanted to win against them.

Not being able to challenge Saint Transformation cultivators, those groups then went to target weaker cultivators who also found safety in numbers.

In the same way, players were also forced to find a group and with Hongxi leading the charge, many of them had ended up going along with her to become a part of her group.

As such, the Player and the ones that were not have ended up having to become separate groups and enemies at this point.

It was a bit to take in, but Alex did it quickly. "Are you sure their group is all Players?" he asked.

"I cannot guarantee it, but if they weren't, they would have come here already," Zhao Boqin said. "As for the ones here, it's easy to tell who is a player and who is not, and they run away. Not that we are targeting them exactly. We just need points."

Alex nodded. It made a lot more sense now.

"Still, to think there was such a hidden rule," Alex said. "Are there any other such hidden rules that I can learn about?"

"None that I know of," Zhao Boqin said as he looked around at his group to see if anyone else knew of something. The rest of them shook their head as well.

"There are tricks and ways to bend the rules without cheating, but none additional ones that only a select few know of," Fang Yimu said from the side. "If there are any, we don't know them."

"My sister would've told you if there were any that were important enough for you to know, Your Majesty," Mao Yingkong said. "Since you don't know any, there isn't any."

"I was just curious," Alex said and turned back to Zhao Boqin. "How many times has Hongxi challenged you by now?"

"A couple dozen times. More than 50 certainly," the man said.

"And is it alright if I ask how many times you've won?" Alex asked.

The man's face flinched a little when he heard that question and sighed. "Around 20? No, close to 30 times. I haven't kept count, but she wins just as much as me. Maybe I win a few more, but it cannot be a lot more."

Alex was surprised. "I didn't expect you to lose so many times," he said. "I have sensed her cultivation base. It was no more than Saint Transformation 2nd realm, was it not?"

Everyone looked at him awkwardly, and Teng Xuegang told Alex something he already knew about.

"That girl can fight 2 realms above her own cultivation base," he said. "She is a menace for sure."

"She is," another one concurred.

"The main problem with her is her movement technique. She's like a slippery eel. Every time you try to catch her, she slips right through you. I can barely ever catch her off guard," he said. "If it wasn't for that, I would have won every single time."

"Now that I have broken through to the Saint Transformation 5th realm, she will not be able to win against me," the man said. "Even if she can fight 2 realms above her, damn her."

Fang Yimu quickly turned toward Alex, a thoughtful and curious look on her face.

"Can't you do the same, Your Majesty?" she asked. "I've heard about you defeating people stronger than you. Although the rumors never made it clear if you were using your cultivation base or your sword."

"I have only just recently started using my Qi after people got harder to deal with. Everyone that remains is too strong for just my sword, so I have to use both of them," Alex said.

"Right," Zhao Boqin said. "You were practicing your Sword Intent the last time I fought you, Your Majesty. How is that going?"

"Pretty well," Alex said. "I've improved a bit but due to people having to go look after their sect and clan members, I was forced to stop what I was doing. Since then the improvement has slowed down a bit."

"Slow progress is progress still," the old white-haired royal man spoke from the side while nodding to himself.

"Do you mind showing me how far you've come along?" Fang Yimu asked. "We did say we were going to fight seriously once you got stronger, didn't we?"

"We did say that," Alex said. "But are you sure you are up for it?"

The girl smiled as she saw through Alex's plot to taunt her. "Let us see which one of us is stronger now, Your Majesty."

The rest of the people in the area looked at the two of them, a few exchanging glances with their peers. A few of them were curious too, and wanted to see just how far Alex had improved. They had thought it weird back when they fought Alex and he refused to use any sort of technique.

Alex and Fang Yimu left the valley, with a few other people following them outside to a location further away from their base. Since this was going to be a somewhat serious battle, they didn't want to destroy the formations and barriers that were necessary for them to stay there.

Nearly 15 people followed them out to see Alex fight, the remaining not bothering to care for him. They had seen thousands of battles, had been in thousands of battles by now, and the prospect of watching another one with a relatively weaker group of fighters didn't make it fun for them.

Fang Yimu limbered up and pulled out her sword. A thin green blade that was always strapped to her waist was pulled out from its sheath. She never liked keeping her sword inside a storage bag.

She pointed the sword toward Alex in the distance, her sword shining white with the power of Sword Qi.

Alex knew she had Sword Qi, and wondered if she had made it stronger as well. She did a lot of time to improve on it.

Midnight flew out into Alex's hand, the black sword pointed toward Fang Yimu. Alex was about to open his mouth when Fang Yimu cut him off.

"Your Majesty, have you fought the first battle of the day already?" she asked him curiously.

Alex pointed to the sky where the sun was a small distance away from the zenith. A sane man wouldn't even call it afternoon yet.

"I've had no chance to fight anyone," he said.

"Neither have I," Fang Yimu said. "Would you mind if we fight despite that? Let there be a stake in this fight."

Alex nodded. "I agree," he said. "That would make it fun."

"It will," Fang Yimu answered. "Then, shall we fight?"

Alex felt his talisman buzz and he gave a nod.

Chapter 1607: Fighting Fang Yimu

Fang Yimu sent out a single sword slash, not meant to do anything but just pry and see how strong Alex was.

Alex didn't do anything until the slash came right next to him and destroyed it when it was right on top of it. It was weak enough that he didn't have to worry about its strength even without using much of his already constrained strength.

"Not bad," Fang Yimu said, sending a slightly stronger sword slash this time, one that contained her Sword Qi as well.

Alex's sword was covered with a white outline this time before he destroyed the attack. 'Saint Soul 4th realm,' Alex said with a bit of a surprise. She had managed to improve her sword by 2 realms since the last time, making it become just as strong as her cultivation base.

'Together she might just have a Saint Soul 5th realm equivalent attack,' he thought.

She was equally surprised to see Alex defeat it so easily and got a little more serious this time around. She moved, her swift movement technique taking her closer to Alex while he was unprepared.

When she was close enough, she sent a sword slash that was as strong as she could make without using any technique. The close proximity and the suddenness of the attack was certainly going to cause Alex some problem.

Or so she thought.

Alex's sword went from having just white outlines to entirely being covered with white light before he swung it at the incoming attack, destroying it so easily that nothing remained in the air.

The girl moved back, shock clear in her eyes. "Your Majesty," she said meekly, not knowing what else to say. "How did you..."

"Practice," Alex said, almost hearing her inner thoughts about what she wanted to ask about.

The girl couldn't believe it at first and thought Alex was joking somehow, but then she remembered the reports of him being able to fight people high above his level.

"You're stronger now, Your Majesty," the girl said. "It seems you're no longer as weak as you appear to be."

Alex gave her a grin. "I never was."

He sent out the attack this time, a single sword slash that contained just Sword Qi. But the strength it contained was around Saint Soul 5th realm.

He had held back a little.

The girl panicked, dodging to the side. The slash vanished into the distance.

Alex looked in the direction it went. 'If only I could make them hone in on the target somehow,' he thought. He would have to work hard if he wanted to make that happen.

He noticed the girl sending out a technique while he was barely distracted. 10 different illusory swords formed in front of her, each an image of the girl's green sword.

He remembered her forming this the last time they fought as well. The stabbing motion required to form these swords was quite unique among the various battles he fought.

The 10 swords flew toward him at once, each holding a strength of Saint Soul 5th realm. That was of no real threat to Alex at all.

He swung his sword, sending out a large Sword Qi slash that devoured all 10 flying swords and continued toward the girl on top of that.

The girl hadn't expected that and had to fight off the attack before it landed on her. She was panting slightly, half out of surprise, half out of fear.

"Were you..." she asked slowly. "Were you this strong the last time we fought as well?"

"With just the sword? No," Alex shook his head. "I hadn't held back anything when we fought that time."

"Then... it really is all progress," the girl said. "Dear god... how is that possible? That's... over 5 realms in just a little more than a year, isn't it?"

"You forget I was training all day and night," Alex said softly. "For 6 whole months, I only got about 50 days free in total without battle after battle."

The surrounding watched made some murmurs as they talked amongst themselves, but none spoke anything aloud. They were getting curious as to how strong Alex was now.

Fang Yimu thought for a bit and nodded. "You're very strong then, Your Majesty," the girl said. "It seems I have to get serious as well."

Suddenly her sword glowed bright red as she poured Fire Qi into it and swung toward Alex.

Alex thought he saw a small image of a sun form behind her when she attacked. He couldn't be sure if it was there or if it was an illusion. The attack wasn't one, so he focused on it for the moment.

He got ready to receive the attack when he suddenly felt something try and bore into his mind. A wave of slight nausea hit him as he realized that the girl was using some sort of Spiritual technique against him.

Her spiritual sense was focused on him as much as the sword was. Still, it wasn't strong enough to stop him from doing what he must.

Alex swung his sword, destroying the incoming flaming slash as his own sword slash flew toward the girl.

Fang Yimu prepared to handle his attack when she suddenly felt a reversal in power as Alex sent out a Heaven's Impact targeting directly at her. He had a stronger attack, but it was reserved for multiple people, instead of just one.

The girl felt the attack coming, and even as it did, she did something. Heaven's Impact landed on her, but it was blocked by something. She suffered some damage to her spiritual sea, but not enough to faint.

She only managed to get a hang of herself when the sword slash appeared in front of her. She blocked it, barely in time before it hit her.

However, in her panic and desperation, she hadn't noticed that Alex had already sent another attack.

This she could not dodge, and in the end was shot down from the sky, losing the duel.

Chapter 1608: In The Valley

Alex was swarmed by people, asking him how he was so strong. They understood that he had been training with his sword, but this was a bit too strong still.

He was challenged by people too. Now that he and Fang Yimu had fought, they could use them to clear their first battles of the day.

"Sure, but I won't give out a pill if you win," Alex said. "Unless you want to make it an actual fight with you having a chance to lose."

Nobody wanted that.

Alex still didn't hold back much, using as much Sword Intent as he could. Fighting these strong people was an incredible chance he wasn't gonna give up just to give them a win.

He did give them a win in the end though, as that was what he had promised. And no one complained about him fighting seriously either as he used nothing more than Sword Intent.

If he had been seriously fighting, there were many other ways for him to make it hard for them to win, but he hadn't.

By the time Alex fought 5 different people, the rest of them had finished their fights with Fang Yimu and there were no more people to challenge Alex. So, they all returned to the valley and sat around.

Alex only talked with them for a little longer before he found his own separate space to cultivate in. He used a formation to make his separate space and let Pearl and Whisker cultivate with him.

He cultivated the whole night and only stopped the next day when his talisman reset once again. He walked out of his formation and went up to the small group that had gathered around Zhao Boqin.

He managed to catch some tail end of the conversation, where the man talked about them having to be careful and taking the long way around. He wondered where these people were being sent to.

Four of them nodded. One of them was Mao Yingkong, and the other 3 people he wasn't close enough to yet.

They stopped talking for a moment when they saw Alex close in and then stopped talking after a brief sentence. The group separated after that.

"What is happening?" Alex asked Zhao Boqin.

"Planning for a hunt," the man said. "We send out a small group each day to fight and come back to let everyone else fight as well. Those 4 are to go out today."

Alex nodded silently. "I heard you talk about a location earlier they had to go to," he said. "It seems you already know where to go to."

The man nodded. "There's a weaker group of fighters toward the river in the east," he said. "They are going there to fight them."

"Do you expect trouble?" Alex asked.

"It would be stupid if we didn't," the man replied. "Together with us here, they will fear a bit to attack us directly with my presence. But with just the four of them, they're a much better target."

Alex gave a puzzled look. He understood that they would be a target, but then why was he still sending them?

"Why don't you go with them?" Alex asked.

"If I do, then we will definitely be attacked," the man said. "Hongxi won't let me be out there for even a moment if she finds out about it."

Alex nodded thoughtfully and frowned a bit. "But you're strong now. You should be able to go out without worry, shouldn't you?"

The man gave a surprised look as if he hadn't thought of that himself before shaking his head. "I get nothing from it," he said, shrugging as he did so. "There is no glory in winning against someone weaker than me."

"But you can protect all of them when they go out, can't you?" Alex asked.

"I can," the man said. "But why should I? They're not my problem. They chose to gather around me. They can do whatever they want."

Alex was a little surprised to hear the lack of responsibility in the man's voice. He had thought this man to be a leader of this group. But from what he said right now, he sounded more like a man burdened with others who couldn't wait to get rid of it.

'He's too strong,' Alex thought. He doesn't care if someone challenges him, as long as it is not Hongxi.' He was sure that was the truth.

The group of four left around the afternoon and returned to the valley after sunset. They had managed to gain a win, so everyone else gained a win too.

No one said anything when Alex got himself a win as well. They had more or less accepted Alex into the group.

Some of them fought Alex from time to time, mostly to get a chance to win a pill or two from Alex. When they found out that he was still doing that after all these months, they were more than excited.

Sounds of battles rang the sky outside the valley day and night, and Alex fought to the best of his abilities, using Sword Intent, Sword Qi, and sometimes even Qi. Although the times he used Qi were rare he focused more on the sword.

Days passed slowly, months gone without anyone noticing.

They would wait until the group that left to get a win returned, and after that people would challenge Alex to get a pill from him. Winning also gave them points, so they were more or less happy with it.

The only interesting parts of the days were when the group that went out returned and told them that they had been attacked. Hearing how they had been attacked and if they won or not was quite fun to listen to.

Those were one of the few days that wasn't monotonous for Alex.

He spent some of his days making pills or painting stuff, but nothing really filled him as much. At least the training was going alright, so he was happy about that.

He had been painting Fairy Gao one day, per her request when suddenly he heard Zhao Boqin's angry shouts.

"God dammit!" he cried out loud. "That goddamn..."

Alex wondered why he was so angry for the briefest of moments before he sensed it as well. Another breakthrough, and a strong one at that.

'Is that... Hongxi?' Alex wondered, looking in the direction where the girl was breaking through. She had surprisingly decided to do it out in the open for everyone else to see.

"She's outside," one of the Saint Transformation realm cultivators shouted. "We should go and wait next to her. Once she's done, we should immediately attack her. Give her a Loss."

"It's close to reset," another one said. "We should be able to make it."

"I'll have to ask you to continue this later, Your Majesty," Fairy Gao said with a soothing voice. "It appears we will have a bit of a showdown."

"Let's go!" Zhao Boqin's hoarse voice took everyone's attention, and people started pouring out of the valley.

Alex took back his items and followed as well.

It had been a while since he had come outside. Most of his days were spent inside the valley, and the only time he did come outside was still on the periphery of the valley to fight with others.

He could've gone outside multiple times by now, had anyone in the valley actually allowed him to accompany them to the various locations they went to hunt for their first fights of the day.

They did not want to inconvenience a King, so Alex had to sit back. Alex couldn't help but wonder at times if they were truly looking after him, or if they were trying to hide where they gained their points from.

The latter seemed much more likely.

The group flew not for long and arrived next to a mountain surrounded by dead trees and broken ground. It was another place, devastated by the battles that seemed to happen every day now.

Alex landed some distance away from the mountain itself where most of the people had stopped. Everyone looked at the mountaintop, where they could see a figure in blue trying her best to break through.

The process had only started less than an hour ago, and this far in, it most certainly took longer than just an hour.

Since she was in the Saint Transformation realm, she had to worry about her spirit growing larger and adapting to her physical body.

Alex wondered how large her spirit was now.

"There's nobody here," one of the people spoke, catching Alex's attention. Alex looked around as well. There truly was no one there, not a single soul.

'Had she come alone?' Alex wondered. Her group was supposed to have been around her. Why was she alone? Or was she the same as Zhao Boqin who cared little for the group that were around them?

Alex found it hard to be concerned with such a matter when Zhao Boqin suddenly spoke up.

"We can't let her breakthrough," he said.

Alex frowned a little when he heard that.

"Brother Zhao," one of them spoke. "You can't attack someone when they're breaking through. The girl might end up going through Qi deviation."

"I don't care," Zhao Boqin said. "She can spend years healing for all I care. It will make me feel easier."

He pulled out a spear, intending to attack. Alex realized he was being serious about it.

"Brother Zhao," he shouted. "Stop! What are you doing?"

But speak as he might, his words did nothing. Zhao Boqin filled his spear with blue Qi and attacked.

Chapter 1609: Familiar

Alex wasn't sure when his sword was out, or when he initiated an attack. By the time he was done, his sword slash flew toward Zhao Boqin, who had to quickly swerve to defend himself.

The attack he had been about to release flew off somewhere else and did not hit the woman cultivating on the mountaintop.

Everyone stared at Alex, not a few with swords in their hand ready to do the same. Alex had only done it quicker.

Zhao Boqin's glaring eyes landed on Alex, his face slowly twisting in anger. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. He did not care who he demanded it of.

A few people moved backward out of their fear of the man as his aura flared a little.

Alex stood where he was and looked at the man unblinkingly. "You were about to attack a person that was in the middle of a breakthrough," Alex said. "Not just anyone but someone from your battalion. Don't you see what is wrong with that?"

The man grumbled to himself. He understood what he was doing was wrong. There was no way he wouldn't. But he found it hard to bring himself to speak of it. His anger also made it hard for him to see why it was so wrong in the first place.

"Step out of my way. I will do what I must do for myself," the man said, hefting his spear for another attack.

"No," Alex moved in front of him. "You are trying to destroy someone's cultivation base just because you are inconvenienced by it. I won't allow that to happen."

"You'll stop me?" the man asked, a hint of disgust on his face. "You don't have what it takes to stop me."

"Is that so?" Alex said, hesitating a moment before pulling something out from his storage ring, and showing it to the man. The dragon medallion.

"I command you to stop," Alex said.

Everyone looked at Alex in shock, the medallion in his hand surprising them more than the fact that he stood before Zhao Boqin, who was without a doubt one of the strongest men here.

Zhao Boqin nearly stumbled at the sight of the Dragon Medallion, flustered that he was ordered by someone who had authority only less than the Dragon Emperor and the crown prince.

"How did you..." he couldn't finish the sentence. He wasn't sure if he even had the right to ask that. He gulped a little, getting ready to obey when he remembered something.

A small frown appeared on his face, his mind working hard to remember something that they were told over a decade ago.

"No..." the man said slowly. "No!"

His voice got fiercer at the end. He slammed the tail end of the spear on the ground, standing resolutely. "That will not stop me, and neither will you. Stand aside."

Alex grimaced. He knew this was going to happen, but he had hoped the man wouldn't know more than that. At least, he hoped he didn't know that the legions were not his to command even with the Dragon Medallion.

But it seemed his luck wasn't as good.

"Step aside," the man said again. "I won't say it again."

Alex had only one choice now. The worst choice he could make, but one he had to if he wanted to give the girl any chance at all.

'I must be going mad,' he thought. He had talked about what was right and how it was the right thing to do to let a cultivator safely break through, but he didn't believe that.

If his enemy were ever breaking through, he wouldn't stand aside and wait for them to be done. He would attack them.

It wasn't that serious right now, but still, he had little need to fight for her.

But he did.

'Dammit!' he thought. 'Why does she have to look so familiar!'

That was the feeling Alex had been having ever since he looked at the girl, and he didn't know why. Her face seemed familiar enough but he had no memories of ever meeting her.

He had never even seen her before.

He wondered if the girl was using some sort of technique to make him protect her. That couldn't be the case though, as he sensed nothing. And surely his body wouldn't listen to her so easily while no one else did anything as drastic.

'Screw it,' he thought. 'I'll protect her and then get my answers.'

It was the time to make this desperate choice.

"Zhao Boqin," he called out to the man with no hint of respect remaining in his voice either. "I challenge you to a duel."

The man's eyes widened when he sensed his talisman buzz once and then buzz once again. The challenge had been made, and even without his intention, it had been accepted.

He couldn't reject a challenge.

And this was the first match of the day.

"You..." he growled with a low but heavy voice. The aura of a Saint Transformation 5th realm cultivation base gathering around Alex.

'Stupid!' Alex cursed himself, but it was too late. He brought out Midnight and prepared for a fight.

Zhao Boqin ignored him for a second, wanting to attack the girl regardless while he was in a duel, but he suddenly found a necklace deep in his clothes buzzing with a low sound.

It had blocked a mental attack.

He quickly turned his head toward Alex. "Fine! If you want a fight, here is one."

His spear charged with water Qi all of a sudden, producing an aura that made everyone around him shiver from just sensing it.

Alex frowned as well, and couldn't help but feel scared at the sight of the attack. That wasn't the attack of a Saint Transformation 5th realm cultivator at all.

What he was going to use was the attack of an Immortal.

Through a spear filled with Immortal Qi, the man used his technique. A blue dragon crawled out of the spear, charging its way toward Alex at an inconceivable speed.

Alex knew he had to dodge it or else he would die. He just had to teleport and he would be fine.

But he didn't want to. Not right now. Not while the man was consumed by anger. This was the best chance to beat him.

Mao Yingkong, Fang Yimu, Teng Xuegang, and a few others looked at him with worry. Some were even certain he was going to die. They couldn't even shout for him to dodge as the attack was just too fast.

And Alex remained where he was, but something appeared on his hand.

The attack landed on him and out of nowhere it turned around, charging back to Zhao Boqin who had attacked him.

The man panicked.

He had used all of his Immortal Qi in this one attack and he couldn't protect himself from it.

The blue dragon struck him, destroying a few of his defenses before landing on him. The talisman activated, protecting him and teleporting him away from the location before the man could be hurt even more.

It took a while for people to notice him on the ground nearly a kilometer away. Sprawling on the ground, he bled from all over his body, clearly too hurt to move.

It didn't even dawn on him that he had lost the match.

Chapter 1610: Shang Hongxi

Alex stood where he was, trembling a little, holding onto the Mirror of Barren Truth. He knew what would happen when he activated the artifact, but even then he was quite scared he might get hurt. It was hard to remain calm in the face of an Immortal attack.

The Mirror of Barren Truth was an artifact that returned a single attack that came its way, back toward its originator. It had to be prepared in advance to do so, and Alex had prepared it with Yao Ning, by having her fill it with Immortal Qi.

Had it been anything other than Immortal Qi, the mirror would not have worked at all.

He put back the mirror and looked in the direction of Zhao Boqin, who remained still and wounded on the ground.

"Did he die?" Alex wondered, but a quick sense told him that wasn't the case at all. Instead, the man had only gotten unconscious. As for how long that would be, Alex wouldn't know.

A single 'thank you' floated into his ear before everyone else came to him, trying to ask him questions. They asked him what he did, and some even asked him what the thing he had brought out was.

He didn't answer all the questions but gave enough to quench their curiosities for now. He wondered how much else he was going to have to answer once they returned back to the valley.

On that matter, he wondered if he was even going to return to the valley in the first place. 'I doubt that's happening anymore.'

Alex noticed a few feeding Zhao Boqin something, and his wounds slowly healed. It was the man's own attack, but it sure as hell had done quite a bit of damage. Had he not been teleported away, Alex wouldn't have been surprised if he was dead.

A bit of aura flared from the side and Alex looked in the direction of the girl that was cultivating on the mountaintop. She was close to being done with the breakthrough.

"That's quite fast," one of the men next to him commented. "I wonder if we noticed it a bit too late."

Alex wondered the same as well, but he had a feeling that she was speeding it all up on her own. She had to break through as quickly as possible. She didn't have the luxury to do it any slower.

Zhao Boqin got up in a daze a few minutes later, right around the time the girl was done breaking through as well. She definitely needed to fix up her foundation a little once she was free.

Zhao Boqin was still in a daze when he noticed that the girl was done with the breakthrough and a frown formed on his face. He wanted to go challenge her, but that was when he noticed Alex and remembered what had happened.

He had nearly died to his own techniques.

He wanted to curse at him, but he held his tongue. Disagreeing with a monarch of another kingdom was one thing, but he couldn't call him a bastard or curse him even worse if he wanted to keep his head.

Bigger wars had started with smaller things. He didn't want to start a war. He didn't want to even be in a war.

The last war that took place in this world was 5 thousand years ago. He would be more than happy to keep it that way for the next 5 thousand years still.

He swallowed what he was about to speak and only scowled at Alex.

Alex was about to say something, but even before him, the girl flew out of the mountaintop, landing in the middle of them all.

She wore a blue shawl around her pink robe and stood there almost regally as she flexed her newfound cultivation base.

Everyone stirred backward out of fear. They knew she was strong. Even with her Saint Transformation 3rd realm cultivation base, she could fight people beyond her cultivation base, at nearly Saint Transformation 5th realm.

No one wanted to test her even if she had just broken through to that cultivation base. No one dared to challenge her. It was a foolish thing to even consider.

Alex saw her beautiful face up close and got the feeling that she was even more familiar somehow, although he couldn't remember where he saw her first. For some reason, he thought he saw her in the Western Continent, but that certainly wasn't the truth.

'What is this feeling?' he wondered.

"Leader," the girl spoke, her smooth voice filling the silence that was only filled by the wind brushing the grass before this. "Do you still wish to fight me?"

Her challenge came as a surprise to everyone. After all, she surely wasn't in the condition to fight someone so strong.

But it seemed she wasn't speaking for no reason. Zhao Boqin felt a tinge of anger and a tinge of fear within him hearing her ask that question. She had all but challenged him. If she had, he couldn't have rejected.

"Screw you, Hongxi," he said with teeth gritting against each other. "Don't think you're any closer to beating me in a fair fight."

"Am I not?" she asked in a sweet tone. "Why don't you challenge me then? You can boast that you beat me."

Alex was surprised to see Zhao Boqin's face turn to a grimace and even show a hint of panic. 'Why is he so scared to fight her? They're back on the same level as before, aren't they?'

Zhao Boqin took his time to answer, and that was how long it took for Alex to realize what was happening.

'He's scared,' he thought. 'He's scared of the Immortal Qi she'll be using.'

That was the correct answer in Alex's eyes. The man had just used his Immortal Qi on him, and from the looks of it, he had used it all too. If they were to fight, it was obvious who would be the winner here.

And if he couldn't dodge and had to be instead saved by the talisman, then he would acquire another Out of Bounds, on top of the one Alex just gave him.

"Just you wait!" Zhao Boqin said through gritted teeth and turned toward Alex. He was about to say something but kept it to himself. He knew enough to not let his anger take over him right now.

But his glare told everything that he needed to. He wasn't going to let Alex alone now.

'Now I definitely can't return,' Alex thought.

As Zhao Boqin flew away, many others followed him too. Fang Yimu and Mao Yingkong remained for him to leave too, but he shook his head and they reluctantly left without him.

In the end, all that remained was just him and the girl in front of him.

"Thank you for protecting me, Your Majesty," the girl said with a small bow. "I was in a bit of a pickle there."

"I did what I thought was right," Alex said. He stared at her, trying to figure out where he had seen her before.

The girl ignored his gaze and gave a small smile in return. "I am called Shang Hongxi, Your Majesty," she said.

"You can call me Alex," Alex said.

"Oh right, you're a player," the girl said, as if just remembering. "Then you can call me by my real name as well, Your Majesty."

"Call me Sarah."