

## Alchemy 351

### Chapter 351: Battle in the Spiritual Sea

Zexi closed his eyes and concentrated. Suddenly, spiritual energy released from him and started entering Alex's head.

Pain was all that Alex could feel. It was as if someone had cut open his skull, taken out his brain, and put it on a blender at the highest setting.

"ARRRGHHHHHH," he screamed as loud as he could. He was both losing consciousness and getting awoken from it at the same time.

"Sh\*t, why the hell does this kid have so much spiritual energy. This is nothing like back when I used this on that guy from the auction hall," Zexi thought.

It was not only Alex who felt pain, Zexi did too, although on a far minor scale. Penetrating another person's spiritual sea was not an easy task for him.

Zexi had a True Lord cultivation realm, as well as a Spirit Cleansing Lily's worth of Spiritual sea, so he had high-quality spiritual sense, but in low amount.

On the other hand, Alex's spiritual sense wasn't worth much due to his low quality, but he had 3 times as much as Zexi's in terms of amount.

So, Zexi trying to enter Alex's Spiritual sea was basically a battle between Quality vs Quantity.

Alex kept screaming as the pain was far beyond anything he had felt yet. The first day of body cultivation was nothing compared to having someone tear open your head and try to take a look inside of it.

After many minutes of fighting, Zexi finally managed to enter Alex's head. His body then slumped onto the ground and both he and Alex were as silent as 2 dead men.

Inside Alex's spiritual sea, Zexi flew in the sky above the, more than half-dried, spiritual sea. He looked around and couldn't help but nod in approval.

Huff Huff

"This is... not all that.... bad at all. Huff, the kid... must've... used all 3... Spirit Cleansing Lilies already?" he asked while continuously catching his breath. Getting in here was not an easy deal for him as well.

"Now, where is that kid?" he said and started searching down below him.

Alex looked around and started fearing a little.

The man was now inside his Spiritual sea, but why? He had said he would get the answers on his own, but that didn't make any sense to Alex.

In the first place, how did he even enter his spiritual sea? Was that a skill, or just something people could do with their spiritual sense?

Spiritual sense, and especially, Spiritual sea was a topic he didn't know a lot about.

'could the man maybe be weak now? like all the other beasts that enter my spiritual sea?' Alex wondered. He didn't have many attacks in his arsenal, but he decided to use them anyway.

He immediately threw an Iron Fist punch towards Zexi. Surprisingly, it accurately hit on the back.

"Arggh," Zexi cried and turned back. "What the hell? Why the hell ... are you flying there?"

the last time he had entered another person's mind, he had found the person unconscious on the dried-up sea.

Zexi seemed genuinely confused when he saw Alex up in the sky. "Could it be? People... who have spiritual sense... can stay awake inside their own spiritual sea?" Zexi seemed to understand what was happening.

"Since the last guy I tried this on didn't have a properly formed spiritual sea, he could only stay on the ground I guess," Zexi said.

Alex didn't bother saying anything to him. He had always been in the sky every time he had to fight a beast here. So it was likely that Zexi's assumption of requiring a fully formed spiritual sea to be awake inside your own spiritual sea was correct.

Alex wasted no more time and started spamming out attacks after attacks. He didn't have many attacks he could do. The only ones he knew were the Iron Fist punch and palm of the sun. Every other one either required a sword or wasn't attack-focused.

Zexi frowned. He had spent a lot of spiritual energy just to get here and didn't want to waste anymore. He still needed some to read Alex's memories and then some to leave this place.

He still sent out attacks of his own to stop the incoming attacks. He looked at the attacks he was blocking and frowned a little.

'Why does this kid's attack have elemental affinity in them? We are inside his damn spiritual sea. He shouldn't be able to use any energy,' Zexi thought.

"Just stop it, kid... Huff... do you really... want to dry your sea... until nothing is left? Do you know... how dangerous that is?" Zexi tried to stop Alex's recklessness.

Alex didn't say anything but kept on attacking.

"Look at your sea kid... you are not using Qi... you are using the sea to power your energy... are you going to be so reckless?" he said.

"What?" Alex finally stopped. He looked down at the turbulent sea and realized that it really had sunk down quite a bit. Until now, he had assumed that attacking inside the spiritual sea used Qi, like the outside, but now he had realized that that was not the case.

However, he also knew that he couldn't afford to stop right now. If this was a fight of Spiritual senses and seas, then he was going to fight as long as a single drop of the sea was left.

He sent on more barrages of his attacks. Zexi was starting to get scared as well. 'Sh\*t, I can't let that happen. If he depletes my spiritual sea completely, I really might just die here,' he thought. His spiritual sense was down to less than 10% of the original amount and that was dangerously low for where he was right now.

He started using dodging maneuvers rather than straight-up trying to fight the incoming attacks. He kept tabs on Alex's spiritual sea and watched it slowly drain away.

Finally, when there was almost nothing, he attacked. Alex tried to send out another attack but nothing left his arms. It was then he realized, his spiritual sea had all but completely dried up and his life was now in the hands of the person before him.

## Chapter 352: Memories

Huff Huff

Both Alex and Zexi were huffing very heavily at this point. Alex's mind was starting to be hazy and there were times when he wouldn't be thinking of anything.

He was on the edge of falling into unconsciousness, and he did not want that to happen. He tried to hold on for as long as possible.

"You are quite tough... for someone... not in the True Realm," Zexi said. "You... have shown so many... amazing things... to me that... even I am curious... how you got... all of this."

He flew directly up to Alex and finally laid his hands on Alex's head. "Let's see what you have hidden in here," he said.

Alex suddenly felt something rip into his head once again. Only this time, it wasn't as painful as before. This time I felt like someone was placing some sleeping gas on him, and he was slowly falling to sleep.

"There it is... the memories. Time to see what you know." Alex could hear Zexi speak even as he started to lose his mind.

"N—no..." he said weakly.

"Kid, you are awake, right? Alright, time for you to listen to me. LISTEN TO WHAT I SAY!!" Zexi spoke. "How do you find the Spirit Cleansing Lilies?" he asked.

Alex's mind immediately went to the times he found the Spirit Cleansing Lilies. He remembered the feelings he got when he was close to the lilies.

"What? Do you really just know which one to choose? That's certainly unexpected," Zexi said while huffing in between. "That doesn't help me. Alright, next question. Where did you find the many ingredients for alchemy?"

Alex tried to not think about the stuff, but that was hard. Hearing the questions, his mind wandered to the answers, and Zexi saw all of it.

Wen Cheng, the group of elders, flying to the southern forest, a formation full of different ingredients, a bunch of Spirit Cleansing lilies, the underground tunnel, the dead corpse on the side of the tunnel, the storage bags with the bunch of ingredients for Saint Rank pills.

Zexi saw every single one of the images that Alex's mind produced.

"Damn, this kid wasn't lying at all. He really did find them in the southern forest. What incredible luck," Zexi thought. "What about the talisman?"

Zexi saw the images of the corpse and the talisman inside flash through his mind. He thought it was quite interesting, but didn't think much of it

"Now... what about the sword?" he asked.

Alex thought of the time he had to kill the Cat Monster and how it had thanked him and asked him to take care of her son.

"What the hell? Th— That was a Saint Realm beast. There is a saint realm beast in the southern forest? Who killed it? Why is a sword stuck there?" Zexi flustered for the first time when he saw that.

"What happened to its child?" he asked.

Alex tried his best, but couldn't stop himself from thinking about Pearl. "Y— You actually bonded with him. You bonded with the child of a Saint realm beast. This is big news. If I can get brother to take your beast, or... if I can take your beast... I can become the emperor instead."

Suddenly, the memories that were flowing into him had something weird in them. "What's that?" he thought and looked at it more carefully. "What is that blue thing?" he asked.

Alex frowned when he heard that. He had just thought of logging out to show no more information and had decided that was a bad idea. Therefore, he had already lost his train of thought and was back to thinking about something else.

"No, kid. Go back to that. What was that blue thing?" Zexi asked.

Alex tried his best, but his mind still went to what he was thinking about. Forcing himself not to think about something only made him think about that thing more.

"What is this?" Zexi asked when he saw the thing more clearly. It was like a blue glass hovering in the air and Alex was touching on it.

"Se... tting? What is that?" Zexi looked at more memories. "What can you do with it?"

Memories started flooding Alex's own thoughts. Zexi looked at every single one of them and was getting stunned.

"This... what is this? this person in the mirror... he looks just like what you did in the competition today. Are these your memories from today? No, can't be. what are those things you are thinking of? those head armors and those coffins. what are those metal bricks with images?" Zexi shouted.

"Are you from outside the Crimson Empire? Whose memories are these? game? real life? what are you thinking about?"

Even as he was halfway fainting, he could hear every single word coming out of Zexi's mouth very clearly. 'He... can see my memories from real life... inside the game?'

"What are those buildings made of? What is that design? What are those metal birds, or those giant metal snakes? Why are there so many metal carriages?"

Alex's mind wandered and showed more images.

Zexi couldn't comprehend what was happening in most of the memories he saw. He immediately lifted his arms and flew back.

"Wh—? What are you? Is— is this a clone? Are you controlling this clone from somewhere else?" Zexi asked. Alex was starting to have trouble thinking anymore.

Now that Zexi left his head, it was getting a little too comfortable, and he was losing himself to sleep. He tried to keep his eyes open, but his eyelids were very hard to keep open.

Huff Huff

Zexi was breathing really heavily now. He had used nearly all of his spiritual sense when he looked at Alex's memories. Now, he barely had any left, and was thus extremely tired, just like Alex.

"It seems you might be too dangerous to keep alive," Zexi said and prepared to leave Alex. Once he left, he would surely kill him with his real body.

Alex needed to stop him somehow. But at the condition he was in, that was simply impossible. He couldn't even think properly at the moment, let alone act on any plans.

'N—no...' Alex couldn't even voice his thought anymore. His eyes got blurry, and everything in front of him looked like a hazy mess. He could barely tell Zexi apart from the surrounding.

'I'm going to die, aren't I?' he thought. The last bit of the spiritual sea finally dried up completely.

Just then, something happened. A shadow at the bottom of the dried lake suddenly moved and appeared right next to Zexi.

Zexi was surprised and was too slow to dodge. Something landed on his chest and he slowly looked at what it was.

"W— What's going on? How can—" Before he could finish speaking, a yellow fog suddenly burst out from around the shadow-like figure and engulfed Zexi. Zexi cried at the top of his lungs, but he couldn't stop the shadow-like figure at all.

His consciousness was hanging by a thread, and now the thread was devoured by this yellow fog.

Alex's head barely registered what had happened in front of his. His hazy eyes couldn't make up the details of what had just taken place. All he could see was something fuzzy followed by yellow light.

'Wha— ' he tried to speak, but he couldn't. He watched as the yellow light vanished from in front of him and he could no longer see any figure of Zexi anywhere.

The shadow then moved a little towards him. Yellow fog appeared once more and this time, it devoured Alex as well.



## Chapter 353: Real

It was in the middle of the night when Alex finally regained his consciousness. He looked at the dark sky, but he couldn't see anything but fog in front of him.

He slowly got up and looked around him. There was nothing but fog on either side as well. He couldn't see anything else. The space had shifted once again.

He felt his head, but it wasn't hurting as much as it was last time. The headache and dizziness he was feeling were bearable. Then, he slowly started remembering the events of the things that took place in the spiritual sea.

Alex remembered the shadowy figure, but couldn't remember what it looked like. It was a barely dark figure that didn't even seem like it was a silhouette. His vision was just that hazy at the time.

Fear started creeping upon him. "W-What was that?" he thought. Yet no matter what he thought of, he didn't have an answer to that question.

It was then he remembered what Zexi had started shouting after seeing his images.

"How could he see my memories from my real life? How does a game— No, how can anything look at my memories in my real life?" Alex couldn't understand. Does Eternal Cultivation have some method of hacking into one's brain?

"In the first place, this game is a weird one," he thought. "None of the other VR games taught in the classes ever have this much information, this many people with this many emotions."

"Zexi said... that I was a clone and that I am controlling this body from somewhere else... could that be true?" Alex thought. From what he remembered about clones, you could be far away from it and still control it if your mind was connected to it, similar to the person who was controlling Song Zun.

Even as he spoke the next few words, he couldn't believe he was even thinking it.

"Is this... not a game?"

Alex couldn't wrap his head around the much information that he was provided. "Is this not a game? Is this world real? Are these people real? AM I REAL?" his eyes darted around as he asked himself those questions.

"No, how is that even possible in the first place? How can such a world exist? No, it can't be real," he tried to tell himself. While some things made sense, some didn't at all.

"No, don't think about it right now. Focus on getting out of here," he tried to distract himself. He got up and started walking around aimlessly.

However, no matter what he did, his thoughts came back to the same thing. Is this a game?

He couldn't find Zexi anywhere. He didn't know if he was still hanging around somewhere waiting to sneak attack him or had left the formation already, but he knew that he had taken a bit of damage for sure. Even if it was simply mental damage.

Losing most of your mind inside another person's head couldn't really be good for you.

He wandered around with many thoughts in his mind until he hit something and fell down. "What's that?" he stood up to check. He sent out his divine sense, and when he finally saw it, he couldn't help but suck in a large amount of air.

In front of him, on the ground, was the unconscious Zexi.

"What should I do? Should I... Yes, I— I should kill him," Alex made up his mind when he saw Zexi lay down there. He send out his spiritual sense to make sure he wasn't awake and faking it.

He tried to check the rhythm of his breathing to see if that would give away anything, but there was nothing. No breathing, no rhythm.

"He-He's dead."

Alex didn't know what to do with that information. The person that had given him so much trouble, was dead in front of him. He didn't feel sad for him, or happy as one would expect, only confusion.

He was certainly relieved that he wouldn't have to worry about him anymore, yet he couldn't understand how he could possibly die.

"Could it be... that yellow light?" Alex thought. Every time he ate a monster core and was sent to his spiritual sea to fight the monster, there was always that yellow fog that appeared and consumed the monster once it died.

"Could it be... that fog consumed him... and killed him as well?" Alex was flabbergasted when he came up with that conclusion.

"So... in a way, I killed him," he thought. He slumped onto the ground unable to think of anything else. There was too much information being thrown his way today.

'I should... just log out.'

Alex opened his eyes back in his room. It was the middle of the night, and his light was on. He stood up and walked up to the mirror. He looked at his face and touched the mirror.

'This feels the same as in the game... is it really not a game?' Alex thought.

After using the helmet for an entire day, he needs to go use the bathroom. Even in the bathroom, he couldn't stop the thoughts from pouring out into his mind.

Was it a game? Was it real? If it was a game, how were his memories accessed? If it was real.... How?

He got out of the bathroom and looked at the helmet. "Everything will be answered if I can look at what is inside of it," Alex thought and went out to get a bunch of tools to open the thing.

He got some screwdrivers, a hammer, a plier, few scissors, and a knife, and started prying it open. He opened a video on his laptop and learned how to do it.

After half an hour and prying, he finally got the helmet to open up. However, he wasn't happy when he realized what the parts inside the helmets were.

Nothing there made sense to him at all. He picked up the chip that was hidden inside the helmet and looked at it carefully.

Suddenly, he noticed something on the chip that made his eyes go wide.

Chapter 354: Chip

"My dear wife, do you want me to ask the servants to bring you anything else?" A young man who was in a lotus position asked the girl next to him.

"Longlong, don't call 'dear wife', just say, dear or wife. I feel embarrassed when you say the whole thing.

"Also, I don't need anything, I'm done cultivating for the night. I will go take a nap. You go do whatever it is that you do that help you make so much money," the girl said.

"Haha, don't worry dear. I will tell you where the money comes from in due time. I just hope you won't be surprised at that time," the man said.

The girl walked up to him and gave him a deep kiss before walking away, leaving behind a fragrant smell of her perfume. The man looked at his wife with loving eyes before standing up and walking the other way, out of the room.

The girl got onto the bed and closed her eyes.

KADAK

The doors to the capsule opened and out walked Hannah. She freshened up a bit and went outside to eat her only meal of the day nowadays, breakfast.

"... So, when these lines form, they must be at equal angles from each other. The closer they are to each other, the better they will perform."

Hannah could hear a voice coming from the kitchen. 'A man?' she thought and walked into the kitchen only to find Alex very intensely watching a video on his phone.

"What are you doing watching videos so early in the morning? Are you that excited about going to your classes today?" Hannah asked.

"My... what?" Alex paused the video and looked at Hannah in surprise.

"Your classes. You do remember they start from today right?" Hannah reminded him.

"Huh? What's today?" he quickly checked his phone and realized that it was Monday today. "Urghh... I haven't slept since I woke up at 2 pm. So, I might have to skip today's school," he said.

"What? Why did you wake up at 2 pm? Why didn't you just sleep?" Hannah asked. She then saw something on the table and picked it up.

She looked at the green object with golden lines on it. "Is this an electronic chip?" she asked. "Where did you get it?"

"Does it look like a chip to you, sister?" he asked.

"Yes. Isn't it a chip?" she asked.

"I don't know. It came from the VR helmet. I opened it up and saw this inside," Alex said.

"You broke open your helmet? Why?" Hannah asked.

"I wanted to see what was inside— No, I needed to see what was inside," Alex said. He took the chip from Hannah's hands and flipped it around to show her something.

"Check this out, sister. Do you see anything here?" he asked.

"Umm... I don't know what I am looking for. I just see a bunch of lines, that's it. You should know I don't have much talent in electronics," Hannah said.

"Not electronics sister. Imagine you find it inside the game, what will you think of it?" Alex asked.

Hannah took the chip once more and looked at the lines. Still, she couldn't tell anything. Alex decided to help here.

"Look here, sister." He traced his finger along a golden line in the chip such that it made a symmetrical figure as a whole. "Doesn't it look like a formation to you?" he asked.

"A formation? Like in the game? I'm sorry, I don't really know much about these things. I spend my days in the game doing normal cultivation and training," Hannah said. "Also, aren't you an alchemist? Why do you know about formations?"

"I... don't really know about formations. I've only seen a few blueprints and this one looks like a formation," Alex said.

"Don't tell me you broke your helmet to look at an easter egg," Hannah said in surprise.

"What? Of course not. I was trying to find out if..." Alex stopped.

"Find out if what?" Hannah asked.

"You will laugh at me," Alex said.

"No I won't, just tell me," Hannah said.

"I was just trying to find out if the game... was actually real," Alex said.

"Pfft. Hahaha, you sound like one of those crazy conspiracy theorists. Did they catch your attention too?" Hannah asked.

"Conspiracy theorists? There are people who believe that the game is real?" Alex asked.

"Yeah, there have been people like that ever since the game started," Hannah said and looked at Alex weirdly. "Did you not learn from them?"

"No. Something happened in the game that made me think... that it might be more than just a game," Alex said.

"What happened?" Hannah asked seriously.

"An enemy of mine read my memories... and saw the real world for some reason," he said. "So... I am starting to believe that helmet could either read our memories or the world we go to in the game is real."

Hannah looked at him for a second and shook her head. "You said you were awake since 2 pm right? You need sleep."

Alex thought of explaining it to her more, but then he saw her disapproving face. 'She doesn't believe me. Hah, I wouldn't believe myself too,' he thought.

"Alright, I will go sleep. See you later." Alex stood up and walked away. Hannah simply shook her head once again and sighed.

Soon she forgot about what they were talking about and got herself a breakfast.

Alex went to his room and fell onto the bed. The broken pieces of the helmet were on the side of the bed, and he didn't know how to fix it back.

He tried to sleep, but more and more questions popped into his head. "If I were to believe that that was a formation, then the helmet should be something like part of a larger formation, or a separate artifact, right?" he thought.

"Formations— I need to learn about them more to figure out what that is about," he thought. "I can't sleep right now. I need to know more."

He got up from the bed and walked into the capsule before logging back in.

#### Chapter 355: Serene Earth Qi Absorption Method

Alex opened his eyes back in the foggy area. He sat up and immediately all the information he never had in the real world was there for him to use.

'This is really weird,' he thought. He was starting to question the things that he had been ignoring as part of the game.

"Wait, maybe I am getting ahead of myself. What if the developers just learned how to access memories of mine. That sounds a lot more plausible than there existing another world that I was being sent to," Alex thought.

Despite firmly believing in his idea about this being a real world, he wanted to make sure there weren't any other pieces of information that he had been unknowingly ignoring.

"That chip... could it be what looked into my memories?" he wondered. That didn't sound wrong to him. Maybe the developers of the helmet and the capsule were just that bright that they managed to do what no one else had been able to replicate since.



"It did have formation-like patterns. Maybe there is a formation out there that can look into memo— Wait, no. What am I thinking? If it only looked into my memories, then formations as a thing should not exist out of the game."

"So, there should have been some other methods in which they are accessing my memories," Alex thought.

"Let's forget about them accessing my memories; how am I accessing my memories from the game? How come I only remember these when I play the game?" he thought.

"Nothing makes sense if I compare these things to what I have been told about Virtual Reality as a concept... that is if I believe this to just be virtual reality or a game.

If I were to think of this as a real-world... then the formation in my world must be sending me to this body and I am accessing the memories of this body," Alex thought.

Clones were a thing he didn't know much about, but he had seen cases of it. Song Zun's body was being used by someone else. Maybe, that was the same with him.

"I did log in to the game for the first time inside a forest. Was there a corpse in there just ready for me to steal?" he wondered. "Aside from that, what about the talents of the body? Were they the talents of the owner of this body and I just got lucky?" Alex thought.

Alex sent his spiritual sense all over his body, but there was not a single sign that he was a walking corpse.

"Wait no, that wouldn't make sense. I... I made this body. While I used random preferences, there should be others whose body matches how they look like in real life. There is no way they were a corpse before that... right?"

"Or maybe I am just that unknown about clones and there are other ways to change them as a corpse," Alex thought. He was getting contradicting answers from himself.

One thought he had would pretty much prove to him that this all was real, and then in the next moment he would have thoughts that told him that there was a much simpler explanation for all these that didn't include this all being real.

"Urghh... I might get a headache at this rate. Sigh, let's stop thinking about those things for now. Let me see what formations there are that matches the design in the chip," Alex thought.

He then sat down and started looking through all the blueprints to understand the design and what the designs were meant for. He not only wanted to find similar-looking formations but also check what it was that the formation did.

Unfortunately, of the formation blueprints he had, not a single one of them looked anything like the pattern from the chip. He really tried to find similarities that might have been hidden in the formations, but not one of them matched at all.

"Well, that was a failure. Am I really wrong?" he wondered. Alex was starting to doubt himself when he thought of something. "Haha, that should help me put a nail in the coffin."

Alex stood up and shouted, "Cultivation Method."

Suddenly, a blue panel appeared in front of him. It had been ages since he had opened this panel. There was a single book in this panel and he quickly opened it.

The Starry Sky Qi Absorption Method.

He had learned this on the first day of playing the game and had not checked it ever since. He clicked on the book and tried to see if there was anything there so that he could reread that book.

Unfortunately, he couldn't. "Wait a second," he thought. "Maybe there is a cultivation method on the outside," Alex thought.

He immediately logged out and looked for a cultivation method. It took him a while, but he managed to find an earth-grade cultivation method, the entire thing.

However, it was mostly just squiggly lines from Alex's perspective. He could understand a few words, but not everything. "It seems they copied the original thing without translating it," he thought He knew

He took his laptop next to the capsule and logged in. As soon as he was in, Alex tried to learn the language of the cultivation world, rather than try to translate the book one by one.

Once he felt like he knew a lot, he got out and translated as much as he could. Once he was done with the first iterations, he remembered what he missed and went back to learn some more.

He repeated it for nearly 3 hours until he fully learned a new language in the real world.

"That should definitely not be possible," Alex thought. This just went to add more evidence to his theory.? After another hour or so, he was finally done fully translating the whole book.

The cultivation method was called the Serene Earth Qi Absorption technique. It was around 5 thousand words long and could be read by Alex in under 10 minutes.

Alex sat on his bed with the cultivation method in his hand. "Let's do this."

#### Chapter 356: Formations

Alex started reading the translated book. As he read on, he realized that it wasn't as easy as he had expected it to be. He didn't have the same talent as the in-game character and thus failed to remember much of the 5000 words the first time through.

Once he was done, he once again started to read the book from the start. He had to read it over and over to understand what was being told throughout the book.

"No wonder the people would rather just click the 'Learn' button. If your talent is like this, I assume it will take forever for them to learn anything," Alex thought.

After 7 or 8 times of fully reading the book, did he finally understand what the book was trying to say? It spoke of a way to pull in Qi from the surroundings and introduce it to your body.

He sat cross-legged in a lotus position and couldn't wait to start cultivating. Unlike in the game, he couldn't just start to breathe slowly and hope the method worked. He would have to actively do.

"Here goes nothing," he thought and took a deep breath. Then, he started to do what he felt was moving something along his 'meridians'. He felt a tingling sensation in his body, but couldn't tell if that was because he felt excited or he was genuinely taking in Qi.

After a while, he thought he felt something weird with his body. He happily thought he had succeeded, but turned out it was just a placebo effect.

Just because he wanted it to be true, he saw results in places there were none. He 'cultivated' for another 15 to 20 minutes, only to realize how stupid he was being.

"Is it really possible that I am overthinking it all and this is all a coincidence?" Alex wondered. Nothing he did was working. There was 0 evidence proving his claims.

"Oh, Sister said something about those conspiracy theorists. I should check it out," he thought and opened his laptop.

He searched through the internet to find information about these people that believed the game to be a real word. Unfortunately, it really turned out to be a bunch of conspiracy theorists.

They barely gave any evidence towards their claims and all they kept on saying was stuff like 'don't believe them' or 'stop being a sheep', and also the most repeated one of all, 'think for yourself.'

Alex was severely disappointed. He was back to square one where he had a theory of the game being real, but no way to prove it. He had minor evidence, but nothing concrete that could explain anything in full.

The only thing that could possibly explain was—

"The chip," His eyes shined as he thought of it. "I didn't find any information regarding similar formations, but that doesn't mean I won't be able to find information if I read about formations themselves."

He immediately went back into the capsule and logged in to the game. The fog was still the same and would likely stay that way until the formation was broken or it naturally ended.

With nothing else to do, he sat down in a lotus position and started thinking of the various stuff he read about formations till now.

He started to understand how formations worked. Until now, he had read many books about formations but hadn't stopped a single moment to try and understand what they meant. Today was going to be his first major step towards learning about formations.

There were 3 things required when making a formation. The design of the formation, the metal that is used to make the design, and the source of energy to run the formation.

The design of the formation was the actual image of the formation, made using lines that could do different things depending on what the metal used to carve was made out of, and what sort of energy was being passed along.

The designs themselves were simple lines that were connected to each other using the different points at which they met. For example,? one could use 5 formation flags and have a formation where the shape was a pentagon and have its function be something.

The same formation flags could be used to make a pentagram, and its function would be something else.

Of course, formations were not this simple. You couldn't change how it looked and have it function in a certain manner. It also needed an appropriate formation flag or a metal plate on top of which it would be drawn.

These were things that were made by artifact masters. Depending on the metal in use, there would be different results.

Lastly, the thing required to run the whole thing was the energy. Most of the time, it was just a simple spirit stone, but other times, it could be rare materials or monster cores.

"A metal plate, with the formation lines carved on it. The first two requirements certainly are there," Alex thought when he remembered the chip.

"As for the energy... could it be the connection to the wall that we have to plug the helmet too?" he wondered. After all, as long as an energy source was there, a formation should be able to function quite properly.

"Am I... right?" he started thinking.

In the end, no matter what he thought, he couldn't deny the fact that there were just too many coincidences for him to ignore.

Still, he decided to ignore it all for now. Ning learned what he could about the formations until it was dark again and logged out.

He had classes tomorrow, so he decided to make sure he had done all of his homework and stuff. Also, he had been working the whole day today, so he was incredibly hungry and needed to eat as well.

So, he went to the kitchen and prepared a delicious meal for himself. Hannah wasn't going to wake up until tomorrow morning, so he only prepared it for himself.

After that, he logged back into the game.

Chapter 357: Post Battle Haul

Alex logged back into the game, and the first thing he told himself was to forget about everything.

"Forget about the game being real, forget about formations, forget about everything for now. The first thing I should be doing is finding myself a way out of this formation," Alex spoke out loud.

Suddenly, the earth opened up and devoured him. He exited out of it when he hit the barrier underground. He was once again on the edge of the formation.

"Where are the formation flags?" Alex wondered. He tried searching for it, but it was incredibly well hidden. Alex even sent out his spiritual sense to search for it in near trees but there were none.

With no choice, he started hitting the wall. He hit it with every power he had, but no matter how strong Alex was, the barrier didn't stop working at all. In fact, it didn't even fluctuate.

"This must be a True rank barrier as well. Damn that Zexi, why did he set up such a strong barrier?" Alex wondered. "Speaking of which, where did his body go. I need to get back my stuff."

Alex started running around aimlessly in the fog. However, unlike yesterday, he couldn't find the corpse as fast as he wanted to.

It took him nearly half an hour of wandering aimlessly did he finally find the corpse. The skin looked incredibly pale and a strange scent was starting to rise from Zexi's body.

"Sh\*t, it is already decomposing. I need to bury it," Alex thought. He took all of the storage bags from Zexi's body and took out his steel sword before stabbing it onto the ground to dig it.

He stabbed the ground a few times before he took out the dirt with his own hands. After doing that for 10 minutes, he now had a large enough hole to fully bury Zexi.

Once he was done burying Zexi, he looked at his own storage bags first. Everything he owned was there, with nothing being used, except for a single thing.

"Hmm... the Ebony Corundum Stiletto is missing," Alex thought. Last he remembered, Zexi had stabbed it on the ground and hadn't bothered retaking it at the time. "He was more focused on looking at my memories," Alex thought.

"Sigh, I guess I will have to find it later on.? For now, let's see what a High Prince owns," Alex thought and took out his storage bags.

When Alex checked inside, the first thing he noticed was the tens of hundreds of True Spirit Stones. "I— I'm rich," Alex shouted out in excitement. There were close to half a million dollars in the form of True Spirit stones in there.

The more he looked through the more stuff he found. Different weapons, armors, artifacts. There was even a boat inside of it. If he sold these, he could also gain a lot of money from them.

He then came across a piece of paper. When he checked inside it, he realized it was an instruction on how to set up the Spirit Disorienting formation.

"What? 50 meters? That's absurd," Alex thought when he read it. The formation was told to be set such that the formation flags were each 50 meters away from where the formation actually started. Also, the True spirit stones required to power these things were also around these formation flags.

"Urgh... so they aren't next to the formation huh? Does that mean I will have to wait here for another 30 days?" Alex questioned himself. The thought of this was quite terrifying. Being in the formation for over a month was not something he wanted to do.

"Maybe master will come to find me once they realize I am missing. Maybe they are already searching for me. I hope I am not very far away from them," Alex hoped.

"I wonder if senior sister went back to fight that guy. I hope she won if she did. Although, maybe they stopped the competition after such a tragedy that happened," he thought.

He sighed and went back to checking the storage bags of Zexi. The other things he found in there were some pills and talismans that were mostly useless for Alex aside from a few of them.

"Ugh... I doubt I can even reveal any of these items in public. They will probably kill me if they found out their High Prince is missing and I have his items," Alex thought.



"I hope he didn't have a fami— wait, the Royal family is his family. Well, I hope he didn't have a wife a child," Alex thought. He hated Zexi, but he wasn't heartless enough to wish badly for his family too.

"Although I remember master saying that the third brother of the emperor wasn't married. That's good," Alex thought and went back to searching the bag.

The next thing he found was a white, oval ball. He took it out and held it. It didn't take him very long to realize that it was an egg. A notification popped up over the egg to tell him what the egg was of, but even without it, he would've known.

The black splotches on its shell were a dead giveaway. "The Emerald Lizard's egg. I remember the auctioneer saying that the lizard has a high chance of entering the True realm and a minor chance of reaching the Saint realm."

"This is a good find," Alex thought. He didn't require a beast for himself, but he could certainly give this to somebody else he cared about.

He put that aside and started searching for more stuff until he found something that was interesting.

"Oh, what's this?" Alex thought and took out a woodblock. Then his eyes started shining brightly. "Hahaha, No way!" he thought. He remembered the auction event very clearly and remembered every single item that was sold there.

This was something he had wanted, perhaps just as much as his armor right now, but had failed to get it because Zexi had outbid him without any hesitation.

The woodblock was actually a wooden box that housed alchemy ingredients. Alex quickly opened it and looked inside.

Just as he had expected, there it was. Inside was a dark-blue flower that was shaped like a lotus. Alex's eyes shined and he spoke in excitement.

"The Umbra Lotus."

## Chapter 358: No Fire

Alex quickly searched through his mind to look through his memories and see if there was any information on Umbra Lotus aside from the auction house.

And there was, but nothing explicit. He had actually learned the same thing from the auction as well. From what he had learned in the library, the Umbra Lotus was a rare flower with extremely high Yin content.

Due to the amount of Yin in it, it could be used for Alchemy, Artifacts, Formations, and many other places. Alex happily kept it inside his storage bag.

He checked the rest of the bag and found nothing important other than a bunch of raw materials for artifacts and formations.

With nothing else to look for anymore, he decided to cultivate for the rest of the night.

"Come out Pearl," he said and brought Pearl out of the tattoo. In a white flash of light, Pearl appeared in front of him. Alex immediately grabbed Pearl in fear that he would lose him in this formation.

"Alright, stay inside my robe and we will cultivate, okay?" Alex said.

"Meow," Pearl meowed back in agreement. And so, the human-beast duo cultivated throughout the night. The night was peaceful. The space changed multiple times, but they were never separated. Not only that, nothing entered the formation either.

As such, this was one of the best places to cultivate throughout the night.

Alex woke up early in the morning around 7 am. Once he woke up, he asked Pearl to go back into the tattoo. Alex then decided to learn about formations about an hour longer before he logged out of the game.

He freshened up and went out to have his meal. Hannah was out already as well.

"Hey, Alex. Come sit. I need to talk to you about something," she said.

"Oh, what is it?" she asked.

"You see, I was thinking of getting a car for ourselves and I am going to go sign up for some driving lessons. Do you want to come to learn as well?" Hannah asked.

Alex thought for a moment and remembered he didn't have anything to do for the next month inside the game. "What time is it at?" he asked.

"From 4 pm to 6 pm. It's at a driving range outside the city," Hannah said.

"Sure, count me in then," Alex replied.

After having their breakfast, they left the house and walked out to the front to meet Sarah and Emily who were waiting for them in Sarah's car.

"Took you guys long enough. Come quick, or we'll be late," Sarah said.

"Geez, it's only half-past 10. We still have 30 minutes," Hannah said as she got into the car.

Alex got into the car as well and greeted the two girls.

"I heard you guys accepted our offer. When do you plan on moving in?" Alex asked.

"Upcoming... Saturday maybe? Sunday?" Sarah gave some guesses.

"It will be Sunday," Emily said. "After our other two roommates leave on Saturday, we will then take care of the rest of the things and move in on Sunday," Emily said.

"Good! Good!" Hannah said.

They quickly reached the school and got off. Each of them made their way to their own classes.

"Alex, I will message you around 3 pm. We will have to go together to sign up," Hannah said.

"Sure, sister," Alex said and went to his classes. It felt weird for him to go back to classes after so many days of holidays. Even the friends he had made in his classes were showing the same symptoms.

He looked around his class in surprise. There were barely 30 people in a class that should have had 100 people in it. It seemed people didn't plan on returning for a while.

The professor walked in and sighed when she saw the class, but still taught what she had come to teach. After all 3 of his classes were done, Alex walked out.

His phone vibrated with Hannah's message and he quickly found her on the west gate of the university. They got into a cab and went out of the city to the driving range to learn.

For the next 2 hours, they registered themselves and took a small lesson about the various things they needed to learn before they even got into a car.

After 2 hours had passed, both Hannah and Alex went to a small restaurant to eat some food and caught a cab back home.

"I don't need to make anything for today right?" Hannah asked.

"I doubt so. I'm full right now. Given that I will spend the next 12 hours in the capsule, I probably won't even need to eat tomorrow morning," Alex said.

"Very well then. I will see you tomorrow. Good Night," Hannah said and went to her room.

"Good Night sister."

Alex went back to his room and logged back into the game.

Inside the game, he once again remembered he had literally nothing to do. "Urghh... I want to make some pills," Alex thought.

However, there was no fire in here to help him at all, and he himself couldn't make fires either. There was no tree around him either. For some reason, the inside of the barrier was an open space.

Alex even wondered if there were more than just two formations used here. Once could be a formation that expanded the size of where he was.

He had an idea. He could use some of the wooden boxes and rub them together to make a fire. That would totally work. But then, he saw the problem with that.

"I can't sustain the fire at all. I will need to keep adding boxes to keep the fire going. Keeping it lit with Qi is just not a viable option. I will need to worry about the fire more than I do about the pills," Alex thought.

"Sigh, are there other ways to make fires?" he wondered. It was then he remembered something. Something he hadn't interacted with for a long time.

"Hmm... that could work."

Chapter 359: Making Formations

SCRATCH SCRATCH

Alex used part of his sword to carve away the land underneath him. There were 5 formation flags stuck on 5 different locations next to him.

With the formation flags, the formation would work just fine. However, Alex wasn't used to making formations, so he wanted to make sure the flags were in the correct place by carving away a physical path and see how straight his lines were.

As expected, the resulting path was very crooked. The formation wasn't as symmetric as he wanted to make it. So, once he was done. He removed the formation flags from their original location and replaced them on the ground a little left of it.

He did the same with 2 other flags and once he was done, he started carving away the ground once more. All the while, he had his Qi on the flags, and would something happen, he would immediately pull back the flags towards himself.

He was really worried about space shifting on him while he was trying this out and losing his formation flags.

The formation was a simple Qi Gathering formation that required 5 spirit stones to function and would gather Qi from the surrounding and the spirit stones into the formation.

He had bought it back in the capital on his first day and hadn't had the chance to check it out until now.

Alex didn't want to use it to get more Qi during his cultivation, although he wouldn't reject that. He simply just wanted to see if he could have a formation work.

Once he was sure the formation flags were at the best place he could manage, for now, he placed a spirit stone each next to the 5 formation flags and walked into the middle.

"So, what do I do to activate it?" he thought and checked the instructions. "Once I am done preparing the formation, just pour Qi into one of the formation flags. I see."

Alex put away the instruction and sent out Qi towards one of the flags. The Qi entered the flag and suddenly, the flag started buzzing. The spirit stone next to it lit up slightly as well.

As soon as that happened, the rest of the flags started buzzing and the spirit stones started glowing as well. Alex could feel a slight disturbance in the Qi around him as the density of it started getting higher.

"It's working," he said in both shock and amazement. He had failed his first alchemy but somehow managed to make a formation work on the first time.

'Sigh, that's probably because I am using flags instead of making my own formation,' Ning thought to himself. He wasn't sure how sects taught formation, but it was unlikely they taught the students to use flags from the get-go.

It was like maths. You didn't teach a kid to use a calculator at the start. They had to start with learning the numbers and adding them up in their fingers.

"I guess I will have to meet some people with actual formation knowledge and ask them these questions," he thought.

Suddenly, the space twisted, and he was in someplace else.

"Sigh, I was afraid this would happen. At least I was done with it," Alex thought.

Now that he knew he could make formations work, it was time for him to do the actual thing he was planning on doing. He was going to carve away metal plates so that he could make a formation it and convert it into a fire lantern, just like the one he used to practice within the outer sect mountain of Hong Wu Sect.

There were too many problems and too many hopes with this endeavor of his.

First of all, he didn't know if the shape of the carvings he remembered was all that it was to the formation. He didn't have any blueprints on common rank fire formations that only he could activate with his Common Qi. Thus, he had no way of telling what was important and what was not.

Secondly, different metals were required for different formations. He had a few metal plates in his storage bag thanks to Zexi, but none of them were carved and he didn't know if they were the right metals.

Lastly, Alex had no idea what it used as an energy source.

Still, he had hoped. He remembered the shape of the carvings quite clearly, so if that was all there was to it, he could successfully carve it onto the metal plate.

He also remembered the color of the metal plate and thus was quite confident that this was the same metal. From his information, this metal was used in a lot of formations, so he was quite hopeful because of that too.

Finally, he remembered that the formation in the lanterns was powered by the sect running formation, which was powered by the spirit vein underneath the Hong Wu Sect.

Since Spirit Veins were what eventually became spirit stone caves, he was pretty sure he could substitute the energy source with spirit stone.

Once he thought of all of this, he brought out a metal plate and started cutting it. He placed his steel sword in between in feet and started using it to cut the plate into a circular shape.

The plate came out to be with rough edges which he smoothed out as much as he could. After that, he picked up the sword and used it as a carving pen. He slowly started etching in the pattern.

He didn't have the same error-finding ability that he had with alchemy one he had a recipe with him. Heck, he didn't even have a blueprint for what he was doing, so he never knew if he had made a mistake.

Also, there was no way of undoing erroneous carvings with the metal plates, unlike the flags which he could just reposition.



Still, he kept on carving away and in the end, it came out looking fine. He placed it on top of two spirit stones, and once everything was ready, he poured Qi into it.

#### Chapter 360: The Pattern for Fire

The plate surprisingly accepted his Qi. "It's working," he said excitedly. Although he had done the best he could, he still knew that it was far from being decent.

He waited for the fire to light up, but for some reason, nothing happened. No spark, no shine, or any other sign aside from the fact that it graciously accepted his Qi.

"Did something go wrong?" Alex wondered. "It's working for sure... but it's not producing fire. Is the efficiency too low?"

But that didn't make sense. From what he understood regarding formations, even when they had terrible efficiency, they would at the very least work, albeit horribly.

"Then does that mean the formation was never meant to light a fire? No, it did make fire," Alex thought. "Am I missing something?"

He started thinking. The formation plate looked like a worse version of the plate in the sect. It had too many rough edges and the circle wasn't very good looking either. But none of those should have ever been a problem.

After a few minutes of thinking, he remembered something that he had overlooked in his initial assumption. "This formation doesn't just light fire, it communicates to the sect running? formation on when to light up and when to shut down."

"Meaning, there is a sort of message receiving formation etched on here as well," Alex thought. "That means the fire-producing formation? is only part of it, and I need to find it."

Of the 20 or so formation blueprint he had with him, only one of them had anything to do with communications. There was also another one that produced fire amongst other things.

They were True Rank formations, so it was useless for him right now. However, he could cross-check these two to figure out what pattern helped in creating fire and what helped in communicating.

So, he got to work. He spent the next dozens of minutes thinking about how those two formations worked. He made a mental image of the patterns and tried to see what lines overlapped and wrote that into a new piece of paper.

He found a part of a pattern from the communication formation that matched part of this formation, and he also found a part of a pattern from the fire formation that matched part of this formation.

When he put those two patterns side by side, they were completely different. When put together, they made 95% of the original pattern. There were some additional lines here and there to make the pattern work together.

"So, if I just take this portion of the formation, it can work?" he wondered.

He brought out another plate of the same kind and started cutting it with his sword to make it a circle. The space shifted, but he didn't let that bother him.

After a few minutes, he managed to make the plate a much better circle than the previous one. He then started carving out the new pattern. It took him a while, but he managed to make a somewhat decent pattern with his sword.

"Phew! I hope this one works."

He put the plate on top of two-spirit stones and took a deep breath before sending in some Qi to activate it. He could tell that his Qi was filling the gap made due to the pattern and once all of the gaps were filled, a spark appeared.

Suddenly, the spark changed into a small ember which turned bigger and bigger until it was a massive ball of flame around the size of a baseball.

The light from the fire reflected in his eyes, but it couldn't outshine the happiness that was gleaming in his eyes.

"YES! I did it! Hahaha. I did it," he started shouting into the night.

Not only had he make a working formation, he actually made it by understanding patterns and extrapolating information from other formations.

There was no way he wouldn't be very happy after that.

"I wonder how good it is. High Mortal Grade? Mid Earth Grade? I can't believe I actually made it, Haha," he jumped up and down with giddiness.

Finally, he calmed down and looked at the flame. Did nothing but wait now. Around 2 hours went by and finally, the flame started dying, before completely extinguishing in a couple of minutes.

"Hmm... so it's 1 hour per spirit stone?" Alex wondered. He picked up the plate and looked at the dull spirit stones underneath. They were completely empty.

"Let's try making a pill now," Alex thought. That was the entire reason he made that formation in the first place. He dug up a small hole and placed some spirit stones on it.

Then, he placed the plate on top of it. Finally, he put the cauldron on top of the hole. Once everything was set, he put Qi into the formation and started it.

The formation started burning at a steady rate. Although the fire wasn't the hottest he had seen, Alex could work with that. He decided to make a simple pill that replenished one's Qi.

Once the cauldron was hot and ready, he put in the ingredients and started making the pill. Just as he put the first ingredient, the space shifted.

"Oh No!" he thought. However, for some reason, the cauldron and the fire didn't disappear. It was as if instead of him, that specific land was shifted.

He wanted to learn why but had no time right now. He focused on the pill and added the required ingredients. After 20 or so minutes, he finished making the pill.

When the pill came out, he was happy to see that he had successfully managed to make a 41% pill with neutral energy despite the current situation.

"Once I get used to the place, I should be able to make better pills," he thought and got cooking.

Over the course of the night, he switched the spirit stones twice before he was done making pills and it was time to log out to go to his classes.