

Alchemy 251

Chapter 251: Rules

15 disciples, 7 elders, and 1 sect master were all currently standing inside Ma Rong's room. Within 5 minutes of being summoned, everyone was gathered.

Ma Rong quickly did a headcount and determined that everyone had in fact come to the room.

"Alright, since everyone is here, I will start talking about the competitions. Listen up carefully," Ma Rong said. All the disciples and elders got more attentive, ready to listen to what was coming.

"The different mini-competitions for the next 5 days have been revealed. For the next 4 days, meaning Sunday to Wednesday, there will be different competitions from 7 am to 12 pm in the morning. This is the time in which the different production and specialty-related competitions will take place," Ma Rong said.

Alex was a little surprised when he heard that the battle would take place in the morning.

'That would leave enough time during the day to do what we want. Was that the competition holder's plans? To allow the different sects some free time during the day?' Alex wondered

Ma Rong continued to speak after a small pause. "As for the battle-related competitions, they will take place on Friday, starting from 7 and going until as long as it is required," Ma Rong said.

"Now, we don't care about the battle competitions all. We are a production sect, so our focus will be all on Alchemy, and a few other production battles," Ma Rong said.

Everyone nodded when Ma Rong said that. Alex didn't expect them to be okay with what she had said. 'Do we even have disciples capable of taking part in the other production matches?' he wondered.

"First of all, the rules have been confirmed. Only those who are not in the True realm and under 25 in age can take part in the competitions."

"There can only be 3 disciples from a sect in a single competition, and a single disciple can take part in only 3 competitions. So, we will have to carefully choose what competition to send you guys out on," Ma Rong said.

"For the next 4 days, the competition has been separated into 4 themes. Sunday will be all about ingredients. Alchemy ingredients, formation flag, and ingredients, Talisman ink ingredients, etc. The exact competition hasn't been revealed, however, so we will have to choose the participants tomorrow on the ground."

"For Monday, the theme is Speed. It's how fast you can do stuff. I assume for alchemy it will be making pills very fast, but we will have to wait until the competition is revealed."

"For Tuesday, the theme is Perfection. It's how well you can do a single task. It's almost certainly the highest harmony for pills. But, as I said, we will wait until the competition is revealed."

"For Wednesday, the theme is said to be Learning. From the way the competition holders talked about it, I assume it has to do with who can learn the fastest and use it. You might get a new recipe, technique, whatever. We will have to wait until it is fully revealed."

"Thursday is a break and the normal sects will have an ample opportunity to get ready for the battle competitions next. This is until where we can do anything. Past this, the chances of us winning is almost nil," Ma Rong said.

The disciples listened to the sect leader solemnly. They didn't know if they could do good or not, but they would certainly do great.

"Now, time for you newcomers to learn something. It's the point system. The point system for the first 4 days and the last one is completely different. For battle-related competitions, the point is always fixed to the top 16 place holders."

"The Winner gets 100 points. The 2nd winner gets 80. The 3rd and 4th winners get 60 points, and 5th to 8th winners get 40 points and 9th to 16th winners get 20 points," Ma Rong said.

"For the production and specialty competitions, its... kind of weird. You basically get points equal to 100 divided? by your rank."

"If you are 1st in rankings, you get 100 points. 50 for a second, 33 for a third, 25 for a fourth, 20 for a fifth, and so on. So, the higher your ranking, the better points you get," Ma Rong explained.

"Now, we need exactly 523 points to get upgraded to a 1st-grade sect. That is what we will be working for. In the overall competitions, we need to get at least that many points."

"Any questions?" Ma Rong asked.

"Sect Leader, can't we go by last year's competition to figure out what this year's competition will be?" someone asked.

"No, it's always different," Ma Rong said. "We have no way of telling."

"Will there be no non-battle and non-production-related competitions?" someone else asked.

"There will be. Those are considered battle-related since fights are sometimes inevitable," Ma Rong explained.

Everyone else thought and found nothing else to ask. Seeing that no one had any more questions left Ma Rong dismissed everyone.

"Yu Ming, wait," she said as everyone was leaving.

"What is it, Master?" he asked. He wondered if she was going to tell him what competitions he was going to take part in.

"Starting today, I want you to cultivate both body and Qi at the same time. Don't stop one for the other. You can only get stronger if you can increase both body and Qi cultivation at the same time," Ma Rong said.

"But, Master I can't wake up in time if I cultivate Qi. I was thinking of skipping Qi cultivation until the end of the competitions actually," Alex said.

"That won't do. Just do as I say and cultivate both while you can," Ma Rong said.

"But I can't wa—" he remembered this morning, his master was crying. She told him there was nothing wrong with him falling asleep, but explained no further.

'Does she know something?' Alex thought.

"Master, can you explain to me why I will be fine if I fall asleep while cultivating Qi," he asked.

Chapter 252: Dual Cultivation

Ma Rong shook a little when she heard the question. It seemed she found the question a little too hard to answer.

"I can't tell you right now. You will find out on your own someday. You naturally finding out what is happening is the best we can hope for," she said.

Alex was now even more intrigued. 'What does she know? And why is she trying to hide it from me?' he wondered.

"Still, Master, I can't go into cultivation knowing I might end up being late tomorrow. Why don't I just cultivate body?" he said.

"Don't worry. Just go and cultivate. If nothing else, I can guarantee that you will wake up on time," Ma Rong said.

"That's a lie right, Master? There have been many times when I woke up at random times," Alex said.

Ma Rong saw that the conversation was going nowhere, so she said, "If you don't wake up on time, then it will be on me that you couldn't take part in tomorrow's competition. I will take the blame. Now go and do as I say."

Alex finally saw that she was really serious about this. He nodded and left to his room. He sat down on his bed and started wondering.

'Why is she not telling me this? Is something wrong with me? Is this a disability? Do I have a short lifespan? What is it?' From Ma Rong's expression and tone of voice, he knew that it wasn't anything good.

However, he was unable to tell if it was anything bad either. He thought of many possibilities, but in the end, none of them fit the situation.

'Sigh, I guess I will do as she says,' he thought and called out Pearl. The moment Pearl came out, he told him to stay quiet and sneaked a glance at Wan Li who was busy reading his book.

Alex put Pearl into his robes and told him to start cultivating. Pearl didn't meow once at all and started cultivating. Soon, light spilled out of his robes and numerous cuts started appearing all over his body.

Wan Li accidentally caught sight of that and nearly screamed. "Brother Yu, are you okay? What happened to you?" he said, clearly concerned about his situation.

He immediately brought out a bunch of pill bottles and started flipping through them to find ones that would help Alex at the moment.

"Don't worry about me, Brother Wan. This is my cultivation method. I'm fine," Alex said.

"A-are you sure? You have so many cuts all over you," Wan Li said.

"Yes, I am sure. Please get back to your reading," Alex said. He then thought of something and said, "I'm going to meditate now, so, please don't bother me overnight, okay?" he asked as politely as possible.

"Sure, Brother Yu," Wan Li said and got back to his studies.

Alex started to meditate. He took a deep breath to start his Qi cultivation, but the pain made it hard to focus. It was nearly impossible to blank out his mind when he had to constantly keep on feeling the pain.

'Ignore the pain. You've felt it many times already. Ignore it,' Alex said to himself and started focusing back on the cultivation.

He ignored the pain as much as he could, but as soon as he let his mind slip away, the ignorance would slip away as well and the pain would bring him jolting back to awareness.

He kept on trying to cultivate Qi many times after that, however, most of the time he would forget to ignore the pain.

'I can't keep on doing the same thing and fail without changing my approach.' He decided to try something else.

He started to split his consciousness. His mind was capable of focusing on 10 different things at once, although it was a little difficult. 2 things were a piece of cake.

He used a small part of his mind into ignoring the pain and the other big part to start meditating. He took deep breaths in and out. Soon, he was starting to feel like letting go of all control and just fall asleep.

But Alex kept the ignorance in check and made sure to never let go of it.

He failed to do that. In the end, he let go of the ignorance and the pain was back. Fortunately, this was enough time to fall unconscious.

Alex slowly opened his eyes as pains creaked throughout his body. "OW! OW! OW!. Pearl stop," he ordered. "Meow," Pearl said as he stopped cultivating.

The cuts all over his body disappeared and the body returned to its pristine state. In fact, it looked like he got a little bit stronger.

"Wait, did I miss the match?" he quickly turned his eyes towards the top right to check the time. It was 6:12 am.

He had woken up on time. "Woah, so master was right. But why? Damn, if only she explained to me straight and didn't say anything convoluted like 'it's better if you find out on your own' sh*t," Alex thought.

"Damn, isn't it time soon for us to leave for the tournament? I must be getting really hungry outside. I will eat something fast and return back," Alex thought and quickly logged out.

He freshened up quickly and went to the kitchen as fast as possible. He reheated some of the foods that remained from yesterday's party and started eating them.

'I can't get hungry prior to 12 pm,' he thought and ate. After eating, he returned back to the game. Wan Li was still reading his book.

"Brother Wan, I think you should get ready to leave," Alex said. Wan Li was distracted by Alex and looked up from his book. "Did you say something brother Yu?" he asked.

"Aren't you going to leave? It's time for the competition," Alex said.

"Huh?" Wan Li immediately looked towards the window and saw the morning light.? "Oh, it's already daybreak," Wan Li said.

"Yes, Brother Wan. So get ready, we are leaving for the competition."

Chapter 253: First day

Everyone got ready and went downstairs. Once everyone was gathered, they left. Most of them were returnees, so they knew where the competition took place.

The group walked for about 15 minutes, going through the busy streets of the west side of the capital, all the way to the east, where the competition was being held.

Right inside the wall on the east was a massive coliseum. People stood in front of the coliseum entrance in a line encompassing a large area.

They were all different people of different status, coming to watch the once in a year competition between the various sects from around the empire.

They all wore clothes of different colors and types, according to the current fashion of the city they were from. There were also hundreds of different disciples with robes of myriad colors.

"Will they make it in time?" Alex asked his master.

"Yeah. There is still a small briefing to be done by the Royal Fu Academy to tell us about the different competitions today. These people will make it in time by then," Ma Rong said.

"Royal Fu Academy?" Alex was a little confused. "Aren't they the sect run by the royal family? Is the competition set by them too?" Alex asked.

"Yes. They are the competition holders for each year. And are also the winners most of the time," Ma Rong said.

"Hmm... they must be a 1st-grade sect then. Oh yeah, by the way, master, how many 1st grade sects are there in the competition? Any numbers that have been revealed by now?" he asked.

"There are around 12 by now. Also, there are 36 2nd grade sects and some 80 3rd grade sects that will be taking part," Ma Rong said.

"Woah, that's a lot. Won't the competitions take too long?" Alex asked.

"Don't worry, it won't. Most of the sects will only take part in some of the competitions, not all. Especially since their limited disciples have a limited number of times they can take part in."

"I mean, just look at us. Even if we were to put a single disciple in a single competition, we would only take part in 45 of them. However, we don't have that luxury. We will only take part in as much as it is required to get 1st grade," Ma Rong said.

Alex nodded and walked into the coliseum with the rest of the sect members. They were freely allowed entry once Ma Rong showed a card.

They were soon led to an open area inside the giant coliseum. As Alex and the rest walked out, they finally saw just how massive the coliseum was.

'This is bigger than most sports stadiums back in the real world, isn't it?' Alex thought. He hadn't been to any, but he had seen them on TV, and this looked so much bigger.

'I could probably fit my farm in here,' he thought. 'Although... if they are going to have multiple competitions at once, won't this space actually be really congested?'

A man got onto a temporary stage. He had a head full of white hair, all tied up in a knot, and wore a black robe with white linings. He stood in front of the hundreds of sects and started.

"Good Morning everyone. My name is Fu Zhen. I welcome you all to the Annual Sect Competition. You must be pretty excited about the competition, so I will skip the actual speech for later. "

"We have learned that everyone is here, so we will start the explanation for today's competitions."

"The theme of today's competition is ingredients. It's mostly focused on the production and specialty sects, so the competition will have to do with ingredients required in these fields."

"Please look at the screen, These are the competition for today," Fu Zhen walked to the side and an image popped up behind him. There were a bunch of texts written on it.

Everyone in the competition started looking at the screen and reading it. The list contained the different competitions and their descriptions as well as the time they were going to take place.

'Oh, there are 2 alchemy competitions huh,' Alex thought in surprise.

Ma Rong looked back and said, "Alright, aside from alchemy, is anyone confident in any of the other ones?" she asked.

A male and female disciple spoke up from behind.

"I can do the formation ingredients, sect leader," he said.

"I think I can do well in the poison ingredient competition," she said.

"Okay, good. As for alchemy, Fanfan and Wan Li will take part in the pill ingredients recognition, while Yu Ming and Meimei will take part in the raw ingredient recognition," Ma Rong said.

Alex looked towards the screen once more. The Pill Ingredients test, according to the explanation, was where the participants would be given a mystery pill and would have to recognize the ingredients in the pill from the effects it provided.

These pills were usually new common rank pills made exclusively by the royal alchemist for the competition, so there wasn't any way for others to really know the recipe beforehand.

The second ingredients test was the raw ingredients test. It didn't mention the exact procedure of the test, but given that it dealt with ingredients, Alex was sure that he would be able to do well in the competition.

"Sect Leader, I want to take part in the second test too," Fan Ruogang shouted.

"No. There are only 3 competitions a participant can take part in. I want you to take part in only a single one today," Ma Rong said.

"Okay," Fan Ruogang said with a dejected voice. However, her voice immediately got cheery as she said, "Let's do well okay, Wanwan?"

"Mmm," Wan Li said nothing more.

Ma Rong chose the third participant for either competition. Alex didn't really know them or care about them. Ma Rong looked back to check on the screen once more.

"Since the first one is at 8, and the second one is at 11, we have ample time for preparation. Okay, let's go register your lot in the competition."

Chapter 254: Registration

All the sects walked over to a room inside the coliseum. The sheer number of people in the room was enough to scare anyone away.

'Just how many cultivators are there in this room alone? And they are the best of the best too,' Alex thought.

Alex looked around and saw a lot of different people. All of them were from sects he had never heard of before. 'I only know a handful of sects, to begin with, and even amongst them, I only know Tiger sect and the Hong Wu sect by looking at them,' he thought.

He looked around and caught sight of someone. It was a lady in a red robe and was surrounded by other cultivators of her own sect.

'Ah, that's the lady I saw in the restaurant. Her face still seems so... familiar. Who is she?' Alex wondered.

He looked at her for a few more moments but could remember nothing. 'Weird, I am pretty sure I haven't seen her before,' he thought. Soon, he forgot about her and focused on what was happening in front of him.

There were multiple stands with people in black robes noting the name of the participants and which competitions they were taking part in.

It was sect wise and the 1st-grade sects got their turn first. The 12 different 1st-grade sects had disciples taking part in nearly all of the tests, so it took quite a while for Alex's turn to come.

Alex finally saw the group of disciples from the Tiger sect a bit further away getting ready for their registration. However, he didn't see his senior sister anywhere. 'She must not be participating until the final day,' he thought.

Soon, it was Hong Wu Sect's turn as well.

There were 8 people in total taking part in the competition today, so they all walked forward. Ma Rong gave the black-robed woman working in the registration her card and soon they were ready for registering.

The woman tapped on a metal ball next to her that was being kept on next to her and it sounded a small TING.

"Grab the metal ball and put some Qi into it and put it back," the woman said.

"Go, Meimei," Ma Rong said and Zhou Mei walked forward and grabbed the sphere. She then put some Qi into it. The sphere made no denotation of it being filled with Qi, but Zhou Mei was sure that it was.

She slowly put it down on its place in the metal sheet. The woman checked the result and said, "Hmm... 23-year-old, 4th realm of Meridian Tempering. tell me your name and the competition you are participating in?"

"Zhou Mei, for the raw ingredient recognition test at 11 am for Alchemy," Zhou Mei said.

"Alright, registered. Next," the woman said.

Fan Ruogang did the same thing. She walked up and grabbed the metal ball before infusing her Qi into it. After she was done, she put it back in its place.

"20 years old, 9th Organ Tempering realm. And your name and competition?" the woman asked.

"Fan Ruogang for Pill ingredients competition for 8 am," Fan Ruogang said. The woman registered it and called for the next person.

Alex walked forward and picked up the ball and infused his Qi into it. The metal ball glowed a little yellow, but no one noticed it.

Alex put it back on the metal plate and the woman read the information with a little surprise to her voice. "18 years old, 5th Organ Tempering realm. Not bad kid, what competition are you here for?" the woman asked.

"Yu Ming for Raw ingredients recognition for Alchemy. 11 AM," Alex said.

Next up was Wan Li. Alex hadn't bothered checking any of their cultivation bases yet and only went by feelings like everyone else did.

Due to his rapid growth and unusual battle prowess, he still hadn't been able to accurately measure other's cultivation base yet. He still needed some practice.

However, he could tell that Wan Li was quite weak. Or at least Alex got that impression. 'He must've spent the majority of his time on Alchemy.' This was the only reason why he would be so weak in cultivation right now.

Wan Li put down the sphere after infusing it with his Qi. "19 years old, M-Mind Tempering 3rd realm, what are you taking part in?" the woman asked.

Alex's eyes went wide. 'Mind Tempering realm? But I can't feel it at all. How is he hiding his cul— Ah, Master must've given him the book,' Alex thought.

The immortal Concealment technique was quite useful, and Alex had learned it fully. Ma Rong was still not used to it and Wan Li from the looks of it was just starting to practice it.

'No wonder he is just weak and not actually hiding his presence all the way,' Alex thought. There was no way that the top disciple of the sect who had been in the sect for nearly 9 years was going to be so weak.

Once Wan Li told the woman his competition, he walked back. The other remaining 4 members walked forward and got registered as well. However, they weren't good enough in Alex's eyes to hold up to Wan Li's performance.

"See, Brother Alex. I told you there would be so many people here. I'm starting to get nervous once more," Wan Li said. However, Alex didn't bother consoling him this time.

"Honestly, I am kind of nervous too. However... I am confident in my abilities enough to not let this nervousness hamper my performance. You should be better than me Brother Wan, I'm sure you will do well despite the nervousness."

Wan Li smiled after hearing that. "Yeah, I will do fine," he said. Once the registrations were done, Ma Rong took the group with her to dedicated seats for the sects in the coliseum's audience.

Different people were still coming in and the various sects were still getting registered. Only after 20 more minutes of patiently waiting did the people from the different sects finally arrived at their seats and the audience was fully packed.

The competitions were finally going to begin.

Chapter 255: Space

Alex looked at the coliseum arena being set. He then looked at the schedule handing in the air and was confused.

For the 8 AM schedule, there was going to be 4 different competition at once. Alchemy pill recognition, Artifact Material recognition, Talisman paper ingredients, Poisonous Material recognition.

'They are going to have 4 different competitions at once?' he thought in surprise. 'Yeah they are quite large, but so are the number of people. If nearly 100 people take part in each competition, how are they going to manage it on the stage?' Alex wondered.

Suddenly, something weird happened on the ground below. The arena that was a bit larger than a football field suddenly grew to two times as large, without actually increasing in size at all.

"What?" Alex said in shock. A lot of other people throughout the audience were shocked a little too. Even Wan Li was shocked.

"What? You guys haven't seen it yet? Hehehe," Fan Ruogang said with a smug smile. She had been here last year as well and had seen this happening before.

"Master, what is going on? Why does it look like everyone in the arena just shrunk down and the area doubled?" Alex asked.

"That's... thanks to a space formation employed by the Royal Fu academy," Ma Rong said.

"Space... formation?" Alex said slowly trying to figure out what that meant. Before he could even come up with an answer, however, Ma Rong explained.

"They basically manipulate the space inside the arena to make it larger or smaller as required," Ma Rong explained.

"Manipulating space..." Alex couldn't understand just how complicated this topic was. Space was something he couldn't imagine being able to interact with, let alone touch, and yet here it was in front of him.

'Damn, this game is something else,' he thought. Suddenly, he thought of something. He had seen space manipulation before. He had ignored it previously because it was a game, however, it seemed everything in the game was on purpose. So, maybe this one was too.

"Master, is this the same thing as what they do to storage bags?" Alex asked.

"Storage bags are a little different. The thing we see in front of us is people using a formation to manipulate space to stretch and shrink it was required. However, in a storage bag, it's actually a part of space ripped directly from our world and put into the storage bags," Ma Rong said.

"What? People can rip space apart?" Alex asked in shock.

"Haha, no. Maybe people can, but not when making storage bags. They instead use a special formation passed throughout the ages to drag the space into a premade bag. Of course, the bag has to be made out of special materials to be able to handle space being put inside it, but I do not know how they do it," Ma Rong said.

"It's a heavily guarded secret amongst the Granite Forest sect and the Southern Sanctuary sect. We don't know exactly what is used to make the storage bags. But we can guess that it's probably not very expensive given how cheap storage bags are," the Second Elder said from the side.

"I see," Alex said. The other disciple also nodded as they learned something new today.

Fu Zhen walked up to a newly set stage and started talking. His voice seemed to be amplified as he started speaking.

"Welcome to the Crimson Empire's Annual Sect Competitions. I am going to be your main host going forward. We are truly excited to have every one of you here," he said.

He went on to speak some more flowery words and told the audience about the competitions that were going to take place today.

"Wan Li, Fanfan, go and get ready. Your competition is up next," Ma Rong said. It was nearly 8 AM and the competition would start at any moment.

One of the elders stood up and took the three disciples to the gate.

Soon the stage was separated into 4 different parts and the competitions were going to start. Disciples started gathering along the different stages and the audience waited with bated breaths.

"Ah there they are, it's starting," one of the disciples said when they saw Wan Li and Fan Ruogang walk into the coliseum arena. They walked to their respective spot where the competition was taking place.

The host was a middle-aged woman for the alchemy contest and she started explaining the competition rules.

"Here are the rules of this competition. Each one of you will be given a single blank talisman to write your answer into. You will be given a Pill made by the alchemists working for the Royal Alchemist. He is the founder of this current pill and it is your job to find the ingredients used to make the pill."

"You only need to write as many ingredients as you can recognize. Each correct answer will award 2 points, and each incorrect answer will deduct 1 point. In the end, a half an hour later, the one with the most points wins."

Suddenly, an image appeared behind the woman. "This is all the information you will get regarding the pill and what it does. At 15 minutes mark, we will also feed one of the pills to the Pill Swine, and you can look firsthand what the pill does."

Someone brought out a pill swine to the stage and kept it there for later. Wan Li and Fan Ruogang waited for the pill to be handed out.

"If you yourself eat the pill or were found to have cheated in any way, you will be instantly disqualified from this competition and will lose all remaining turns to participate in the upcoming competitions," the woman said.

Similar explanations were going around all throughout the coliseum arena as all the different sect disciples were getting ready.

Wan Li and Fan Ruogang were finally handed a pill after some time along with everyone else, and at exactly 8 am, a bell rang, announcing the commencement of the competition.

Chapter 256: First Competition

Wan Li and Fan Ruogang could only use 2 senses of their 5 senses to fully understand what the pill was made up of. Sight, and Smell.

Everyone in the area started checking the pale yellow color of the pill. It had a size of nearly 2 centimeters in diameter.

The explanation for the pill was hung up behind the woman in front of them.

-The pill increases the muscle density of the human body by a certain percentage above 10% and below 25%. It increases the strength of someone's physical body by just that amount. However, it does not increase the bone's rigidity, so there are chances of breaking the bones due to high strength.-

That was all that was written in the text. With the sight, smell, and information floating in front of them, everyone got into thinking about the potential ingredients that might be in the pills.

"Woah, I don't think I could figure out a single ingredient if I were in this competition," Alex said.

"Yes, until you start making your own pill and testing them, it is hard to understand what ingredients are responsible for what in a pill."

"Once you are used to it to an expert level, you can even start tailoring pills to meet your requirements. However, not many people can reach that level. I am still far off from that. The only one aside from hidden experts that can do this is the Royal Alchemist," Ma Rong said.

Time slowly passed as Wan Li, Fan Ruogang and the rest started to insert their answers into the talisman. Wan Li found specs of minuscule red dots at some places in the pills when he looked closely.

"Hell Chery pits?" He wondered as he went in for a sniff. Yes, this was exactly what it smelled like. So, he quickly jots down the answer.

Fan Ruogang read the muscle density increasing part and thought of Red-eyed Stork tendons. There was no visual or Olfactory aspect of it to the pill, but it rarely did. So, Fan Ruogang put that in as well.

Similarly, everyone else used their own experience to figure out answers.

Soon, 15 minutes passed, and most people had put in what they believed were the answers.

"We will now show the effects of the pill on the pill swine," the woman said and brought forth the pill swine that was brought to the front of everybody.

The footage of whatever happening was all floating in giant panels in the air and the entire audience could see it.

The woman took the pill and fed it to the pill swine. From Alex's perspective, a pill swine looked no different from a normal swine, so he was curious why the pills worked for them.

Once the woman fed the pill, the swine started to fidget a little, and soon people could see well-defined muscular figures appear on the swine's body beneath its skin.

The participants quickly looked at the information they could gather from this event, aside from what was already told in the explanation.

The swine fidgeting, its muscle getting stronger from the feet up, its eyes turning slightly red, the amount of time taken for the change to happen, the slight increase in temperature and heartbeat they could tell from all the way back where they sat, Everything gave them the exact information they were looking for.

The group started to quickly answer the questions, and by 20 minutes mark, most of them had already handed their answer.

Getting a wrong answer deducted points, so many didn't want to take the chances and stuck with what they had written. Soon, the competition was over.

The group stayed where they were as they waited for the competition holders to tally the result.

"The result is ready. You all did well, and some exceptionally well. The pill had exactly 17 ingredients, you people, in total, managed to figure out all of them," the woman said.

"As for the result, we will now announce the top 3. The top 3 people who successfully answered the most ingredients, starting with the 3rd place is..."

"Wan Li, from Hong Wu sect, who managed to get exactly 28 points."

Wan Li's face drooped in slight disappointment when he heard that he was in third place.

"In the second place is... Fan Ruogang, from Hong Wu sect as well, managed to get exactly 29 points."

Fan Ruogang's eyes opened wide when she learned that she was in 2nd place.

"As for the first place, it is none other than, Huang Fu from Royal Fu Academy, who scored exactly 31 points. The rest of the results are on the board," the woman said as a ranking screen appeared behind her.

"Huang Fu, is that supposed to be someone famous?" Alex asked.

"Yes, he is the Royal Alchemist's direct disciple. Considering that he got 31 points, he must've made a mistake on the final ingredient. What terrifying talent to know that there were exactly 17 ingredients in the pill," Ma Rong said.

Alex wished he could be that great of an alchemist soon. It seemed he had to forget about everything else and focus solely on cultivating and making pills now.

After returning back to the sect, he doubted he would have anything else to do, so he would have a lot of time.

'Oh, I will have to go back to the tiger sect as well. That's gonna cause a lot of problems,' Alex thought.

He was a little worried about that. Wan Li and Fan Ruogang returned back to the seating area.

"I'm sorry sect leader, I couldn't do better," Wan Li said in a sad tone.

"Are you kidding me? You only got 1 less correct than me, and I'm used to playing such games. Why do you keep talking down on yourself? She said as she patted his back a little too strongly.

"She is correct. You did well, far better than I would have expected honestly. Come and sit now, the rest of the competition is continuing," Ma Rong said.

Chapter 257: Rules of the Competition

The competition continued as per usual. There were always two or more competitions taking place at once in the arena and people could see whichever one they wanted.

"Is us being able to individually hear and understand the different competition something to do with formations?" Alex asked.

"Yes. It's a formation that only provides sounds based on which screen you are looking at," Ma Rong said.

Alex focused on the competition regarding formations itself. The goal of this competition was for the participants to recognize which flags belonged to which formation and gather the different materials that were used for those formations.

He was in part curious about this competition in part because it had to do with formations, and in another part, because the familiar girl was taking place in it.

After several minutes people started completing the competition one after another. The girl didn't take long to gather them, but she wasn't the fastest either.

The top 3 winners were Sky soaring sect who won 1st and 3rd, and Royal Fu Academy who won 2nd place.

"The Royal Fu Academy is quite terrifying, aren't they?" Alex asked, not really looking for an answer.

"They are the Royal Academy after all. A place where only the best and brightest go to. You don't really hear its name when people talk about sects specializing in certain aspects, but make no mistake. They are amazing at every single part of cultivation," Ma Rong said.

"Haha, True, True. It's collected so many points throughout the different annual competitions that it probably has enough to go a step beyond the 1st grade too," the Third elder said from the side.

Alex sat there, watching the competitions for a while longer. He saw sects that focused on poison, sects that focused on the talisman, sects that focused on music, sects that focused on artifact making.

Finally, it was his turn for the competition.

An elder stood up as he took him, Zhou Mei, and another disciple to an area inside the coliseum. They reached a separate room where people were made to go past a certain barrier.

Alex didn't know what was happening, but he did as everyone did and walked past it. He felt his Qi fluctuate a bit as he moved past the barrier giving him a weird feeling.

"Oh, so it's just checking my qi to see if I am taking part or not," Alex realized.

They were then taken to the arena. Alex walked past a certain area, and suddenly he felt as if the world around him had expanded by a lot. The audience who were just a few dozen meters away were suddenly hundreds of meters away.

'Can I possibly get used to such a magical phenomenon?' Alex wondered.

The place they were going to take the competition in was a little different from the ones for Wan Li's turn. The disciples were made to stand in a line with a curtain behind their backs.

They were then made to give away their storage bags and store them in a box that could only be opened by them.

A man wearing black robes walked up on the stage and started speaking.

"Everyone, Welcome to the Ingredients Recognition Competition. I will be your host and competition holder for this competition."

"I will now explain the task and the rules of this competition," the man said.

"Behind every one of you is a curtain hiding a hoard of ingredients that will remain invisible to you until you cross a certain line. Once you go past the line, you will have exactly 5 seconds where you can pick an ingredient."

"Each ingredient will give you points of anywhere from 10 to 1 points. How do you know which ingredient is cost what? Easy. All you have to do is look at the list of names hung in the sky when you enter the curtain."

" You can only pick ingredients that are in the list. Picking up any ingredients, not on the list will result in you earning negative 5 points."

"You will go 5 at a time and you will have to cross the line on my command. Speaking at any moment throughout this competition will have you immediately disqualified."

"Not physically touching the ingredients, and choosing more than 1 ingredient at a single turn will have you disqualified."

"Delaying to return back after the 5 seconds have passed will have you disqualified."

"There are exactly 100 ingredients on the list, and the exam will end when all the ingredients on the list are gathered," the man said.

Everyone nodded once they understood what the competition entailed and got in a single queue, waiting for their next turn.

The ones at the front of the queue had a higher advantage than the ones at the back, but the competition holders didn't seem as worried about that for some reason.

'There must be some level of difficulty in this exam that going first won't give a large enough advantage,' Alex thought.

With 5 people going in every turn, Alex was in the 4th group, while Zhou Mei was in the 2nd. The last disciple was around the 11th group, but they didn't care about that.

Soon the competition started. The first 5 people walked past the curtain and no one on the other side could see what was inside.

"Go," the host said and the people in the queue could hear some scurrying. After 5 seconds passed, 5 dejected young men and women walked out from behind the curtain.

They weren't allowed to speak so they couldn't vocalize their current feelings, but if they could, they would surely say the words like 'Hard' and 'Difficult' for sure.

Maybe some would even use the word complicated.

'It isn't so simple after all,' Alex thought.

Next up was Zhou Mei's group. They too went in and were given the signal to proceed. 5 seconds later, all 5 disciples came out with similar emotions on their faces.

Zhou Mei was clearly frowning from the difficulty of the task. The same was the case for the 3rd group of disciples as well.

Next up was Alex's turn.

Chapter 258: The 10 Ingredients

Alex and 4 other young folks walked past the curtain onto the other side. 5 men stood there, who swiftly handed them an empty storage bag.

"You will be using this to gather the ingredients," they told them.

Alex looked in front of him and all he saw was a black barrier blocking his view from what was in front of him. He looked to the side and saw the other 4 quite nervous about the various things.

The host was to the side and without wasting a single moment he told them to go. Alex activated Focus Mode.

Time slowed down as all of his senses amplified to another level. Alex walked in with all of the rest, waiting to see what was in there that made everyone so worried.

The moment he entered, 2 things became clearly visible for him. The first was the list that was hanging in the air, and the second was the ingredients laid out in front of him.

The list had exactly 10 groups inside of them, each group consisting of 10 ingredients. The groups were separated into points where the first group of ingredients won them 10 points, the second 9 points, all the way down to the last which earned them 1 point.

This was a little overwhelming to remember at just 5 seconds, but not as much as what the others were.

On a large surface in front of them were nearly 1000 different ingredients, all laid down randomly. The entire front of him lit up as thousands of names started popping up. The number was so much that even he was easily overwhelmed.

'I could use my spiritual sense to easily check through it all individually, but it seems I will have to wait until my next turn to do so,' he thought.

The 5 seconds were over.

All 5 of them walked back to the end of the queue. The other 4 were currently frowning as they didn't even know where to begin with finding the ingredients, while only Alex was the first person without a single negative emotion.

He was overwhelmed when he saw so many names for sure, but now that he had time, he could slowly digest it and see where everything was.

'I am sure I can actually afford to waste next turn too,' Alex thought. His first course of action was remembering all the 10 ingredients that would earn him 10 points.

He recollected all of his memory from the few seconds worth of massive information that was in his head. He first remembered the list of 10 ingredients.

[Blue Spirit Lotus]

[Dizzying Daffodil]

[Fire Ox's Tendons]

[Spirit Cows Milk]

[Tear Bearing Plant]

[Demon Faced Leaf]

[Solar Tree's Apricot]

[Midnight Fox's Blood Essence]

[Crying Deer's Tears]

[Earth Chrysanthemum's Bud]

These were the 10 ingredients that in total got a person 100 points. If the other participants were anything but bad, they would definitely go for these ingredients.

They would do their best to remember the names from this list and look for it on every turn they got.

Alex thankfully was all done with remembering the names, he was now looking for the ingredients among the 1000 ingredients that were laid there.

It took him a while to remember where exactly the ingredients were and which ones were the easiest to find. He would target the easy ones first.

'I will focus on those 10 for now and then move on to 9 points and 8 points and so on,' he thought. He didn't know if he could get all 10 turns to gather the 10 ingredients or not, but he planned on making the best of what he would be given.

Soon, it was his turn to gather again.

He walked into the curtain and stood in front of the dark barrier once more. 'I wonder if I could see what is beyond here if I used my spiritual sense,' he wondered.

He wasn't stupid enough to use it here however though. Considering how many different people were in the audience, having a single powerhouse who took interest in a self tempering realm brat that could use Spiritual sense could end up being a dangerous situation.

"GO," the host gave them the signal to enter. Alex removed all sorts of thoughts from his mind as he entered the barrier and immediately ran to the group of ingredients and grabbed an ingredient directly without hesitation and put it in his storage bag.

He had got the Solar Tree's Apricot. 'That's 10 points for me,' he thought and looked at the list of ingredients above him once more before returning.

Alex returned back to the queue with no worry on his face while the 4 other people besides him were still frowning. This was especially increased when they saw Alex actually choosing an ingredient on his 2nd try alone.

He looked upon the list of ingredients that were in this mind from the recent most viewing and smiled as he realized not a single one of the ingredients were taken yet.

He wasn't sure how long it would last, but he would wish for it to last as long as it could. The queue was so long that it would take him another 3 minutes before it was his turn again.

During this time, he made sure to revise this plan again. He had taken the apricot, so he planned on taking another one of the easy to get ingredients.

'I should try and get the Tear Bearing plant. It's one of the biggest ingredients in there and quite easy to recognize in a single glance,' Alex thought.

He planned on how to get some of the other ingredients as well. All in all, he now knew exactly where all the 9 remaining ingredients were and exactly how he could get them.

Soon, it was his turn to go in again. He walked up to the curtain and entered it, standing in front of the barrier. The other seemed troubled, but not him.

Alex simply waited for the host to give him the go-to enter.

Chapter 259: Results

With a single gesture from the host and the word 'go', Alex and the other 4 people entered the dark barrier once more. While the other 4 stayed behind to remember the list and the ingredients in front of them one more time, Alex went ahead and gathered the Plant.

'That's two down,' he thought and looked at the list of ingredients. He was slightly shocked. He returned back to the queue along with the other 4 people.

'So, someone managed to grab an ingredient from the 7's list huh?' he thought. When he checked the list just now, he saw that there were two names that had been grayed out from the list.

The first was the apricot that he had gotten the turn prior, and another one was an ingredient from the group that earned one 7 points.

'The ingredients are going to get taken away faster now that we are coming up on the 4th turn,' Alex thought.

As expected, on his next turn, 3 more ingredients from the list were taken away. Alex grabbed the Demon-Faced Leaf and walked out.

On his 5th turn, he grabbed the Spirit Cow's Milk. By now, around 20 items out of the 100 were taken. This was just going to get snowballed and soon, there would be no more ingredients left to gather.

On the 6th turn, he walked up to the Fire Ox's tendons and grabbed them. A few of the 4 people along with him also grabbed some of the ingredients.

Alex didn't know if they grabbed anything important or not as he would only know what was missing on the other round.

He looked up at the list of the remaining ingredients and was a little surprised. Yet, he also knew it wasn't something he needed to be surprised about.

Dizzying Daffodil was grayed out of the list of names with 10 points. 'Someone got to it before me, huh? I guess it about time people start to obsess over the items with 10 points,' he thought

As of now, including the 4 10-points ingredients, there were only about 50 ingredients in total left.

'I can't think of which ingredients to pick now. I will have to make my choice depending on what is left,' he thought.

On the 7th turn, he walked into the dark barrier and immediately looked up at the list. He saw that there were only 3 names lit up for the 10-points ingredients.

Someone had taken away the Midnight Fox's Blood Essence. Alex gave no thought to what was taken and immediately walked up to the Earth Chrysanthemum's Bud and picked it up before walking back.

'Tsk. There are only 30 ingredients remaining,' he thought. Everyone went through their turn and eventually, it was Alex's turn once again.

It was his 8th turn and so he walked in once more. By now he had gathered 6 ingredients in total. Given that there were nearly a hundred participants, that was one of the best results one could get.

Once he was given the go, he entered the dark curtain for the 8th time and looked up at the list to check what ingredient he could go for.

'Wha?!' he was surprised. The list had very few names that actually were not grayed out. They were about 12 in total. The worst part was that all of the 10 points ingredients were taken away.

'Sh*t,' he thought. He quickly looked over to the other list and then to the different ingredients laid out below. There weren't many ingredients left, and he hadn't been concentrating on the remaining ingredients at all.

So, unfortunately, he had to give up on this turn. Alex returned back to the end of the queue and started remembering the position of every single ingredient there.

He wouldn't be caught off guard this time.

2 more turns passed by and Alex took a 5 point and a 3 point ingredient, earning in total 68 points. 'That should be enough to win right?' Alex thought.

He had only missed 2 of the 10 turns, so he was confident that his performance was one of if not the best today.

Once all the ingredients were done and the list was fully grayed out, the host made them all hand over their storage bags for a tally.

In the meanwhile, Alex and the rest of the participants took back their storage bags. Alex checked to see if anything was missing just in case and was relieved that it was all there.

They waited for the results to be done for over 10 minutes, and only then did the host return back from beyond the curtain.

He stood up on the stage and started speaking.

"Congratulations everyone on competing in today's competition. You guys managed to complete the task faster than we anticipated."

"I am now going to announce the results."

"In the third place, with 33 points, is Nan Ren from the Spring Song sect," the host said. A man dressed in the same dress as the fatty from yesterday got happy when he heard the result.

"In the second place, with 42 points, is Jia Fang from Royal Fu Academy."

The young lady in black robes seemed a little disappointed that she didn't manage to obtain first place even though she believed she had gotten a good enough point in the competition.

Alex didn't even need to keep listening to know that he had won. Still, he let the host announce the result before he showed any signs of celebration.

"And in the first place, with an incredible 68 points, is Yu Ming from Hong Wu sect. Congratulations to the winners. The rest of the rankings, you can see on the board behind me," the host said and got off the podium he was standing on.

Alex looked at the list hovering in the air. He truly had gotten quite a lot compared to the rest of the people. With nothing else remaining, he walked back out of the arena, returning to the seating area in the coliseum.

Chapter 260: Alchemy Hall of the Capital

Zhou Mei looked at the list and sighed a little. She had gotten 26 points in the competition and had thus become 5th in the rankings. Normally, she would've been happy, but right now, she only frowned.

'How did that guy get so many points while everyone else struggled?' she thought. It was really hard to believe that someone that was not even in the same cultivation realm as her could possibly gather so many ingredients.

'Does he have a really good mind or what?' she wondered. She knew he was talented. Even with all the opportunities, one was given, it was impossible to reach where he was without having some talent of one's own. But she found it difficult to accept precisely because he was given so many opportunities.

She sighed and moved out of the arena along with the other nearly hundred disciples.

Some of the hundred disciples were a little happy to have earned something, but most were actually sad and frustrated. It wasn't so easy to go in, look at the list, remember it, look at the thousands of ingredients in front of them and pick one that matched the list.

Even if they did remember a few, they weren't sure if they would be gone by the next day. That was just how hard the competition was.

Alex and Zhou Mei as well as the other disciple made their way to the seating area.

CLAP CLAP CLAP

"Congrats on the 1st place Yu Ming"

"Nice job."

"That's the sect leader's disciple for you."

"No wonder she took him as her direct disciple."

Alex smiled and thanked them as he walked up to and sat in his seat. "Great job Yu Ming. I knew you could do it for sure. You too MeiMei, good job on getting 5th place. That was a terribly difficult task. I doubt Fanfan could get that much, let alone Wan Li."

Zhou Mei nodded when she heard Ma Rong say that, but internally she was still disappointed. Out of the top 3, she was the only one to not be in the top 3 of the competition.

"Alright, let's leave," Ma Rong said and stood up. The rest of the members stood up and started walking too. The competition was over for the day, so everyone else would be leaving soon as well.

The other sects didn't want to be stuck among the waves of the audience trying to leave the place, so they started to leave as well.

Alex and the rest smoothly got out of the coliseum and went back to their hotel. "You guys can go around and roam you know? You don't have to follow the rest of us back," Ma Rong said.

Some of the disciples nodded and got out of line to leave but the rest of them followed the group back.

The group walked all the way to the west of the city where they finally went to their hotel room.

"Alright, everyone. The rule is the same as yesterday. Do what you want until 6 pm, by which you must be in the hotel," Ma Rong said and went to her room.

Alex went to his room with Wan Li as well and made some excuse about being tired and went directly to bed before logging out.

"Urghh... that took a while. I am so hungry," he thought and quickly went to the kitchen to get something to eat.

There was something in the refrigerator, so he simply microwaved it and ate it. It wasn't very tasty, but he was too lazy to want to make anything on his own.

After finishing his food, he went back to his room and logged in.

He was now back to the game after leaving for 20 minutes. "Ughh... I can't sleep," he said as he woke up and stretched a little to give Wan Li the impression that he really did try to sleep."

"Do you want to go out to the Alchemy Halls Brother Wan? I want to make some pills," he said.

Wan Li thought for a few moments and said, "It's alright brother Yu. You can go by yourself. I want to write and study what I learned today in the competition." He then took out a pen and a book and started writing on them.

Alex was blown away by how incredibly hardworking the boy was. 'If only he had a mind that could keep up with that,' he thought. Wan Li was already in the Mind Tempering realm, and that was supposed to have boosted his mental abilities quite a bit.

However, if he was still such a forgetful person then...

'I really want to give the poor guy one of the flowers so that he could have an eidetic memory too. But I can't. If someone else from the sect ends up finding out that I had some, I would be in deep trouble,' Alex thought.

"Alright then, I'm leaving," Alex said and walked out of the room. He soon walked out of the hotel and started walking towards the middle of the city.

The middle of the city was where the Alchemy Guild and Halls were. This was where all the different guilds and halls were, so he swiftly made his way there.

He didn't know how much it cost to make pills for around 5 hours but hoped that it didn't cost any more than 2 true spirit stones. That was all he had left now.

He finally reached the place and saw the gigantic buildings that were the different halls. There were hundreds and thousands of people going in and out of these places. Some were mortals, some were in the Self Tempering realms and some were in the True Realm.

He quickly found the Alchemy hall right next to the Alchemy Guild. It was a building colored in light green and had perhaps the most number of people going in and out of it.

Alex thought nothing else and directly walked into the Alchemy Hall.