

Alchemy 331

Chapter 331: A Feeling

Alex ran away with the man's talisman and read it. He had noticed a few talismans in that there were writings on the talismans that belonged to the participants.

He had come to notice two different sets of writing.

One said [CCHASTWDPH] and another one said [ETWLFEONT].

Alex tried to make sense of the 2 types of talismans and didn't notice anything. His own 2 remaining talismans were of the first variety.

'Is this something random to f*ck with me?' he thought. He gave up on thinking about it for the moment.

Alex ran through some intersections, redoing his runs multiple times cause he ran into dead ends. Finally, he was done with that section of the maze and walked out of it.

"What the?" he thought as he saw the scene ahead.

Unlike the previous times, there wasn't an open space to walk through like the previous times. Instead, in front of him was... himself.

Or more accurately, a reflection of himself. As he walked forward, he saw the walls move as well. When he finally entered that section of the maze, he realized, the walls were mirrors.

He walked ahead slowly and suddenly slammed on a wall that was placed at a 45-degree angle. 'Sh*t, this is going to be hard,' he thought.

He tried walking in another direction and could see nothing but himself in all the walls. So he carefully moved. Dead ends were much harder to return from since he didn't know where the intersections were anymore. He couldn't remember the places like he could for the other mazes.

So he had to rely on intuition now. Thankfully, he had his spiritual sense fully working, so he didn't have to worry about accidentally hitting a wall anymore.

Finally, after nearly 15 minutes of scurrying around like a headless chicken, he managed to get out of there. However, it was simply him getting out of the fire pan and into the fire.

The place in front of him was nothing but fog. He carefully placed a foot inside expecting the whole land to cave in, or some sort of attack to just at him.

However, there was nothing. He carefully walked a bit more and there truly wasn't anything. 'Hmm, so there really isn't anything,' Alex thought as he freely started walking forward.

As he walked more and more, he couldn't help but get the feeling that this was familiar. 'Isn't this just like...' suddenly, his eyes went wide.

He suddenly started to look around with anxiety and confusion in his eyes. He turned his head around to check but no matter where he looked, he couldn't make sense of it.

"Where am I supposed to walk towards?"

He was stuck in a formation, and this was one that took away his sense of direction.

Alex wandered for a bit but he was still stuck inside the formation. "What do I do?" he thought. Even his spiritual sense didn't help as there was nothing to look at in the vicinity.

"Screw it," he thought and came up with an idea. He took his sword and threw it ahead of him, but only a small distance away. He slowly walked towards the sword and stopped with both of his feet stuck together.

He then picked up the sword and without looking anywhere, threw it straight ahead of him. While getting to his sword, his body would try to make him move in another direction, but with the spiritual sense, he knew where he was supposed to walk to.

He found a person in the fog once but didn't dare break his direction as he would probably get lost if he did that. Finally, after repeating that a few dozen times, he hit a wall.

He quickly walked to the sword and realized that he had hit a wall. When he saw where he was, he frowned. He was back in the mirror maze.

Meaning he would have to repeat the same thing for an entire length of the maze. "F*ck," he couldn't hate but shout.

He was about to throw the sword when suddenly, he felt a... weird sense that something was calling to him. He couldn't tell what it was, or where it was. What he could tell was the direction it was coming from.

It was behind him. He couldn't tell what this feeling was as it wasn't anything like when the alchemy ingredients called to him, or when his body reacted to materials it wanted.

This was something different, something that felt more... home. 'What's going on?' he thought. He knew for sure this had nothing to do with his knowledge of alchemy or his body, but there was nothing else to him but that.

'Whatever at least it will help me now,' Alex thought and ran straight ahead. He didn't bother with directions or people, as long as the feeling was coming from behind him, he knew where to go.

In under a minute, he reached the other side of the fog and looked at the top. It once again said that he couldn't change his choice of entrance later on.

So he carefully, but in the end randomly, chose an entrance and walked in. When he saw the maze, he couldn't help but be surprised.

"Is this real?" he asked himself. Ahead of him was a straight line for nearly 200 meters. There were no split paths, no intersection, or anything.

From start to finish he could see everything. "What's the catch?" he thought and slowly placed a foot in. He was expecting vines like the first time to pop out and lock him in place, but nothing happened.

Second foot, third foot. He walked more and more, but nothing happened. "Haha! There's nothing?" he thought and started running.

He hadn't taken 10 steps into the run when—

BAM

He hit something and fell on his butt. "Ouch," he said as he stood up and looked in front of him, but there was nothing there.

"What did I hit?"

Chapter 332: Illusory

Alex rubbed his head a little and carefully looked ahead. He could still clearly see the end of the path, but he had just hit something.

He slowly extended his arm forward until his arm touched something. "A barrier?" he wondered and felt it a little more. The more he felt it, however, the surer he was that this was not a barrier.

He closed his eyes and tried to understand what he was feeling. "This feels like the walls of the maze," he thought as he felt the tiny leaves and branches.

He suddenly backed up and looked at the whole thing again. Only this time, he used his Spiritual sense.

"There truly is a wall," he thought as he saw the wall finally. To the right of him was an opening. He opened his eyes and looked at the opening. He could see a wall there.

He slowly moved to the right while extending his arms like a blind man finding his path. Soon he reached the wall and tried to touch it, but there was nothing there.

He walked straight in and the whole environment changed. It was like he was on the other side of the wall. However, he could go back if he wanted to.

"Illusions," he finally understood what was happening.

He sent out his spiritual sense and found his way ahead. Thankfully, there were no intersections with the illusions, they were just hard to find paths.

He 'felt' his way through the rest of the maze and walked out. The scenery changed once more, and he knew he was out of the illusion. During the entire illusion maze, he actually found nobody.

'Am I ahead or behind? Or did people just choose a different route?' he wondered. Ahead of him was an obstacle course, that didn't seem very hard.

'Even a mortal can complete that,' he thought. However, he knew there was going to be something weird about this place.

He walked forward into the empty landscape and suddenly felt a force attack him. This force reminded him of the force in the Forbidden Fields. However, it only attacked his Qi and not his spiritual sense.

Furthermore, Alex could feel that he could push back this force if he wanted to. The only problem was, he would have to expend a lot of Qi to sustain that push.

"Well, not like I need it," he thought and immediately ran forward. With his nearly Organ Tempering realm body cultivation, he didn't need to worry about anything.

He jumped through all the obstacles and crossed them in no time like it was child's play for him.

He finally reached the other side where the force disappeared and he regained his Qi. It felt good. Ahead of him was nothing but a very long stretch of land that inclined the further along it went.

However, he didn't trek on it as there were words floating in front of Alex that said 'Jump in the Hole'. Alex stepped forward and saw a hole in front of where he was. He wasn't allowed to cross the empty land but had to go through the hole.

"Ah, F*ck!" he was annoyed at how long the Maze was going on. It had been over an hour, even close to 2 hours, and yet the maze still didn't show an end.

However, he couldn't waste any time and directly jumped into the hole.

The inside was dark and he could only see anything thanks to the light that was coming from the hole. However, the further along he went the less light he got. Even if he was a cultivator, he couldn't see in places with truly no light.

So, he used his spiritual sense for guidance. Just as he sent it out, he felt someone waiting in the darkness on the other side.

Alex could see him with his eyes closed, listening to his footsteps. 'He wants to steal my talisman,' Alex thought. However, there was no way the man could do that here in a place with no light.

The darkness was Alex's domain.

Alex immediately disappeared and appeared next to the man.

PING

He swiftly grabbed the falling talisman and disappeared. The man had been listening to sound for echolocation to determine where Alex was, but he never expected Alex to simply disappear and steal away his talisman.

By the time the man looked behind, Alex had disappeared again. Alex didn't bother walking at all. He kept on using the teleportation technique as that was the fastest way to leave this place of darkness.

After not even 5 minutes, he reached the end of the underground tunnels and climbed a steady incline to walk out of it. When he finally came out, he was surprised.

"What?" he shouted out as he saw the most ridiculous field yet. In front of him, was a field full of nothing but monsters. He looked at the sword he was holding and thought, 'Am I supposed to fight them?'

However, just as quickly he shook his head. "No, at the end of the day, this is a race. I am supposed to walk out of here as soon as I can," he said to himself.

He decided to skip the monster, and just as he wished, the texts floating in the air also gave him an easy route out.

- The restriction of '1-meter flight' is lifted just for this one course. It will start the moment you enter the maze walls on the other side.-

"I can fly?" he thought happily. He could now easily skip the hundreds of monsters down below. He was about to fly and leave, but then he stopped.

He looked up and looked at the words again. "Why?" he asked himself. Why would the competition holders lift a restriction for just this one land?

Was it because it was dangerous? Was it because it was time-consuming? If one could simply skip it, why even have this be a part of the Maze run?

That was when Alex noticed something amongst the many monsters and thought, "I see. No wonder."

Chapter 333: Blue Gorilla

Alex looked at the massive amounts of beasts down on the ground from his elevated land.

He also noticed a few people fighting the beasts. "It seems they noticed too," he thought.

On top of many of the beasts, there was a small line going across their bodies, which came to their underbelly that held a small box.

'That box must be the reason,' Alex thought and immediately started flying. However, after getting close to the monsters, he realized another problem he hadn't thought of yet.

They were all in the Meridian realm, and every single one of them could seriously injure him in a single strike.

If his body had the same cultivation base as his Qi, he might have some ease, however, with how he was now, he had no chance.

'I need to think of another way,' Alex thought. He looked for a monster that was very weak and had the weakest cultivation base of them all.

A blue-haired gorilla beast with 1st Meridian Tempering realm had the misfortune of being his target.

Alex could either try to fight the beast head-on and win the box from it, or he could sneak in and steal it.

He didn't have much time to waste and fight it, so he decided to steal it. He flew up to the highest vantage point and waited for the perfect moment.

Suddenly, he disappeared. He emerged right below the gorilla, slightly disoriented, but with enough wits to grasp the box and pull it.

However, not everything was as easy as it looked. No matter how hard he pulled the box, the ropes just wouldn't let go.

The gorilla smashed down with its giant arms, but Alex easily rolled out of its way and once again tried to pull. It didn't work.

He immediately flew away from the attack range of the blue gorilla and frowned as he looked at the others. Many other people were struggling with their beast of choice as well, and Alex realized that the other beasts were ignoring everyone else.

'Are the beasts under a trance so that they don't realize what is happening around them?' Alex wondered.

Just then, he saw a man kill the beast he was fighting. Alex was about to turn back, but he saw something interesting. After the beast dropped, the top on its rope lit up a bit and fell in two directions.

The man took the box still attached to the open ropes and left.

'So I have to kill the beasts?' Alex thought and looked towards the blue gorilla. The blue gorilla was already doing its own thing after Alex left it.

'Sigh, and here I expected to not have to fight at all,' he thought. 'Whatever, I just hope the sword lasts through it,' he thought and started moving.

As soon as he got close to the gorilla, the gorilla too got aware of his existence and started moving. It tried to walk towards him, but Alex gave no chance, he was in a hurry.

His sword shined golden and he disappeared. When he appeared, he was already below the gorilla, and he accurately hit the waist of the gorilla where the rope was.

He wanted to give one last try to see if the rope was unbreakable; it was. 'Fine then, I will kill it,' he thought and started attacking it.

Alex dashed sideways at incredible speed and slashed the gorilla on the leg. There was a slight cut on the gorilla's leg, but that was all it was.

'I'm going to have to use more than just Smiting Blade.'

The gorilla tried to smash him with its fist, but Alex had a full vision of everything that was happening around him. He immediately disappeared once again and arrived behind the gorilla where he launched the Fist attack and the Palm attack.

His body already looked like jade from using his defensive technique and he was leaving nothing unguarded by fully using his spiritual sense.

He bombarded the gorilla with attacks. The gorilla tried to swing at him with its giant hands, but Alex simply used that to jump backward.

Without wait, he put 2 fingers forward and they started to glow a little yellow. He then swiped those fingers along the side of his blade and moved the glowing sword above his head in a circular pattern.

Five glowing after images of the swords were left behind that quickly turned towards the gorilla. The gorilla showed a little fear when it saw this.

"HAH!"

Alex shouted as he let them loose. 5 energy blades blitzed their way to the blue gorilla.

BANG

Dust flew everywhere and Alex had to block them with his Qi. However, even with the dust flying, he knew, that didn't work.

An ice-clad blue gorilla appeared from the dust. 'Sh*t. It has water elemental powers,' Alex thought. The gorilla was strong than him and had probably a better water element than him. So, the ice armor, which was a sub-type of water, was capable of weakening his Penta Blade attack that was a metal-type attack.

'However, it's still hurt. Meaning, it's not that much stronger than me if I put my Qi density into account. I just need a better element,' Alex thought.

'Got it.'

He could use the Fire element to Ruin the gorilla's ice armor, but Alex didn't have any fire elemental attacks. He could use Earth Elemental attacks to Overwhelm, or at the very least, control the ice armor, but Alex didn't have that either. So, the only thing he could use was Wood Elemental attacks.

Instead of golden-yellow, his sword changed colors and it started glowing green. Alex disappeared once more and appeared right below the gorilla once more. The gorilla was prepared, but it was still too fast for it to react.

Alex swung directly into the ice armor. The ice practically broke apart at the touch of his attack and the attack itself landed on the gorilla's body.

The gorilla cried in pain and grabbed the right side of its gut where a relatively big cut had appeared.

Alex smiled and thought, 'I can kill it.'

Chapter 334: The Box

He had just launched the 2nd strike of the Elusive Heavenly sword at close range to deal the damage with great precision.

Once again, his sword glowed green, but suddenly he noticed the gorilla form two sharp icicles and smash it towards him. Alex disappeared once again, but the gorilla seemed to be prepared this time.

It searched for him and attacked him within a second after he reappeared. 'Sh*t,' he thought and disappeared again.

Thankfully, after the mortal cleansing, his movement of Qi had become very quick with almost zero resistance. Thanks to that, he could continuously disappear right after he reappeared as much as he wanted.

However, his mind was a different problem. After the 3rd instant teleport, he was starting to lose information about where he was and which direction he was turning towards.

The gorilla slammed again and he disappeared once again. On the 4th reappearance, he threw his sword outside of the gorilla's area of attack.

He then disappeared again. When he reappeared, he was about 8 meters away from the gorilla and held his sword in his hand. It took him a second to get his head together and he stepped back once more.

HUFF HUFF

He breathed heavily. The blue gorilla suddenly threw one of its icicles towards him. Alex easily dodged it, but in that time the gorilla had blown the ground with the cold air from its lungs.

Almost magically, ice formed on the surface of the ground and so did an ice armor form on its body once more. There was so much reflection between the two that the amount of shadows had been reduced by nearly 2 thirds.

Alex could no longer use the same techniques as before.

'Screw it, you want long ranged attacks? You will get it,' he thought and put wood Qi into his blade once more.

With a single slash, he sent out the 2nd strike of the Elusive Heavenly sword once more. The gorilla knew it couldn't dodge, so it tried to block the attack with its icicles and armors.

The green slash easily cut through the two, but has in turn lost a lot of its energy and was thus so weak that it only left a slight cut on the skin. The ice armor grew back and so did the icicles. The gorilla could fight again.

However, Alex wasn't dejected. He instead smiled and said, "Let's see if your Qi will last longer or mine." Once again, he threw out the 2nd strike which the gorilla blocked.

He threw it once again, and again, and again. The gorilla blocked the first few, but as it started losing its Qi, the ice wasn't as strong as before.

Suddenly, Alex put it more Qi into the sword and made the sword glow even greener. He was using the 3rd strike. The 3rd strike was truly useful for people that had superior wood roots, but it slightly increased the damage of attacks on people with inferior roots like Alex as well.

With one last breath remaining on the gorilla, he wanted to finish it off with the strongest attack he could use against it right now.

He raised his sword diagonal to the right and slashed.

A very green slash of energy flew towards the now bloody gorilla. It tried to move a little out of the way, but it was too wounded to do so.

The slash directly landed on its chest and cut in deep enough to damage its internals. Within seconds, the gorilla died.

"Hooooo," Alex took a deep breath and walked towards the corpse. The robe around the gorilla's waist glowed a little and it fell off.

He went ahead and grabbed it. Suddenly, the feeling that had been with him since the foggy area increased a little. It wasn't enough to make him really think anything of it, but was just enough that he noticed the increase.

He didn't know what it was, so he decided to ignore what it was and keep going with the competition. He was about to fly when he noticed something.

The many beasts that were in a trance earlier suddenly got out of their trance and looked at him. "Wh— What?" he tried to slowly back away, but their eyes never left him. They even started to move forward.

The further Alex moved, the more the beasts came closer to him. "What's happening?" he shouted out loud. The beasts heard the shout and ran towards him in a rush.

Just then, an aura erupted from the sky and a few staff members in the True realm got down. Their aura suppressed the beasts and one of them said, "You can leave to the other side."

Alex nodded and flew up and away. He didn't want to do anything with these beasts so he stayed very high in the sky. "What was that?" he wondered.

He suddenly looked at his hands and realized what he was holding. "Oh right, I nearly forgot," he said and dropped down near the maze walls.

-The Final Maze; Choose wisely-

That was all it said. 'The final maze, so if I cross it, the run is over, right?' Alex thought. The final maze was actually made up of solid wooden walls instead of the bushes like most of the other ones.

"Let's check what's inside here first," he said as he pulled the box up along with the rope. The rope seemed to be attached to the top of the box, while the box itself was totally without any design, aside from the single seam running across it that seemed to be where it opened from.

"Let's see what is inside of you," Alex thought and pushed the lid open. It didn't open.

"Huh?" he put more force into it, but it wouldn't open at all. 'What is this box made up of?' he wondered and tried some more, but it didn't work.

He even used spiritual sense to check what was inside, but for some reason, there was a seal on the box itself that stopped him from seeing it.

He was extremely befuddled as what exactly to do next.

Chapter 335: Wooden Walls

BANG, CLANG

Alex slammed his sword right on top of the box, but nothing happened. Instead, his sword broke in two. "What the? What am I supposed to do then?" he asked in frustration.

He kicked, punched, threw it at the wall, and tried to use different techniques on the box, but it didn't open.

"ARGHHH" in frustration, he grabbed the box by the end of the ropes and started slamming it everywhere. He didn't let go and kept on beating it around.

Suddenly, he felt the load lighten. "Huh?" he looked up and checked. The box was a good 20 meters away from him near the wall of the maze. He looked at his hand and only the rope remained.

"Oh, it came off," he said and walked to the box. He picked it up and saw its pristine condition. "Damn, still no damage. Just how strong is thi—" he stopped.

He could now see something on the box that he couldn't before. There was a hole in it.

"Huh? How did it— Oh, it was covered by the rope. I should have ripped it off as the first thing I did," he said and looked at the hole.

For a few seconds, he didn't know what the hole did, but then he saw something. Inside the hole... was another hole. His eyes started shining when he saw that.

"A keyhole," he said in surprised. He quickly searched into his robes among the dozens or more talismans and brought out a key. This was the same key he had found deep in the swimming pool like course.

He inserted the key and twisted it.

CLACK.

The box opened. With slightly nervous hands, he opened the box and saw what was inside. When he finally laid his eyes on the reward he had been trying this hard to get, he was disappointed.

"Just a bunch of talismans?" he nearly shouted in anger. He calmed himself and said, "This might be good, don't lose hope Alex."

He checked the first one.

-15 seconds reduction from the result-

"That's just the first one," he said to himself.

-52 seconds reduction from the result-

"That's... not bad," he tried to deceive himself.

- 34 seconds reduction from the result-

This wasn't good, but he still didn't lose hope.

-16 seconds...-

This was bad.

-28 seconds...-

This was bad too.

-10 seconds...-

This one was especially bad.

-22 seconds...-

"Sigh, I wasted so much time." He quickly read through the other 5 remaining talismans.

"Huh?" when he got to the last of the talismans, he noticed something. There was something etched onto the wood on the end.

"What's this?" he thought and read it.

-Here lies the final one of the 3 -

-HKELOHOEA-

"Wait... this is!" Alex quickly took out the two types of talisman out that had a similar string of words written on them.

[CCHASTWDPH], [ETWLFEONT], and [HKELOHOEA]. If the information on the box was correct, he now had all the pieces of the puzzle. But Alex couldn't think of how they would fit.

"Hm, no matter what order I stack them in, it doesn't work," he thought. Putting the words in a straight line didn't seem to be the way to go.

"Are these abbreviations then? Probably not. These would be too long," he thought.

"Reverse then?" he checked but that didn't work either.

"Hmm, one is 10 letters long, while the other 2 are 9 letters long. How do I do this?" He spent a good 5 minutes trying to think of ways to orient them.

"Hmm, that is... I might as well try it," Alex thought after coming up with an idea. He took the broken sword and started writing the words on the ground.

He was still cautious the entire time about someone getting behind him while he etched the words onto the ground. Instead of writing them horizontally however, he wrote them vertically, side by side.

"Let's see what they read," he thought and tried reading in one way.

"CEHCTKHWE— Nah that doesn't make sense." He read it the other way this time.

"HECKTCEWH— Nah, not this one either. Am I even doing the right thing?" he wondered and read the final way.

"CHECKTHEWALLS— Wait... it's working. Check the walls... lemme read the rest," he thought and started reading it from start to the end. When he finished reading it, a massive smile appeared on his face.

The three talisman together read 'Check The Walls Of The Wooden Path'.

"So I have to check these walls?" he said as he looked at the wooden path that lied ahead of him. Without hesitation, he dug a little hole and buried the box before moving on.

As soon as he walked in, he started looking at the walls, but everything looked the same.

"What am I supposed to check here? Is there a hidden door or something?" Alex wondered. "If it's a hidden door then I should be able to open it by pushing on one of these walls, right?" he said to himself.

He ran his hands across the walls constantly pushing them. He also knocked on them to see what they sounded like. He did this for a few seconds when...

KNOCK KNOCK

He knocked on one of the walls and it sounded weird. He knocked again, and as he had expected, it was hollow. He tried pushing that part of the wall in, but nothing happened.

"Hmm... then should I pull instead?" he thought and searched for a something to grasp. After finding nothing, he used his Qi to pull the wall.

A drawer like box fell off from the wall and he saw a talisman inside. He picked up the talisman and saw read it.

-1 minute reduced from the final result-

"This is nice," Alex said, but it wasn't really worth wasting his time around. "How many even are there?" he said and sent out his spiritual sense to check the walls.

His eyes suddenly went wide in shock as he could only speak out only two words, "So many..."

Chapter 336: Leaving the Maze

"What is he doing there? Mingming, you idiot, just run. Don't stand there," Fan Ruogang was the most enthusiastic of the competition viewers when it came to being Alex's fan. So, when she saw him move through the final end of the maze at a very slow pace, she got angry.

"Don't get so agitated Fanfan, he must have a reason. Look, he seems to be getting something from those walls," Zhou Mei said as she pointed to the huge screen that showed the entire maze from start to finish.

The participants knew it was big, but only the audience could really see the true scale of the maze. The maze was about 500 to 600 meters in width and nearly 3 kilometers in length.

With so many normal mazes and obstacles, this was truly a grand scenery to behold. The space inside the stage was so big now that it was impossible for the audience to truly see what was going on inside the maze.

So, they could only rely on the large projection in the sky.

"But Meimei, I bet 400 spirit stones in Mingming's name. If he doesn't win, I am going to lose 4 true spirit stones in this bid," Fan Ruogang said, revealing the true reason for her agitation.

"Don't worry Fanfan, brother Yu knows that delaying is a bad idea, so he must know something. Look, those 4 are doing the same thing brother Yu is doing. There must be something to those walls," Wan Li said while pointing to the screen overhead.

Indeed, about 4 people had stopped by the final maze and were checking through the wooden walls.

"Sect leader, you think disciple Yu noticed something?" the first elder asked.

"Must have, otherwise he wouldn't have stopped in the final maze for this long. It's been nearly 20 minutes since he entered, and he is not one to waste time," Ma Rong said.

"What was Yang Ma's time?" Luo Mei asked.

"They should announce it all together, but from what I estimate, it should be around 2 hours and 10 minutes, without the reduction," Wen Cheng said.

"And the others were much late right?" she asked.

"Yes, they were around 30 minutes later. Their time is around 2 hours 40 minutes," Wen Cheng.

"So, junior brother is going to take more time than that, right?" Luo Mei asked. "Just what is he doing there?" she was getting a little annoyed.

"I don't know. Hopefully, he isn't stalling for no reason. Although, a few of the others are doing so too," Wen Cheng said.

Of the original 170 people in the competition, around 80 people had been disqualified due to not moving, around 10 due to attacking another participant,? 30 due to having all of their talisman stolen.

There were only 50 people remaining, and of them, 43 had already passed the maze. Of the remaining 7, 5 were in the last maze, while the other 2 were still someone in the catacombs, lost due to the lack of light.

"Oh look, one of the guys gave up on his own. He touched his own talismans," an elder said from the side.

Indeed, there was 1 less participant in the maze. A guy in the catacombs had given up.

Slowly, one after another, the 5 people in the final maze started making their way out as well. During that time, the second person lost in the catacombs finally made his way out and flew to the wooden walls as well.

Even that person made it outside before Alex and one other person. The other person made it out about 5 minutes after that, and around 10 minutes after that, Alex finally got out.

With the last person out of the maze, the Maze run was finally over.

DING

A large ranking board appeared in the sky. It showed the maze clear time of everyone. The person that left first was the winner and the person that came last, Alex, was the worst of all.

Fu Zhen then started speaking. "These are the raw results of the game today. As you can see, the fastest time was 1 hour, 34 minutes, and 46 seconds, while the lowest time was 3 hours, 22 minutes, and 33 seconds long."

"However, we have yet to add the time reduction talisman they might have gathered. Let us start with the first person," Fu Zhen said and called forth the first person on the list.

The person walked forth and provided 6 talismans to a staff. The staff put them in a box and the time on the ranking board started dropping.

The final score was reduced by a minute and 24 seconds, to make it 1 hour, 33 minutes, and 12 seconds.

The second person was called forth, and then the third and the fourth. There were really only 52 people in total that passed and it wouldn't take a long time for their numbers to be rechecked.

The rankings never really changed a lot. The most reduction one got was as of yet was Yang Ma who managed to get a 5 minutes reduction in the result time and got about 2 hours as the actual result.

However, that all changed when the last of the 5 people went forward. The first person gave nearly 50 talismans to the staff, garnering a lot of attention from the others.

His result was originally 2 hours, 58 minutes, and 55 seconds. After submitting the talismans, his result went down to 2 hours, 23 minutes, and 34 seconds. That was a whopping 35-minute reduction in finishing time.

Everyone was shocked at how much reduced, however, that wasn't able to get him anywhere. The next 3 people also managed to reduce anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour in their result, but that wasn't enough to get them even in the top 10.

The second last person was the guy lost in the catacombs, so he really didn't have much and only reduced his time by 3 minutes at most.

Finally, it was time for the final person in the ranking, Alex to give him talismans.

Chapter 337: Negative

Alex's original time was 3 hours, 22 minutes, and 33 seconds. That was the worst time out of everyone yet, but that was the raw time. He still needed to get it reduced.

So, he slowly walked to the staff. Along the way, he could see Yang Ma's terrible smirk. He rejoiced about the fact that Alex got so much less score.

'God, he really is horrible,' Alex thought. He reached the staff and pulled out a stack of papers from his robes. In his stack, there were at least 50 talismans.

He dropped it on the staff's table and the staff started to calculate. As the staff was calculating, Alex reached back into his robe and pulled out another stack of the talismans.

He placed it on the staff's desk with a little sound.

The first 50 weren't surprising to anyone. The last 4 of the 5 people had around that amount. However, Alex had just nearly doubled that.

"What the— how does he have so much?" the participants started questioning.

"Brother Xi, how did you get 50, and why does he have so many?" a disciple asked his senior brother who was one of the final 5.

"The final maze had talismans hidden in the walls. I spent all my time searching for them. He must've probably spent longer than me to search for them," the man named Xi answered.

He spoke quite openly, so everyone in the area heard that. Murmurs started among the crowd and people started guessing how much Alex reduced his numbers by.

Some guessed 40 minutes, some guessed an hour. Some even guessed an hour and a half. However, most people were sure that it would be a ridiculous amount.

The staff counted all the nearly hundred talismans and was finally being done with it. Just then, Alex reached into his robes, took out another stack, and dropped it on the staff's desk once more with a gentle smile.

The staff's eyes were so wide that he forgot to count and only stared at the stack for a solid 5 seconds.

"Ahemm!" After a gentle reminder from Fu Zhen, the staff went back to calculating. Fu Zhen looked at Alex and said, "If you have more, drop them all at once," he said.

"Sure," Alex said and reached into his pockets to bring out another stack that was double of what he normally took out. Even Fu Zhen was surprised this time.

The participants had their eyes out for a while now, and this time it nearly fell off.

The staff did his best to count as fast as he could and when he got the result, he was both confused and surprised. He called Fu Zhen close and whispered something into his ears.

When Fu Zhen heard this, he was surprised and confused as well. He thought for a second and turned to Alex. "Junior, how did you get so many talismans," he asked.

"From the walls in the wooden maze," Alex replied.

"Yes, but how did you get so many of them," Fu Zhen asked.

Alex smiled and said, "I just did. If you are worried about me cheating, you can ask your staff member who was looking after me. He was up there all the time and saw everything I did."

Fu Zhen turned to one of the staff members still in the air, and that person shook his head indicating no foul practice.

"Hah~" Fu Zhen sighed and looked at the staff in charge of counting the results and said, "Do it." The staff member nodded and applied the reduction.

The group watched the numbers in Alex's result lower. From over 3 hours, it dropped to just 3 hours. With the change in number, it also started climbing the ranks.

Slowly, it climbed higher and higher as the time was reduced more and more, and before anyone knew it, the result reached 2 hours. With just a little more reduction, he jumped past Yang Ma.

Yang Ma's face got a little dark when he saw that. The result was still climbing, however. Without stopping, it climbed higher and higher until it was in 1st place.

Alex had dropped his result by nearly 2 hours now. However, that was still not the end.

The result reduced even more and soon it crossed the 1-hour mark.

"What's going on? How is it so low?" some of the disciples started to complain. But since they had seen the result take place in front of them, they couldn't keep complaining about it for long.

The result dropped lower until it was at the half an hour mark and still kept on dropping. After what felt like an eternity, everyone saw the result reach 0.

However, it still didn't end there. Even after reaching 0, it went down into negative. It kept on lowering for a few more seconds until it finally stopped.

The final result of Alex's maze run turned out to be Negative 45 minutes, and 26 seconds.

Fu Zhen started speaking to the crowd and announced the top 3 winners. The audience was way too far from Alex's eyes so he couldn't tell their reactions, but he knew in his heart that his masters must have been proud.

"Please follow us," a staff said and called everyone with them. The group of staff took them to a room with 120 of the rest of the participants.

They handed everyone a spirit stone, a Qi recovering pill, and told them to stay inside the Qi gathering formation until the next turn.

Alex found a relatively quiet place and ate the pill. Immediately, his body started working and directly gave him energy. Alex didn't have much use for the spirit stones, but he still kept them.

He was returned back his box with all his bags in it. Once everything was settled down and was quiet, Alex started feeling uncomfortable. The feeling was still there, haunting him apparently.

'Just what is it? Could it be a bug of some sort?' Alex wondered. So, he decided to log out and log back in to check.

Chapter 338: Attack

Alex opened his eyes in the capsule. He waited for a few more seconds to make sure he was properly logged out and then decided to go back in.

"Wait," he said to himself. "It might be better if I use that helmet instead. It will also help me with my body," he thought and opened the lid.

He then laid down on his comfy bed and put on the helmet. After that, he logged back in.

Alex was still in the Qi gathering formation and nobody had disturbed him. However...

"Tsk. It's still here," he said when he felt that the feeling didn't leave him. He was very curious as to what it was. However, just then, it disappeared.

"Oh, it's gone," he thought.

With nothing else to do, he stood up and left the formation. He couldn't even absorb Qi actively, so there was no point in staying here in the first place.

Besides, he had barely lost anything. The most he lost was in the fight against the gorilla and that by no means was a lot.

He made his way over to the Hong Wu sect. Suddenly, someone attacked him. Alex immediately got ready to fight but stopped when he saw what attacked him was a pair of hands.

It immediately wrapped around him and confined him. It was a hug.

"Aah! I'm so happy Mingming, thank you so much. Thank you." It was Fan Ruogang who had decided to hug him out of nowhere.

MWAH

Not only was Alex surprise attacked with a hug, but with a kiss on the cheek as well. His face got a little red and he started blushing a little.

"Wh— why did you suddenly hug me? I nearly thought you were an enemy and hit you," he said bashfully.

"Fanfan, you can't jump on him like that just because you made 200 True spirit stones," Zhou Mei said.

"What?" Alex's red face slowly went back to being a little less colorful, and just showed a general confusion towards the situation.

"Sigh, when the match started, Mingming went around gathering people for bidding on the winner. She bid 400 spirit stones on you and got a 50 times higher return from it and made 200 True spirit stones," Zhou Mei explained, with a hint of envy in her eyes.

"Haha, you wish you bid along with me, don't you? Look how much I made," Fan Ruogang teased Zhou Mei by showing the handful of True Spirit stones. Even Alex got a little jealous when he saw that.

"Good work, brother Yu."

"Great job, junior."

"That was an outstanding result. How did you do that?"

Alex briefly explained what had happened. Multiple compliments rained down as he made his way through the sect members to go sit next to Ma Rong.

"Congratulations on the first place, Brother Yu. You now officially have 300 points, the highest possible in this competition," Wan Li said.

"Oh, I didn't realize that," Alex said with a gentle smile. "Thank you, Brother Li."

He then looked towards his master and waited for her to speak. Ma Rong kept quiet for a few seconds and then finally spoke.

"Were you using your sense a lot?" she practically whispered.

"Yes," Alex said and nodded.

"I thought that was what was happening. If not for me especially looking for you, I wouldn't have noticed at all."

"Good job. You did great," she finally smiled and said. Alex smiled too.

"Thank you, master," he replied.

"Alright, now leave," she said.

"Huh?... oh, right. Ok, I will see you guys later after this competition ends," Alex said and went to the front of the seating area where the Tiger sect was located.

"Hey, good job, Yu-Ming. I am proud of you," Wen Cheng said the moment he reached there.

"I am honestly so surprised at the result, Junior brother. What happened out there?" Luo Mei asked.

Alex thanked them and explained everything.

"Oh, I see. So everyone who flew over the beasts got doomed huh?" Luo Mei said.

"Not really, as that second-ranked, you could just be fast. But I think, Yu Ming is genuinely an extreme case in this competition," Wen Cheng said.

"That is true too," Luo Mei said.

"Sister, aren't you going to leave now?" Alex asked. The top 16 was going to start soon and it was time for her to leave.

"I will go down after the stage is fixed," she said as she gestured towards the stage.

The opaque barrier had returned and Alex could tell that they were destroying the stage inside there. He had a pretty good guess that most of them were just formations, but he was still surprised how well it was.

So, while the stage was getting ready, they all waited.

"Did you like that, father?" the second price asked.

"Yes, Yes, that was very fun to watch. It's truly amazing how the last person flipped the points around so much that it went below zero. This is truly the first time I have seen something like this happen," the Emperor said.

"Truly well said, dear. It was the most fun I have had watching a competition in a long time. Not only were the different Maze fun to watch them go through, but the final result was also equally as fun to see," the Empress said.

"That was great of you, dear Nephew. I enjoyed it very much too," Zexi said with a burst of loud laughter.

The rest of the four looked at him with surprise. "You liked it?" the second prince asked.

"Of course, it was very entertaining to watch," Zexi said with a smile.

"You know what daddy," the Princess intervened, "that's actually the same robe as the boy I met," she said.

"Is it?" the Emperor asked in surprise.

"Yes, but that wasn't him. The one I met had long hair," the Princess said.

"Well, that's very unfortunate," the Emperor said.

Zexi had a smirk on his face as he looked down at the seating areas of the different sects and said, "Truly unfortunate, indeed."

Chapter 339: Top 16 - Begins

Luo Mei stood up and said, "I will see you guys after I win it all," and left. Du Yuhan and Yang Ma stood up and followed her as well.

Tiger sect was the only sect with 3 participants in the top 16 aside from Royal Fu Academy who had all 4 in there.

Alex and the rest wished them 'Good Luck!', but given how serious they were right now, nobody replied anything.

Alex looked down on the stage and saw the perfect stage already ready for them to fight in. The maze had disappeared as if it never existed and the formation that messed with the space inside the stage was turned off.

So now the stage was the same size as it always was. Fu Zhen walked up to the stage and announced out loud.

"Fellow Daoists and everyone, welcome to the Top 16 of the Singles Battle. Here are our remaining contestants," he said and showed a massive screen with the names of the 16 participants and their sect as well as their cultivation base.

Royal Fu Academy beat all of the other contestants in everything from Cultivation base to a number of participants.

The first match was between Luo Mei and the crocodile beast tamer girl from the Myriad Beasts sect.

Luo Mei walked onto the stage with no worries at all as her opponent was in the 2nd Mind Tempering realm. The moment the girl appeared on the stage, her forehead lit up and the crocodile appeared on the stage.

It also had the same cultivation base as the girl but it had a much better physical defense too.

"Begin!" the referee announced.

Luo Mei didn't attack with her sword, instead, she created a large ball of water on her left hand and threw it directly at the crocodile. She was testing waters to start off the match with.

The ball landed on the crocodile, yet it did nothing. As expected of a reptile that could live both on land and water. It probably had both elements.

Luo Mei decided to get serious. She immediately swung her sword and sent a blue slash flying towards the opponent. The Crocodile moved on its own and blocked the attack.

The slash hurt it a bit but did not manage to penetrate the skin.

'Is the beast's skin that strong? Probably not. It's most likely using a technique,' Luo Mei thought and started spamming her attacks.

One after another, her attacks landed on the crocodile, and with each attack, it took more damage. Luo Mei was about to make another attack, but she instead pushed herself back to the end of the stage.

BANG

A massive sound rang out from where she had just been standing on. When the dust settled, a giant green frog showed itself.

This was another beast of her that the opponent had been hiding all this time.

Luo Mei frowned. Not only was her another beast a water element using beast, but it was also in the 3rd Mind Tempering realm. It was stronger than its master.

She frowned. There were too many targets for her to fight and they were all in some ways immune to her water attacks. However, instead of reducing the water element in her attacks, she decided to increase it.

Luo Mei kept in her sword and put her hands forward. Suddenly, water sprouted out of her hands and filled the stage. She kept pumping until the water was about 2 meters tall and had swallowed everything.

The frog, crocodile, and the girl tried to swing in it and rose to the surface. Just then, Luo Mei moved her arms, and out of nowhere, 3 vortexes formed on the surface of the water.

These vortexes were so strong that the girl or her beast couldn't move at all. The vortex that had the girl started moving. The girl tried to stop it, but Luo Mei's control of it was much higher than her strength to destroy it.

Finally, she appeared right in front of Luo Mei who took out her sword again and placed it on her neck.

"I give up!" the girl immediately screamed. Luo Mei nodded and kept her sword back before leaving the stage. The 2-meter high flood finally stopped and all the water fell to the side of the stage.

The girl and her beasts were left there trying to catch their breath when they heard the referee announce the result.

The next match was between the Lesser Immortal sect's elemental user and the Black Fu Academy's 5th Mind Tempering realm cultivator.

His opponent was 2 realms lower than him but had managed to make his way up here. So, to win against him without wasting a lot of time, the Royal Fu Academy's disciple decided to reveal sword intent as well.

With that, he easily won against his opponent.

The next match was between Du Yuhan who was at the 3rd Mind Tempering realm and his opponent who was also at the 3rd Mind tempering realm, but in addition to that also had 3 puppets of the same strength.

Du Yuhan stood at one corner of the stage, while his opponent on the other end of the stage took out the 3 puppets. It was going to be a 4 v 1 fight.

"He should be fine as long as he can reach the puppetmaster as soon as he can, right?" Ning asked.

"Yes, but this is going to be hard. The Thousand Hand sect's disciple has 3 puppets of which one acts like an attacker, another a defender, and the final one that could change into any when it is required to be one. So, it's a very hard combination to fight against," Wen Cheng replied.

Du Yuhan grabbed his sword by the handle and the scabbard with his other hand. His eyes darted left and right as he imagined what puppet to attack first. He took a deep breath and exhaled.

Seeing that both sides were ready, the referee wasted no more time and screamed at the top of his lungs, "Begin".

Chapter 340: Du Yuhan VS Puppets

The puppets stood in front of the disciple from the Thousand Hand sect. They were about 3 meters tall and had long slender arms and legs and a head that was just a massive oval with no feature.

They were made up of wood but were reinforced by metal on the joints.

The first puppet held two short swords in its two arms. The 2nd puppet wore blue armor and also held a bronze shield on its left arm.

The final one held both a shield and a short sword.

Once the disciple from Thousand Sect heard the match start, he immediately controlled the puppets and made the two with the sword jump forward.

Du Yuhan slashed as he pulled the sword from the sheath and launched a flying attack towards the puppet with two swords.

The puppet attacked with its two swords and dissipated most of the incoming attack, and what remained wasn't enough to harm it at all.

Seeing that he didn't stop the puppet's momentum at all, Du Yuhan suddenly started swinging his sword in an infinity shape pattern.

Dozens of minor slashes rained down on all 4 of his opponents. While they weren't very strong on their own, the disciple didn't dare dismiss these attacks as they came from a person that knew sword intent.

The defensive puppet got in front of the disciple and put the shield up. The other puppet with a shield also got in front of the puppet with the swords and blocked most of the attacks.

The puppet landed in front of him and both of them attacked him. However, the attacks were very simple and Du Yuhan easily dodged them. They had lost their previous ferocity.

The disciple hiding behind the defensive puppets peeked and looked at where Du Yuhan was. At that moment, the ferocity returned and they started making more varied attacks that Du Yuhan couldn't easily escape from.

However, even then, the blades of the puppets couldn't touch him at all. He weaved and moved through every attack.

"Oh, he knows it too?" Alex looked at Wen Cheng with an inquisitive look.

Wen Cheng just shrugged and said, "What can I say? After learning that you had a 5 Elemental root, I immediately thought of Yuhan, so when I needed to give you books, I gave you the ones that had helped him."

"Oh, so he's still hiding a lot then?" Alex asked.

"No, not really. Somehow you can make great use of your abilities despite having a poor spiritual root, but Yuhan can't do that. So he only knows a few of the techniques you know, and even then he can't use it all that well," Wen Cheng said.

Du Yuhan kept dodging and launching attacks whenever he got the chance. If he could take out the master, the puppets would follow suit as well.

So, he had been continuously attacking the cultivator as well. After doing that for a while, he had come to realize that the puppets didn't function as well when his opponent couldn't see the battlefield.

He needed to know what was happening to give accurate commands. Otherwise, it was just 'Hit him' or 'stab him' most of the time.

Du Yuhan immediately launched another attack towards his opponent and just as the opponent hid again, he slid behind the sword puppet and started barraging its back with attacks.

The puppet took some damage, but it still turned around to hit him, however, by that time Du Yuhan was far away and was readying his next attack. His sword suddenly started glowing green and the next second, he launched the attack.

The green slash flew through the air towards the damaged sword puppet. Suddenly, the defensive puppet jumped forward and got in front of the sword puppet to take the damage in its place.

BANG

The shield on its left arm got cut in half and it even lost its arm. There was also a deep gash on its chest, but it managed to survive thanks to its armor.

Du Yuhan ignored it and sent a white slash towards the unguarded master, but the third sword and shield puppet jumped forward and blocked him. Since the attack wasn't as strong as before, he only left a little mark on the shield, amongst the dozens he had left already.

For the first time since he started fighting in the competition, Du Yuhan frowned. He had expected the Top 16 fight to be hard, but not this troublesome. The puppets were genuinely no joke.

"Sigh," he let out a sound and suddenly took in a deep breath. The air around him started distorting the image around him as his Sword Intent reached to the extreme. The sword he was holding started collected Qi and turned pure white.

"Oh no. ATTACK HIM!" he ordered all three of his puppets. The three puppets left their place and converged on Du Yuhan.

Du Yuhan didn't send out an attack either. This time, he himself launched forward.

SLASH

Du Yuhan landed in front of his opponents, while the puppets landed behind him. Du Yuhan raised his sword again and his opponent got scared.

"Come back," the opponent ordered his puppets. He was scared that he was going to get attacked without any defense.

However, Du Yuhan didn't attack him. He instead looked at his sword and saw that it was all chipped and unusable now. So, he put the sword back into his sheath.

CLACK

Just as the sound of the sword entering the sheath rang out, the three torsos of the puppets behind him slid down from the waist. They had been cut in half.

Even their weapons and shields had been destroyed, as well as their arms. There was not a single part of their body that came in contact with the slash and survived.

Du Yuhan stared directly into his opponent's eyes and waited.

"I— I give up," the opponent didn't hesitate any more and forfeited the match then and there. The referee announced the results and Du Yuhan walked out of the stage.

During all that, not a single sound escaped from the audience as they were all shocked to speak after such a spectacle.