

Alchemy 401

Chapter 401: One More Evidence

Alex sat in the carriage at nighttime slowly carving away at the metal plate on his hand. His inscription pen danced along the plate as he carved strokes on it.

The woman in red looked at him with a glaring eye from the side, but said nothing.

Last night, when the bandits were all killed, She had returned to call him a coward for not killing the bandits and the conversation that followed it annoyed her.

"You are a coward," she said.

"Sure, you can call me that," Alex said paying no heed to her words.

"Don't you know how bad the bandits are? They kill, pillage, r*pe the people on the road. They are the worst people living in the empire," she exclaimed.

"I know," Alex said.

"Then why did you let them live?" she asked confused. The conversation was not going the way she had expected to. He didn't deny a single accuse of her.

"When did I let them live?" Alex asked as he looked at her. His eyes didn't show the same cowardice from the first time that led him to getting depressed for the rest of the night.

"You let them live! I had to kill them!" she said.

"Yes, and I was the one that brought them to you. You have the most authority here, so I will let you make the decisions. That was how I was raised, and it's ingrained onto me. This world will have to try harder if it wants to change me. Even then, I doubt it could ever do so," Alex said.

The woman was confused what he saw saying, so was Ying Wu who was to the side.

"Don't worry! I'm not daft enough to think letting bandits live is ever the way to go. If I'm ever alone and I encounter them, I will make sure to do what is right. I may not necessarily kill them, but I won't let them go away with their crimes either," Alex said.

The woman was very confused. She almost believed that she was talking to a different person right now. However, when she saw the resoluteness in Alex's eyes, she realized that something had changed in him.

Alex closed his eyes and started contemplating the formation from the chip to see if he could find anything from them again.

The night ended and the sun showed its face again. The caravan, however, however didn't stop moving. It wouldn't stop moving until it reached its next destination, Rosewood City.

Alex wondered if the name of this city was a coincidence or not, given that it was similar to how the cities in his own world were named.

However, he soon saw the red walls of the city from faraway and was disillusioned. Similar to how his cities in the real world were named after plants, the cities in this world— or at least this Empire— were named after the color Red.

Scarlet, Cardinal, Rosewood; Every single one of these major cities were named after a shade of red.

They finally reached the Rosewood city around late afternoon and stopped. Since this was a bigger city, they were going to stay here until tomorrow morning.

Alex hadn't expected that, but he didn't mind. The distance from Rosewood city to Scarlet city wasn't that far. If the map was accurate, at their current speed, they would reach sometime around 8 pm if they left early morning tomorrow.

Alex got out of the caravan and looked at the lush green trees of the Southern Forest. They were once more right next to the forest. He then turned around to take a look at the massive walls of the Rosewood city.

'So, this place suffered an attack as well?' Alex thought as he saw the constructions taking place around the wall. He walked up to the gate and entered.

Rosewood city had the First Grade sect called the Honor Sect, so Alex could see people wearing golden robes of their all the time. The other people seemed to be acting the same way they would always do.

'So the beasts didn't affect as much huh? That's a relief. Hopefully the Scarlet City didn't suffer much either,' he hoped as he walked amongst the streets.

The city itself was beautiful and vibrant, and he took his time exploring it to its fullest. He learned that the Honor sect was located at the southern end of the city, while a lesser known sect called the Noble Truth sect sat to the north.

The placement of the sects were surprisingly like that of the Scarlet sect. 'Was that a coincidence?' Alex thought.

He walked through the city and bought a few formation materials that he thought he would need. He also bought as many alchemy ingredients as he could.

Finally, as it got late into the night, he returned back to the caravan and got in the carriage where Ying Wu was looking after her mother.

"Oh, you're back," she said.

"Yes, I had to get a few things and lost myself to the beauty of the city," Alex said with a smile.

"Oh wow! I have never been to the Rosewood city. I wanted to come here once with my father, but he didn't bring me. I was quite mad at him at the time. But then I also asked him to take me everywhere so maybe that was the reason," Ying Wu said as she laughed.

"Your father?" Alex asked.

Ying Wu's face immediately changed. "Let's not talk about him," she said.

Alex didn't ask any more questions but secretly wondered if he was either dead or did something that made her agnostic towards him.

He quickly changed the topic and asked, "Why don't you go inside now?"

"I— I have to stay here and look after her," she said. "Besides, I'm not allowed to leave anywhere without my— my master."

Alex sighed and was a little disappointed towards the woman in red. They talked for a little while, but then the woman in red came to tell them to rest.

Ying Wu was quickly embarrassed as she had forgotten that it was her time to sleep. She quickly said good night and went to sleep, leaving Alex with nobody else to talk to.

So, he took out a random metal plate and started carving the formation from the metal plate onto it.

He assumed that making the strokes would be quite simple and it wouldn't even take him a few minutes to completely finish it, but he hadn't realized how naive it was.

With 5 to 10 strokes, it was easy to carelessly carve onto the formation plate and make a working formation. However, with over 140 strokes, he had to be careful with each stroke.

If he made a single stroke in even the slightest wrong angle, the whole formation would start having problems. The other lines in the intersections wouldn't cross properly, the places that were supposed to leave small spaces would instead be covered, and in certain occasions, too many lines passing close by would have greater chances of making nicks in the formation.

So, he had to make sure to follow the pattern slowly and surely. He was very afraid to make mistakes at the start and he even did make mistakes, but over time, he gained more confidence with each failure.

Each one of the failed formations were a stepping stone towards a better, successful formation.

It took him the rest of the night to carve a pattern that was accurate to the ones on the chip. He made the final stroke and looked at it.

Aside from not using golden lines in green plate, everything else was the same. Even if the plate was different however, he should be able to tell if the formation was real or not.

He took a deep breath and passed his Qi onto the formation. He didn't need an energy source as he only wanted to tell if the formation was real or not.

The Qi went through the stroke and started filling them. Alex was looking forward to checking the formation but soon started getting scared as the strokes took forever to fill.

The more strokes there were the better the Qi they required. With his common Qi that hadn't even turned to True Qi had to work way more than what the other Qi would have.

Fortunately, his Qi was dense and robust, so he managed to fill every nook and cranny of formation. Once it was all filled, Alex looked at it with bated breaths.

For a moment, the Qi did nothing. It didn't move or show any signs of being in use, but then suddenly, it pierced through the plate to look for an energy source. It didn't find any, and so the Qi on the formation dissipated.

However, that was all Alex needed. 'It works!' he thought. He couldn't get excited or cry out about it. Instead he took it in as another piece of evidence that his theory was true.

He was all but absolutely convinced that he was currently in an actual real world. 'Now, I will just have to learn about what the formation actually does,' he thought.

There were other people who had tried this daunting task of carving a 145 stroke pattern before and Alex had seen them 'not activate' it. He was quite disappointed at the time, he had now realized that they were never going to ever activate it.

The metal and Qi quality just wasn't enough. Instead, what they should have explained that the formation was real.

'Better late than never,' Alex thought.

It was morning now and the carriage started moving as the caravan moved towards the Scarlet city. He asked the woman in red and she said that it would take about 10 hours to reach the city with their current speed.

That was more than enough to go to his classes and returned.

He took Hannah's car and drove himself and Emily to their classes. Once again, he entered to the empty classes.

The professors finally started giving out their assignments that would carry over marks for the exam. Alex couldn't keep playing games all the time now.

Once the classes were over, he went to the car with Emily and drove back home. He was very proficient in driving now and quite liked it. He even thought of buying his own car, but that felt too much of an impulsive decision right now.

He wanted to go on a little detour with Emily, but he had important things to do in the game now. Emily was understanding of that and supported him fully.

Once back, he had his lunch and immediately went back to the game.

He logged in and felt the carriage moving, they hadn't arrived yet. He stood up and walked up to the door and saw a vast expanse of meadow that reminded him of the forbidden fields.

Only these meadows didn't have grasses as tall. "Are we in the Gap?" he asked.

"Yes, We will soon reach Scarlet City, maybe even in less than an hour," she said.

The Gap was a name people gave to an opening in the southern forest that didn't have trees growing on them. According to some records, there were wars fought here before and so the land was mostly destroyed with no trees growing here anymore.

'The war from back when the Crimson Empire was shattered maybe?' he thought. That was the only explanation he had for the wars. He couldn't think of any other wars mentioned in the records.

The caravan kept on moving and soon they could see a queue of other similar caravan and carriages on the road waiting in front of a giant gate.

There were cultivators wearing mostly yellow, and sometimes green coming out of the southern forest. Alex saw all of this and smiled.

He had returned. He had finally returned to the Scarlet City after over a month.

Chapter 402: Trouble?

Alex looked at the giant wall that was under construction as well.

'So the beasts really did come here. Thankfully, the damage doesn't seem to be a lot. Even the disciples are already going back to the forest to hunt,' Alex thought as he looked around.

The caravan soon stopped and got into the queue of people. Alex looked towards the woman in red and Ying Wu, and then said, "Thank you for giving me a ride till here, I will leave now."

He then jumped out of the carriage. He was about to leave, but then he turned around and looked at Ying Wu and her mother.

"You guys will find help at the Hong Wu sect, right? Use my name, that should help a bit," Alex said.

"Sure... if we need it, we will," Ying Wu said without questioning why a disciple's name would be of use.

"By the way, do you have a place to stay? I can maybe arrange some for you, as a means of paying back the favor for bringing me here," Alex said.

Ying Wu smiled and said, "It's no need. I have a cousin who lives in the city, so we will probably take residence there."

"Oh, alright then. Goodbye for now. See you guys later," Alex said as he left the caravan and walked towards the gate.

"He... is not bad," the woman in red said as her expression relaxed after Alex left. "Seems quite genuine too."

Ying Wu smiled at the compliment from the woman in red. Not many people were able to get that. "You know..." Ying Wu said as her expression drifted off towards a pleasant imagination, "... if he was just 10 or maybe even just 8 years older, I wouldn't mind marrying him."

The woman in red showed a shocked expression. Ying Wu quickly got back to reality and her face got serious again. "Let's hurry and go meet my cousin; we need to heal her as soon as possible."

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Alex entered the gate and went inside. He was quite famous amongst the people of both sects now; he was the direct disciple of two first grade sect's Sect Leader after all. However, people mostly only knew him by name.

Not many people actually knew what he looked like. Only those that went to the competition did, and that was just a few amongst the thousands.

So, even though he walked through the street wearing dark green robes that caught attention left and right, nobody actually could tell who he was.

He watched around but not a single thing in the city seemed out of normal.

'Hmm... so the beasts didn't even make it past the walls? Then what happened in the capital must truly be a once-in-a-while occasion. Ying Wu did say that the second time was not as bad as the first one,' Alex thought.

Since the Tiger sect was much closer to the gate, he decided to go there. It was around 5 pm now, and the sun was starting to set. The sky was painted with a mixture of blue, purple, and orange.

He reached the small marketplace outside the Tiger sect where the various disciples were doing their daily shopping. Alex smiled when he saw this and walked past them.

He was wearing the Hong Wu Sect's clothing, but he didn't care about that right now; he needed to let the people know that he was alive.

The guards stopped him, but weren't disrespectful as from their perspective, he was a core disciple of an alchemy sect. He wasn't someone to make an enemy out of.

"Stop! Why have you come here?" one of the elders standing guard asked.

Alex didn't immediately answer and instead rummaged through his storage bag before taking out a circular badge.

"Here! I am a disciple of the Tiger sect too," Alex said as he handed them the badge. The guards didn't even have to check carefully to know that it was a legit badge, but that just made the situation more confusing.

Is he a disciple? Did someone give it to him? Did he steal it? They were unsure.

"Umm... I am the Sect Leader's Disciple. You can ask my senior brother Liu Xun to confirm it," Alex said.

When they heard the Guard Leader's name, they wasted no time and immediately called him. In mere moments, Alex felt a familiar spiritual sense pass through him.

"Junior brother?" Liu Xun looked at him with a shocked face. "You... You... you are alive?" he said, too stunned to do anything else.

"Hello Senior brother, it's been a while," Alex said.

Liu Xun immediately ran forward and started checking on him. "What? How? I thought you died; They said you died," Liu Xun said.

"Yes, stuff happened and I was in a place where I couldn't leave for a month, so I could only come now," Alex said.

"Good! Good! Thank god you survived," Liu Xun said. "Right, I should message master about it soon."

"Oh, I can message him," Alex said as he took out the communication talisman. He placed it on his forehead and tried telling his master that he was back, but the connection wasn't successful.

'Huh? What's going on?' he thought.

"Junior brother, Master isn't in the sect right now," Liu Xun then said. "He's still in the capital."

Alex was a little surprised. "Master is in the capital? Why? I thought he would return after hearing about the beast attacks," Alex said.

"Of course not! You were missing and presumed dead, so he and junior sister stayed behind to search for you," Liu Xun said.

"Oh," Alex said. 'So they didn't abandon me even after a month of going missing?' he thought. A special warmth started spreading through his chest as he realized just how much he was loved.

"So... we should contact them and let them know that I am back, right?" Alex asked.

"Y-Yes! Yes, we should do that immediately. Uhh... I will go ask the elders to message him right now. What will you do?" he asked.

"Umm... I should go back to the Hong Wu sect and let them know that I am alive too," Alex said. "Master and the rest must be worried for me."

"They sure are," Liu Xun said without thinking much, but then he froze. His expression changed to a slight bit of nervousness as he looked at Alex and asked, "So, you haven't been to the Hong Wu Sect yet?"

Alex saw the change in his emotions and wondered what that was for. "No, I just got back here on a caravan. Since Tiger sect was closer, I came here," Alex said.

"I see," Liu Xun said with a hint of hesitation.

"What's going on, senior brother? Do you want to tell me something?" he asked curiously.

Liu Xun hesitated a bit more and then spoke, "uh... you see. A week ago when the beasts attacked, we called the Hong Wu sect for help, they sent the help, but Sect Leader Ma never came."

"So, when we tried asking around a bit, the elders from the sect tried to dodge around with the question. So... I think something bad must have happened to your master," Liu Xun said.

"W-What?" Alex was surprised. 'Master is in trouble?' he thought.

His face immediately changed from confusion to resoluteness. "I shall leave, for now, senior brother. I will go and see what is wrong with my master," he said and immediately flew up.

There was a flight ban on anyone that was not the city lord, or the two sect's sect leaders. But Alex didn't care about that right now.

He suddenly hid his aura, put on the light veil to turn invisible, and removed all friction from himself to push himself to the limit.

In just a little over 5 minutes, he could see the gates of the Hong Wu sect in front of him. He didn't stop however, he was to go directly to his master.

Just as he entered the sect, an invisible aura passed through him, checking everything around him. However, it stopped when it noticed the nameplate with him.

By coincidence or by luck, Alex had forgotten the Tiger sect's badge at the hands of the two guards. If not, he would've had to face problems with the sect running formation right now.

As soon as he entered, he took out a talisman and started calling for her. He could tell that the messages were going through, but she couldn't pick them up.

He started getting more worried. He went past the sect valley and landed in front of the sect leader's house as he let the veil disappear.

He was running in when an elder walked out of the house. It was an old man with white hair, someone he didn't interact with a lot. It was the Grand Elder.

"Grandmaster," he said as he bowed deeply.

The grand elder was shocked to see someone appear out of nowhere, not to mention his grand disciple that was said to have died during a beast attack in the capital city.

"Yu- Yu Ming?! You are alive," he said with shock and happiness. "Child! You're alive."

His surprised face soon turned to a smile, then to a grin as he realized his grand disciple was really alive. "You... how?" he asked.

"No time to explain, Grandmaster. Is there something wrong with my master?" he asked.

Suddenly, the smiling face of the grand elder turned somber as he shook his head and said, "she is not in any good condition, and I do not know what is going on."

"Is— Is she inside?" he asked.

"Yes, the disciples are looking after her," he said. "Go and check for yourself."

Alex nodded and immediately sent out his spiritual sense to check inside the house. He could see inside the house clearly and saw a dozen or so female disciples gathered in a room.

That was also the room where Ma Rong was being kept on a bed with a water bath ready beside her. The female disciples were washing away any and all exposed surfaces of Ma Rong like her face and hands and legs.

Alex walked in after realizing it was okay. The female disciple was surprised at first, but then they got angry and were about to scream at him when one of the girls suddenly shouted out first.

"Mingming! You're alive!" she immediately ran up to him and hugged him.

"You— we thought you died," Zhou Mei looked in absolute horror.

Seeing the two of them act out like that, the other female disciple started getting curious as to who he was. But they didn't need anyone to tell them. Just by listening to the conversation a little more, one could easily deduce his identity.

"The sect leader's disciple?" someone asked.

"It must be. I thought he died," another person said.

"SHUT UP!" Fan Ruogang got angry. "We don't have time to gossip like this. "We need to heal Sect Leader's injuries, whatever they may be."

The women immediately started to get back on to their work and started applying the water bath. One of the women then suddenly brought out a sword.

Alex was scared that she might have had the intent to attack his master, but soon realized what she was doing. The buckets of water surrounding Ma Rong suddenly had snowflakes dropped onto them which caused them to freeze immediately.

"Is master too hot? Does she have a fever or is this something different?" he asked.

Even as he asked that the buckets of frozen water turned to regular water and the cool environment just created destroyed. Seeing the ices melt in minutes, Once could tell how much heat was radiating from her body.

"Do you know what's wrong with her? Why is she like this?" he asked.

The ladies looked at each other for a moment and then turned around to shake their heads.

Zhou Mei then spoke, "We do not know what happened to her, but it is likely something to do with where she went to recently.

"Oh," Alex said and asked, "Where did she go?"

Zhou Mei took not even a moment and answered, "The Forbidden Fields."

Chapter 403: Saving Ma Rong

"The... Forbidden Fields?" Alex was a little surprised. "But... she can't do anything there, why did she go there?" he asked.

"She... we don't know," Zhou Mei said. "We only know that one day she suddenly contacted all the elders and said that they needed to go take a look in the forbidden fields."

Alex looked back at Ma Rong who was fully unconscious. The other girl was constantly turning the water around her to the ice to maintain her body temperature, but the heat she was giving off was too much. The ice kept on melting within seconds of each time it was forming.

The floor was nothing but a puddle at this point.

"So, are the other elders in trouble too? They went with her... right?" he asked.

"No, they are all fine. They just suffered from the suppression, that's all. Sect Leader, however, got ill at first, and then the longer she stayed there, the worse she got. In the end, she couldn't even return in time when she fell to the ground, unconscious."

"The other elders had to carry her back," Fan Ruogang said from the side.

Alex thought about his time in the fields. Not for one second had he felt anything uncomfortable about the situation, aside from the suppression of course.

"What did Grand Elder just say? Does he have any hints? Can we make some pills?" Alex asked.

"No, he has nothing. Master came and checked too, but he has nothing either," Fan Ruogang said.

Alex went through the different pieces of information hidden in his brain, but he couldn't find anything. "But master should have been fine the other times she went to the forbidden fields right? How come she's only getting into problems now?" Alex asked.

Both Zhou Mei and Fan Ruogang's eyes perked up as they thought of something that the grand elder had just told them.

"Oh, that's right. Apparently, Sect Leader has never gone to the Forbidden Fields before this," Zhou Mei said.

"Oh... never?" Alex was surprised by this piece of information.

"Yeah, never. She was always a model disciple, away from controversies, so she never had the reasons to go anywhere. After becoming Elder,? and then Sect leader, she had fewer reasons to go as that was all done by the other elders," Zhou Mei said.

"That's good to know," he said. He stepped over the puddle as he walked towards Ma Rong. The other girls tried to advise against it, but he didn't listen.

As he went close, he felt something familiar, something— something was calling to him. He had to be very close to feel it.

'This... this feels like...' his eyes slowly went wide, "A Yang Jade!" he said out loud.

"What?" the girls got confused.

Alex hurried next to her, and he was sure that he was feeling the same feelings he got from the Yang Jades, albeit a little less powerful.

'Did master swallow yang jades on accident?' he wondered. He had shown what he could do to Ma Rong and now he was worried that it was his fault this was happening.

'No, don't think like that. First, see what you can do,' He thought to himself and stood next to Ma Rong. He could feel perpetual heat radiating off of Ma Rong.

It wasn't the heat of a normal fever or even that of any Fire element. This was the heat of Yang. His eyes went wide as he realized this.

'Master has yang energy inside her body?' he thought. He quickly grabbed her hands to see if he could feel anything.

"Ahh!" he suddenly left her hands and fell backward. Pain flared from his hands, so he brought it up to see that his hands were red as if he had touched something hot.

'But I'm a body cultivator; Normal heat shouldn't affect me. Also, my body eats Yang like it's nothing, so why did I get burned?' he wondered.

This time, he didn't go in blindly. He sent out his spiritual sense and felt the energy in the air— it really was Yang energy.

Before he could even think of doing something else, however, something happened that stopped him in his place. He got a notification.

<Sun God's Divine Yang Body is turning the yang energy to Yang Qi>

<Purifying the Yang Qi in your body>

The notification stopped there.

'That... that's the same notification I get when I eat a Yang Jade right? Only this time... I don't see any percentage,' he thought. 'So, master's body does have Yang energy in it.'

Thinking for just a moment, he realized what he needed to do. It would likely hurt him a lot, but if it saved his master, he would do it.

He quickly took out a cloth and started shoving the end of it into his mouth.

"What are you doing?"

The girls asked as they were really surprised by Alex's sudden actions. They were very hard to make sense of.

"Mingming, what are you doing?" Fan Ruogang asked.

Alex stopped and took out the cloth before answering. "I'm going to try and heal her. I can't say for sure it will work, but I might as well try," he said.

"You can heal her?" Zhou Mei's eyes widened a centimeter more than normal.

"No, it's not a guarantee," Alex said, "but I can try. It will hurt me a bit, and I might shout a lot, so I need this to keep my mouth shut."

He quickly shoved the cloth back into his mouth and walked up to Ma Rong. He was a little nervous and scared, as the pain he had just felt previously was very intense. Almost as intense as the first time he body cultivated.

He took a deep breath to deal with his nerves and caught her hand.

The moment he grabbed her hands, he interlocked it such that even with reflex, he couldn't leave it immediately. It didn't even take a moment for him to start screaming.

The screams were all muffled, but they were still loud enough to terrorize the girls around him. They backed away when they heard it.

Then, they saw the expression on his face, a face of pain beyond their wildest imagination. They were horrified at the thought of being so much in pain.

"Sh-Should we help him?" a girl asked. She looked at Alex's hands that had short yellow tendrils that were going up towards his arms. His hands that were touching Ma Rong were now charred.

"I-I will help him," another girl said. She couldn't seem to stand seeing someone so much in pain.

"No! He said he has away. Let's wait. I will help if nothing happens in a minute," Zhou Mei said. However, she too was nervous since she had never seen anyone in such pain before.

Fan Ruogang was starting to tear up on the side from seeing so much pain being expressed through Alex's face and screams.

Alex himself however was focusing on his pain the least. He let himself scream and emote as much as he could to relieve some of the pain, instead of withholding it. That should help him somewhat was what he believed.

He kept what little wit he could into feeling the power ripping away from his master's hands into his own. There was also the notification that was going off that he had to keep track of.

<Purifying the Yang Qi in your body>

<Purifying the Yang Qi in your body>

<Purifying the Yang Qi in your body>

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It was the same notification over and over again, without a hint as to when it was going to stop. He kept on screaming for what felt like a long time when something changed.

<Congratulation, the Yang Qi in your body has been purified and condensed>

<Yang purity at 70%>

<Purifying the Yang Qi in your body>

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His Yang purity reached 70% and condensed once more, meaning his Qi was a little thicker and denser than before. Most of the time when he would eat a Yang Jade, the Purity part was where it all ended, but right now, it kept ongoing.

There was more Yang energy in Ma Rong than a normal Yang jade.

He prepared himself for more screams, but suddenly, he felt nothing. He found himself on the ground, along with Zhou Mei who seemed to have pulled him away as well.

"Are you alright?"

Before he could even say anything, the worried faces of the girls were up close to his face. Seeing them, he didn't have the heart to scold them for taking him away.

He pulled his cloth out of his mouth and said, "I'm fine. Sigh, you should have let me be... argh." He looked down at his hands that had the whole surface charred to black. Without question, his hands were hurting quite a bit.

Fan Ruogang quickly brought out a healing pill and fed him. The sweet scent of the pill wafted up to his nose and he quickly swallowed it.

The energy released from his stomach as it passed throughout his body, looking for anything to heal. The yellow tendrils going up his arm reduced until they were not visible anymore.

His black charred hands that were unrecognizable were healed as the flakes of his skin fell onto the ground to reveal new skin underneath. They still looked very bad, but at least they were healed to the point where one could start to see the palm lines.

"What? That was a 40% harmony pill!" she was surprised. Alex got not a single Qi as all of the healing factors from the pill had gone to his hands. She rummaged to get another one, but Alex stopped her.

"Thanks, Fanfan, I should be able to continue it a little more," Alex said.

"What? No way! Look at how to hurt you got from that just now. We won't let y—"

"Senior sister!" one of the girls interrupted her.

Fan Ruogang turned around to see the girl who just called her pointed at something. They all twisted their heads to see what it was.

"Urghh...." Ma Rong grunted a little. "W-What's... going on? It hurts..." she said.

"Master!" Alex called out.

"Sect leader!" the girls called out as well.

They all got close to her but immediately stepped back due to the intense heat. Only Alex could stay there.

"Master are you alright?" he asked, but there was no response. However, just the fact that she talked back was enough of a change that he knew what he was doing was working.

"Let me try once more."

He immediately shoved the cloth into his mouth and started grabbing his master's hands once more.

Pain shot through his body as his hands started to get back to being worse. The yellow tendrils returned as the Yang energy in Ma Rong's body was pulled into Alex.

His hands started to char once more, but not at the same speed as the first time. Even the pain was quite manageable compared to the first time.

The notifications kept appearing, but he no longer believed he would reach the 80% mark.

"Ughh..." his master grunted. He too was grunting at this point as the pain wasn't strong enough to make him scream.

Ma Rong turned and slowly opened her eyes as she saw Alex's face.

"A... A... Am I dead?" she asked with a monotone voice.

"No master, You are okay. You are fine," Alex said, but he didn't let go of her hand. What little Yang energy remained was still being dragged onto him.

"Yu Ming?"

Her eyes went wide as shock filled her face. She was about to stand up to look at him, but just then, Alex fully took away the last bit of Yang energy in her body.

However, it did not stop there. Suddenly, he absorbed something else, something cold, something dark. He immediately felt a connection between his master and himself.

Ma Rong slumped back onto the bed and Alex immediately left her hand. However, he couldn't help but look at his arms as he thought...

"What was that?"

Chapter 404: Awakened Constitution

Alex remained open-mouthed as he wondered what had just happened. He looked down on the black, charred hands once again that should have been burning with pain. Instead, he felt nothing.

Or more accurately, he felt numb, like the nerves in his hands was unable to feel anything for the moment.

It was like those times he held the ice from the freezer a little too long, and could no longer feel the flesh for a bit. It was indeed similar to those times as he could see ice forming on the surface of his palms.

The black, charred palm had a slight layer of frost on the surface. "How...?" he couldn't help but ask in surprise. That feeling he had gotten at that last moment... the connection... felt so new... yet like it was always meant to be.

Ma Rong was back on her bed, with no more heat coming off of her. Instead, cool air surrounded her.

GASP!

The ladies all around him suddenly made a gasping noise in surprise. Most of them had a hand on their mouth, unable to believe what they were seeing.

"What happened?" Alex asked, only to see them pointing below him.

He looked down at the puddle of water and found that it was frozen solid. "Ice?" he said in surprise. 'So it wasn't just my hand,' he thought.

The ice spread a little bit further than where he was standing, at which point it stopped. Beyond that, the floor remains water.

Alex quickly pulled out a pill from his bag and ate it. The cloth he had shoved in his mouth had already fallen somewhere halfway through the second time.

Unlike Fan Ruogang's pill, this was a True rank pill, so a single one of it was enough to heal his whole body, let alone only his palm. The energy of the pill passed through his entire body, a little of which was eaten by Pearl.

Once the energy passed through his palm, the charred part of his skin flaked off, and a newer skin appeared, completely healing him.

In fact, he even got 200 thousand Qi afterward as notifications flared to let him know.

Once all was done, he walked forward to wake his master up. He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. "Master! Master!" he shouted. Touching her this time, however, did not trigger the connection he had felt just moments ago.

He shook her for a little while more, but she did not wake up at all. With nothing else he could do, he looked back at the girls for ideas. "What should we do now?" he asked.

Zhou Mei walked forward and checked Ma Rong a little. "It doesn't look like she's in trouble anymore. It looks like she's just resting. Let me call my master and grand elder," she said and took out a talisman. She immediately placed it on her head and called out to her master, who would then call her grandmaster.

Within minutes, Alex felt two figures appear outside. The second elder quickly walked into the room with the Grand Elder behind him and asked, "is it true? Is sect leader hea—"

His eyes went wide as well. "What?! Yu Ming— Ho-How are you here? You are alive!!" he shouted out in surprise. "Is it really you?" he asked.

"Yes, Second Elder, I am back. But let's not talk about that for now. Please check master," Alex said.

"Oh right," the Second Elder walked towards him and stopped once he reached close to Ma Rong. "What... why is it so cold in here?" he asked as he reached the point where the frost began on the surface of the room.

"What's going on? Why is sect leader so cold? Wasn't she hot earlier? Hmm... is her temperature changing in cycles? I've never heard about that happening before," the second Elder said.

"No, the second Elder, her body had a lot of Yang energy in it, so I took it away. Now she should be back to normal, only..." Alex gestured towards his master to say he didn't know what was happening.

"Yang energy? So that was the problem huh. Hmm... maybe she came in contact with one of those Yang jades she was talking about. You took away the yang energy from her body?" the Second Elder asked a little.

"Yes, I have a yang-aligned spirit root, so I can handle a bit of yang," Alex said.

"Oh, I see. Let me check what's wrong with her then."

The Second Elder went forward to check Ma Rong a little. He checked his wrist, her head, her breathing, and then her eyes.

"Hmm... that's surprising," he said with a curious face. He didn't speak anymore and kept on checking her once again to see if what he found out was real.

He didn't speak any further than that, so the rest of the people got curious too.

"Little Song, what's going on?" the Grand Elder asked from the side.

"Hmm... I-I think she's fine. I can't find a single problem from her body," the Second Elder said.

"Fine?" the Grand Elder got curious too, and at the same time confused. "How could she be fine, little song? Look at the surrounding," he said as he gestured the ice around the area.

"Yes, the surrounding is cold, Grand Elder, but her body is warm. Exactly the temperature a human body should be at. Her breathing is fine, and her eyes are responding to light in a good manner too. All I can say is her body fought hard for the last 10 days, so it is tired and needs rest."

"As long as we let her stay alone for a bit longer... she should be back to normal," the Second Elder said.

"Then what about the ice, master? What's that about?" Zhou Mei asked.

"That's a little interesting too, but before that, Junior Yu, what exactly did you do to sect leader?" he asked.

"Oh, I just caught her hands and took away the yang energy that was on her body. That was all," Alex said.

"Yes master, we saw that too. Junior Brother Ming had his hands charred fully and were in very intense pain as he stole away whatever it was that sect leader had. I even took him away from sect leader once because he seemed to be feeling a lot of pain," Zhou Mei said.

"Hmm... anything else?" the Second Elder asked.

"Anything.... Oh right, Sect Leader was awake for a split second before falling unconscious. It was at that point all the ice started forming," Zhou Mei said.

The Second Elder took what he just learned in and made no sound as he contemplated on the stuff. After a while, he suddenly started laughing.

"Hahaha!"

The people around him got curious. "What's going on, little Song? Why are you laughing?" the grand elder asked.

"I... I just had a theory, grand elder. I don't know if it is true or not, but it makes a little sense," the Second Elder said.

"A theory? Let's hear it," the Grand elder said.

The second elder nodded and turned to the girls in the room. "All of you girls, go out for a while. I will call you later," he said and sent out the girls in the room.

"You two can stay," he said to Zhou Mei and Fan Ruogang. "It will help you if you know about it."

The second elder then turned towards the grand elder and said, "Grand Elder, you know how Sect Leader has a body with Yin constitution, right?"

"Yes, that was one of the reasons I took her as my disciple, to begin with," the Grand Elder said.

'Constitution... is that the word used for bodies?' Alex wondered. He did remember Ma Rong using that word once in a while, but never explicitly when talking about the bodies.

"You see," the second elder continued, "I think sect leader's constitution might actually have been a dormant constitution that actually never showed itself. And now, for some reason, maybe due to fighting off the yang energy in her body, her constitution has become active."

"Thus we are seeing the current phenomenon. The ice and cold are just her awakened body passively giving off yin energy while she's not in control. Which also means, that she is alright now," the Second Elder said.

"What? Little Rong's dormant constitution awoke? Is such a thing possible?" the Grand Elder asked with a face full of surprise.

"Yes, I've read somewhere that people's constitution can indeed change after some fortuitous encounter. This must be one of the cases," the Second Elder said.

He then turned to Alex and said, "Good Work, Disciple Yu. Now because of you, your master will become stronger."

A rush of happiness shot up from inside as he beamed with a smile on his face. "Thank you, Elder. So, the master will be wake up soon, right?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. Let her rest a few more days. I will have the girls outside look after her for a few days. Once her body is no longer tired, she should be back," the Second Elder said.

"That is good," the Grand Elder said. "Alright, let's leave now. Also, come along Yu Ming, tell us what happened. How are you still alive," the grand elder asked.

"Yes, Grandmaster," Alex said and followed behind them.

The Second Elder told the girls to look after the Sect Leader for a few more days until she woke up. Only this time, they would just have to watch and not do anything else.

The girls nodded and got back to work.

Once the three men were away from the house, the Grand Elder asked Alex to explain what had happened.

Alex nodded and told him everything. He told him how he was captured, how he was trying to look into his memories, and how he died from trying to look at his memories.

The elders, especially the higher ones, all knew about Alex having a Spirit Cleansing lily and thus were sure about him having Spiritual sense. So, Alex had to hide almost nothing at all.

The only things he did keep to himself was that he told them that he didn't know who his kidnapper was and that the kidnapper's cultivation base was in the low True Qi realm.

"I see... so you weren't actually killed during the beast hoard, but actually were captured, huh. Who would've thought? Here we were sure you died."

"Do you know why the person kidnapped you in the first place?" the Grand Elder asked.

Alex had the explanation prepared so he just said, "He was either someone who saw my result in the Annual Sect Competitions or was someone who saw me buy this True rank Armor and wanted to get it. I believe it was the first one, but he never said anything, so I can't be sure."

Alex mixed a lot of truths with the lie, so neither of the two elders detected any flaws in his explanation. The Grand elder sighed after hearing that.

"The city was under attack from the beasts, so we had to fight them ourselves without best disciples and many elders missing. So, when Ma Rong and Wen Cheng heard that, Wen Cheng made Ma Rong return back here, or so I heard. He's still back in the capital searching for you I believe," the Grand Elder said.

"Yes, Grandmaster. I visited Tiger sect before coming here and so they already know about it all," he said. "I rushed here after learning that Master was in trouble."

"Huh? How would they know? We've completely kept it under wraps," the Second Elder said.

"Well, it was my senior brother that told me that Master was absent during the 2nd beast attack and that when asked, the elders never gave a clear answer. So he believed something was wrong and notified me," Alex said.

"Ah, I see. That would make sense," the Second Elder said and sighed as well.

"At least one of you returned back."

Chapter 405: The Courtyard

Alex cocked his head in confusion towards the last sentence that the Second Elder had just said. "One... of us? I don't understand, elder," he said.

"Sigh... After the beast invasion in the capital, when it was time to return, everyone was fine, except you. So, they spent a day searching for you before Sect Leader Wen asked the rest of the group to return back to Scarlet city with haste."

"During that time, we found information, through a letter left behind that Wan Li had decided to go find the bandits that killed his parents. So, he is now gone from the sect as well."

"He did not leave behind any information whatsoever as which direction he went to, or when he left. He might have even changed his face, so we don't really know where he is gone too. A few elders are gone... but it's hard to track down an alchemist when he really wants to stay hidden," the second elder said.

"I see..." Alex said. His eyes drifted away as he thought about how Wan Li must've felt when he learned about his parent's death. The hurt, the pain, the anger, the sorrow— he had kept them all deep inside him, never letting it show.

'He must've been thinking about revenge for a very long time,' Alex thought. He was about to think of something else when the Second Elder spoke.

"I'm leaving now. It's good to know that you are alive and well, Junior Yu. I will let the rest of the elders know about it," the Second Elder said.

"Ah, right. I was on my way to the elder's hall to notify everyone when these children called you, and you called me," The Grand Elder said as if he had forgotten to do something.

He then turned to Alex and said, "You don't have to worry about anything else, child. Its night time, and you must be tired. Go and rest. The rest will take care of your master for now."

The Grand Elder and the Second Elders turned around to leave.

"Grandmaster, wait," Alex said.

"What is it, child?" he asked.

"Do you perhaps know why Master went to the forbidden fields?" he asked. That was a question that was in his mind for a while now.

Grand Elder thought for a while and said, "You know... I don't think she ever gave us any reason to go there. The elders all learned about what happened in the Forbidden Fields and rescued the disciples from there."

"After that, once your master said there was something she needed to check there, the elders just followed her. However, just an hour or two after going there, she fell sick and had to be rushed here, at which point her sickness just got worse," the Grand Elder said.

"I see. I will ask the master directly if she had any reasons then. Good Night Grand Elder, Second Elder," Alex said as he bowed a little towards them.

"Go, child. Rest," The Grand Elder said and left with the Second elder in tow.

Alex didn't move for a while however and instead thought, 'Master must've been worried about the development in the? Forbidden Fields, so she went to check it. But the yang energy there got her ill, so she probably found nothing,' Alex thought.

'Sigh, whatever. I will think about this stuff later,' he thought and went to his home he hadn't visited in over a month.

He walked in and saw that the lanterns had already turned on for the night. He took one off and walked into the courtyard.

He placed it on the ground and took off the covering to see the flame on its own, along with the metal plate at the bottom.

"I really did remember correctly. I can't tell what metal this is, but this is the same one I drew on," Alex thought. He placed the covering back on the lantern and got up.

"Aaah," he said as he stretched. He really hadn't stretch this good in a while.

"Might as well take a bath now," He thought and took off his clothes as he jumped into the pool. The cold water washed away all the dirt and waste his body had accumulated naturally in the last month.

Without asking, he called Pearl out as well. Pearl for one hated being in the water. Every time he was called out, he got really flustered as if he was going to die anytime soon.

However, from the emotion that was transferred along to Alex, he only hated the water and found it no threat.

This time too, he started to splash around and didn't want to stay in there at all.

"Hate! Hate!" the message got sent into Alex's head as Pearl used his spiritual sense to talk. He soon swam properly without splashing around and made his way out of the water.

"You're going nowhere," Alex said as he caught Pearl once again. Pearl tried to get out of his grip, but Alex's strength when he combined his body and Qi was too much for Pearl to handle.

Pearl had to stay there in agony as Alex washed him carefully; Pearl had been out in the dirt for too long and had trained with him every day, so he really needed this bath.

Once he was done cleaning himself and Pearl, he walked out of the pond and let Pearl do whatever he wanted. The first thing Pearl did when he was let go was snarled back at Alex.

Alex found this quite amusing and thought nothing more. He quickly dried himself off and helped dry off Pearl too. After that, Pearl was no longer angry with him.

Alex wore the other core disciple robe of his and started cultivating. He got Pearl to cultivate as well and soon he was dual cultivating.

As he fell into a trance, once again like every other time, he fell asleep.

Around 6 in the morning, he woke back up. He looked at the time and thought that he had quite a few times to go before he had to go to eat breakfast and get ready for his classes.

So, he decided to go check on his master.

When he reached there, he only saw 3 girls there, the rest including Fan Ruogang and Zhou Mei had gone back to their houses in the Core Mountain.

The 3 remaining girls were still taking care of her, but it didn't seem like they had to do anything in particular. They could've left for the night and it wouldn't have mattered a bit.

Ma Rong was still unconscious and the floor was still covered with a layer of frost despite the water there being cleared away. With nothing more to be done, he thanked the girls and walked away.

He went to the disciple hall and saw if he needed to mention his return to the sect. Thankfully, he was exempt from the Contribution point stuff, or he would've been expelled by now.

He got a few spirit stones and some rather weak pills as the monthly compensation. Alex nearly laughed at the spot as to how bad they were.

'Two 30% Common Rank pill, and 50 spirit stones. Before I sold my first pill, I would've thought that this was a really expensive compensation that only core disciples got,' he thought.

Now, he knew just what sort of luxury the core disciples had from being so talented in Alchemy. He checked the contribution rankings and the alchemy achievement rankings.

His name was nowhere to be found in the contribution ranking as he had no more contribution to the sect. As for his alchemy achievements, due to not passing along any pill for the last 6 or so weeks, his rankings had dropped down to the 50s.

'Should I provide some pills to up my rankings?' he wondered for a few moments. 'I don't think so. I can easily just give a heaven-grade pill and become an elder,' he thought.

Thinking that he went back to his house and logged out.

Elsewhere in the real world.

A car appeared outside a giant metal gate and stopped. From inside, Hao Ya walked out with a briefcase in her hand. She wore a long, sleeved black dress that ran up to her knees.

Below that, her skin was covered with stockings. She wore no jewelry except a single ring on her hand that held a large ruby-like jewel.

She didn't even wear a watch aside from the ring. Her hair was untied, but she had a sunglass pushing her bangs away from her face.

She walked up to the gate in high heels and pushed it open. She walked inside and entered the massive mansion that belonged to the man that was responsible for the game of Eternal Cultivation.

She walked to the door she had waited upon previously back when the man was just done making the capsules. She saw that the door to the room was open, so she decided to enter.

Inside was a massive room that didn't match the size seen from the outside at all. She walked in and went past a huge number of glass cylinders and searched for the man, but he wasn't there.

'Is he in the courtyard?' she wondered and walked back out.

Behind the massive mansion, was a small courtyard that was full of well-trimmed lawns and a massive pond in the middle. If one got close enough, one could see something very large moving inside that pond.

Just before the pond, the man was sitting in a lotus formation and had his eyes closed.

"You finally found your way here," he said as he opened his eyes.

Hao Ya frowned when she saw him sitting there in front of the pond. "You could've let me know you were here. I wouldn't have to walk through that room if you did," she said with a pout.

"Haha, what's the hurry. Nothing is going anywhere," he said with a laugh.

"Whatever here's your stupid data you wanted," she said as she tossed the briefcase over to the man.

The man's eyes lit up. "So, it's out already huh. I wonder how it has changed now," he said as he took the stack of paper out of the briefcase.

Once it was out, he started reading it slowly.

"Oh," he said in surprise at the very first thing he saw. "There are over 400 Million capsules sold around the 17 cities? That's a lot more than I had imagined. Wait, what was the number for the helmet again?" he asked and closed his eyes.

He thought back to the previous stack of paper he read and said, "ah right, 250 Million. So, we've had 150 million people join us on our venture huh? I hope some of them are good."

"Although I have to say, I am quite smart to realize that I would need such a large room to accommodate those stuff," he said.

"That reminds me, when is the next shipment of materials coming? The current supply is already ending," he said.

"I have brought it with me, you don't need to worry about that. Just read those data," Hao Ya said.

"Tsk, why are you so cold towards me from time to time?" he asked.

"You damn well know why," she said in an angry voice.

"Ah, yeah. Uhh... I will do something about that for sure. Don't worry about it," the man said and looked back into the records.

His eyes went over a list of data and sighed, "half of them died huh? That's really unfortunate," he said and kept on reading the pages more and more.

"Sigh... why do they keep on rushing through their cultivation so much? I thought everyone would know that's bad by now," the man said.

"Well, at least this girl with the only Ancient grade body has seemed to have slowed down a lot in her cultivation and is fixing her cultivation base right now."

"It seems not all hope is lost."

Chapter 406: Fate

"A girl is?" Hao Ya walked forward to check the information on the page. The man smiled seeing her get curious about the information.

"I can't see what her talent is, but that should be a pointless thing to think about. Especially with this body constitution," he said and looked to the side. "Jealous?" he asked with a chuckle.

"Why would I be jealous?" Hao Ya asked with a pout. "She's just at the True Realm; She still has ways to go. Besides, I would've been way better by now if you focused all the resources on me instead," she said. Her pout still remained on her face, unmoving.

"Sigh, you know I can't do that, Hao Ya. That would be like putting all my eggs in a single basket. If that basket got attacked, all my hopes would be lost at once," he said as he shook his head.

"Besides, if I focused my resources on you, there are still 2 glaring problems we need to look at. First of all, there are just too many resources with me for it all to be useful for you. You would instead just be overwhelmed a lot and couldn't do anything properly."

"Second of all, I can't be out there to help you at all, and I doubt you would be able to do it all on your own," the man said.

"Besides, look at how well this is all working. Just look at all these different body types," the man said with a light in his eyes that was similar to a child in a candy shop.

"There are so many Divine Grade bodies, even more, immortal bodies. I told you this place was a treasure trove; I did good in making this my base," the man said as he kept on checking through the name.

His eyes stopped at one name when his face suddenly turned serious. The girl lost all of her pouts when she saw him serious and got serious herself.

"What's wrong? Why are you so serious?" She asked, but the man did not respond at all. "Is there a God Grade body to make you act out like that? There should be one though, I was sure I checked everything," the girl said.

"No, there is not. The girl with the Ancient Grade body is the highest grade body as of yet," the man said, but he did not lose his seriousness at all. Soon, he fell into deep thought.

Hao Ya walked up to him and looked at the page he was looking at.

"That's... a Divine Grade body right? Why are you acting so serious? Even I have a divine grade body," Hao Ya said as she looked at the name with confusion.

"Yes, you do," the man responded. "But this is something different. I can't believe there is someone with this body out there, and that... I was the one that found him."

Hao Ya started getting a little fearful. "What is it, master? What's up with this body? Is it that good?" she asked.

"No... at least compared with Divine grade bodies, it's maybe in the upper half in terms of its ability. In fact, it could be the best, if not for a few detriments of its own," the man said.

Hao Ya's face turned curious as she asked, "Then why does your face have that weird grin?"

"I do?" the man said as he felt his own face. "Haha, I really do," he said as he fully laughed out loud.

"Stop being so mysterious and just tell me what it's about," Hao Ya demanded.

"It's not the body that is important here, but rather what it represents. This body had good abilities, but nothing to make me jealous. The thing that does make me jealous is his potential. It might only be this much for now, however.... No! I can't get my hopes up. That will only bring me to disappointment," the man said.

He quickly flipped through the pages and looked at the later contents.

"Ooh! Quite a few of them have God Grade talent. Nice! Nice! This is quite hopeful," the man said.

"Uhhh... Master," Hao Ya called the man.

"Yes?" he asked without looking up from the papers.

"Are you sure your talent measurement works at all?" she asked a bit timidly.

"Hmm? What do you mean?" the man asked. He looked up to see Hao Ya who was fidgeting a bit. "Do you want to say something? Go on, I won't mind," he said.

Hao Ya finally said, "Do you really think it's possible for there to be so many God Grade talent? I... I think your system made a mistake."

"That's...." The man mumbled, "possibly true."

"Talent is not something that is quantifiable and I don't have those massive equipments that could be used to measure them, and instead have to resort to something I made on my own. I can't say it is accurate, but...I think it's close to it," the man said.

"Is it possible that you set the bar pretty low for the God Grade at least? Just look at the numbers, the ratio between Ancient to God is quite bad. I think you made a mistake as to where the Ancient grade should be and where the God Grade should be," Hao ya said.

"Hmm..." the man thought. Talent was an unquantifiable aspect and couldn't be easily represented in terms of grades. Even the major sects had a problem doing that, and he was just a lone man.

The fact that he was able to make a system that could measure so many people's talent to a terrifyingly close amount was already great.

"Sigh, whatever. It's just talent. Ancient or God, the difference is barely noticeable most of the time. I can consider these all just Ancient Grade talents and my happiness wouldn't drop even a little bit," the man said.

"Ah, I see. Then, I must congratulate you on your good luck," Hao Ya said. "It's a shame you can't see who those talents belonged to. You could message them not to die," Hao Ya said.

"Well, isn't that something everyone knows by now? That they shouldn't die?" he asked.

"Yes, but see how many people died by now? Imagine if we told them not to die, and that death meant the end of the game. I assume people would be a lot more careful," Hao Ya said. The man nodded but said nothing more.

The man flipped through the pages.

"Sigh, Didn't you say that the public knew about taking their time with the cultivation? Why are there already some in the Saint realm? That is like one of the worst things they can do," the man got annoyed.

"They probably can't even reach Saint Foundation realm at this rate," Hao Ya said from the side as she saw the information as well.

"I think they know that there will be problems with their foundation, but they probably didn't care about it due to how much money they were gaining through the game," she said.

"Money? What is this about?" he asked.

"You know how they are earning a lot through the spirit stones in the games? Yeah, I think that is the problem. The people here care more about money than having a strong foundation."

"If I'm not wrong, these people make in a day what most people here struggle to do in a year," she said. "It's easy to see why they wouldn't want to stop getting stronger. These people can stop playing the game tomorrow and not regret it with how much money they got," Hao Ya said

"I see... I shouldn't have made the spirit stone conversion possible. Should I stop it?" he wondered. "On another thought, I don't think I will have to."

He focused back on the papers. The other people that did follow the advice and slowed down gave him a little hope.

"You folks are the best, keep doing what you're doing," the man said. "I can wait for a while."

He finally turned the page to the Spirit Roots.

"Oh right, I was looking forward to this," he said. "Last time I didn't have the results for spiritual roots so I was kind of lost when I found out that one of the techniques in the system was missing. I hope the person with that particular spiritual root is not dead right now," the man hoped as he checked it.

When he finally saw the spiritual root, he sighed in relief.

"Thank god he's alive," he thought and looked at the person to who it belonged. "Hmm... I'm sure I saw that name before," he thought and turned back to a previous page with the body constitution.

When he finally reached it, his eyes went wide. His eyes shook around as his thoughts spiraled into disarray in his head.

"Master?!" Hao Ya asked loudly, but the man was staring at the page with nervousness in his eyes.

"Master, what's wrong?" she worriedly asked. She had to shake him to awaken him from whatever deep, terrifying thought he seemed to be in.

"Hu-Huh? What?" he asked as he looked around.

"Master, what's going on with you? Are you alright?" she asked.

"Me?" the man said as he slowly looked down on the paper. "I-I'm fine," he said.

"You don't look like it. Come on, tell me what's going on," she asked.

"This... this is not something I can speak lightly," he said. Suddenly, a burst of fire appeared as he burned the papers to ash.

"This information cannot be allowed to be found out. Hao Ya, go and tell the people at the company to remove all information regarding the different people in the game. They no longer need to track anything," he said.

"Master! Why are you being so secretive? Come on, tell me?" she asked.

The man suddenly looked at her with glaring eyes. This was the very first time she had ever seen him this angry and authoritative; most of the time, he was just an easy-going person.

Hao Ya fell to the ground with fear seeing the eyes of what looked like a cold-blooded killer.

The man quickly realized what he was doing and stopped glaring. His expression returned to the caring master she knew all this time.

"Sigh! Hao Ya, please don't question me right now. These are not answers that you should know or deserve to know. If anyone found out that you knew about this information, death would be the least of your worries," the man said.

"There are things in this world that happen that cannot be explained as anything other than Fate. However, if fate truly is responsible for what has happened here, that could only mean... that fate itself worries for what it has in store for us," the man said.

"Now go! Make them delete that information now," he said.

Hao Ya finally got up and nodded. She didn't know what was going on still, but she tried to not think about it. Just as she was walking away, she stopped.

She fiddled with her hands for a bit and wiggled out her ring. "Here," she said as she threw it to him.

"Oh, thanks. I'll get on it," he said as he nodded towards her. Hao Ya nodded back as well and walked away.

The man fell into thought once more for a while. He walked close to the pond and sat down.

"I didn't think something so troublesome would arise from what I did, dear friend. I had hoped it would help me with my circumstances, but... it seems I have unknowingly brought forth a possible new age for everyone," he said as he fiddled with the ring on his hand.

"Haha, I can't tell you about it either; you can stop trying to pry me for answers. You will learn about it in due time," he said and stood up.

"Ahhh! Whatever. If fate wills it, who am I to deny it. I will just go restock the ingredients for now. Talk to you later, friend."

Chapter 407: Swine

Alex logged back into the game after returning from his classes. It was nearly 4 pm, so he had to go do what he needed to very soon since he didn't know the time frame for when it was allowed.

"I sure hope it's available all the time," he thought. He quickly walked out of his house and made his way to his master's residence.

He saw a few girls, different from the ones from this morning, taking care of her. They looked like they were slacking off quite a bit, but considering that they had nothing to do except literally just keep an eye on their sect leader.

He walked into the cold room and saw that his master's face was very comfortable and it looked like she was just sleeping.

"Hello," he greeted the girls. "Were there any changes since last night?" he asked.

The girls greeted him back and let him know that there was nothing of that sort happening. Apparently, she'd hadn't woken up a single time since she was asleep, not even a little movement.

'Her body must've really been exhausted,' he thought. Just fighting with the yang energy all day would have surely caused her very high distress.

"Are you guys giving her anything to eat?" he asked.

The girls looked at him with a weird look. "She's still unconscious. How could we give her anything to eat?" they asked.

"Ah, my bad," he said. 'I forgot this world doesn't have saline drips and such. Maybe they could give her some fluids— Or not. I guess cultivators don't follow the same rules as a normal sick person. As long as they have Qi, they should be fine,' he thought.

Now that he knew of Ma Rong's status, he decided to leave to do what he had been planning for the whole day.

"Oh right, did Zhou Mei or Fan Ruogang come here today?" he asked.

"Yes, for a while. But they left soon after," the girls said.

"Um... do you know where they are right now by any chance?" he asked. He needed at least one of their help.

"Uhh... not really. But they should be in their homes. I don't think they have anywhere else to go," the girls said.

"You guys don't have direct communications to either of them right?" Alex asked expecting nothing.

"No," all the girls said as they shook their heads.

"I see. Thank you anyway," he said as he turned around to leave.

"Oh wait," one of the girls said. "Sister Zhou's little sister should be in her house, and sister Zhou visits there a lot," she said.

Alex's eyes lit up. "Ah, that's right. Zhou Mei had a little sister. I'll ask her for her sister. Thank you," he said and left for sure this time.

He walked down the sect leader's mountain until he reached the sect valley and walked through the crowd. A few disciples turned around to look at him, but most inner sect disciples, let alone outer sect disciples, didn't even recognize him.

Only a few of them turned around to say their greeting to him at all.

Alex liked this invisibility he got despite being very popular in reality. The knowledge of him making a 60% harmony pill in the Annual Sect Competition was not something people could easily hide. Add to the fact that he was the sect leader's direct disciple, he was a direct contender with Wan Li for the most popular disciple in the sect.

He went past the sect valley and made his way to the Core mountain. The elders didn't stop him, and he easily went up the mountain.

'Oh, they already filled 2 more houses in the month I was away,' he thought as he looked through the houses. He finally reached the house that was his but gave away.

He sent his spiritual sense inside but didn't find anyone in. 'Hm... where'd he go?' he wondered, but quickly changed his thoughts and moved on to the next house.

He sent in his spiritual sense to check and smiled when he saw that all three of them were indeed there. He waited for a bit as it seemed like Zhou Mi was in an important step of the pill-making process. Once it seemed like she was over it, he finally walked up to the door.

KNOCK KNOCK

He knocked on the door and waited.

"Go and check who it is," Zhou Mei's voice could be heard from inside. Alex heard loud footsteps coming out of the house and smiled.

The door opened to reveal the large Kong Yuhuan, who seemed to be a little annoyed. However, the moment he saw Alex, his face changed and he immediately got Alex into a tight hug.

"Brother Yu! You really are okay," he shouted out loud.

Alex smiled. "Yes, I am, Brother Kong. Sorry for worrying you," he said.

"It's okay. It's fine as long as you're fine. I was so afraid that you might have been really injured or something. I thought sister Mei was lying to me to give me false hope," Kong Yuhuan said.

The two of them talked for a few more minutes before the Zhou sisters walked out.

"Yu Ming? Why are you here?" Zhou Mei asked as she walked out.

"Oh, I need your help a little. I can use Fanfan's help as well, but I don't know how to contact her at all," he said.

"Our help? What for? I doubt there is anything that I can teach you which you don't already know," she said.

Alex reached into his bag and brought out a pill bottle. "I need to know what this pill does," he said.

Zhou Mei instinctively took the pill bottle and opened it up to see what was inside. She took out one of the pink pills and placed it on her hands.

Alex was curious as to what she was trying to do and watched without saying anything. After a minute of checking the pill fully, she placed it back on the bottle and said, "I don't know what this pill is, so I can't help you."

Alex nearly burst out laughing when he heard that. "Uhh... I wasn't expecting you to know that," he said.

"Then? Do you know what this pill is? Maybe the name can help me," she said.

Alex shook his head and said, "I made this pill, and need your help with the testing. I wanted you to teach me how it works with the pill swine, how I'm supposed to understand what this pill does."

"Ohhh!" she said as she understood what he meant. "Wow, you made a pill of your own? Congrats, that's quite an achievement. Even Wan Li only has about 2 pills he made on his own, and neither of them came out any good. I, myself, have only made only one," she said.

Kong Yuhan and Zhou Mei were on the side, looking at him, absolutely dumbfounded.

"Br-Brother Yu, you made a new pill? How?" Kong Yuhan asked. "Just a few months ago, you didn't even know how pills were made."

"Haha," Alex gave a dry laugh. "I've had some good fortune come along my way."

Zhou Mei thought for a moment and said, "Alright, come with me. I will take you to the pill swine field to check your pills. I hope you have enough contribution points."

"Uhh... I think I'll manage," he said.

"Alright, practice what I taught you. I will return later," Zhou Mei said to her sister.

"Okay sister," she responded back.

Alex said farewell to Kong Yuhan and walked along with Zhou Mei. They quickly took a path and walked down the mountain on the other side and went to an open field behind the mountain with the alchemy garden on it.

"So that's what was behind those giant bushes," he said as he looked at the back half of the Alchemy garden.

"You've been inside there before?" she asked.

"Yeah, I used to work in the gardens at night, finding the requested ingredients," he said. "Master saw my talents at recognizing ingredients was fit for the job and gave it to me."

"Ah, I see. They haven't let us in for quite a while now, so I was a little confused as to how you even got inside. So you worked there huh?" she said as she walked.

Finally, they reached a section of the sect where a few elders were walking with many pigs behind them.

The place was massive, almost half as large as the sect valley, and all of it was filled with pill swines.

Alex got closer with Zhou Mei and they were stopped by an elder. The elder then saw who the disciples he stopped were and said, "Oh, it's you disciple Mei, did you make a new pill?"

"No, he did," Zhou Mei pointed behind her. The elder wasn't usually in the know about the disciples of the sect, so he got curious if he had ever seen Alex, but quickly stopped caring about who he saw.

"So you want to test on a pill swine huh? Do you know how it works?" he asked.

Alex shook his head.

"Alright, each pill swine you test on will cost you 500 contribution points. If the swine is fine by the end of your testing, you will get 250 contribution points back. However, If your pill ends up doing something irreversible to a pill swine, whether it be some physical or mental effects or death itself, you will not get any contribution points back. Do you understand," the elder said.

"Oh, uh..." Alex quickly took out his nameplate and asked, "Does my authority extend here too? I don't remember if master ever gave me that."

"What? What authority?" the elder asked, but still took the nameplate and checked it. His eyes quickly changed as he got serious.

"You are the Sect Leader's disciple that came back alive yesterday?" he asked.

"Oh yeah," he said.

The elder handed him back the nameplate and said, "Yes, your authority runs up to here. You can go inside and use any amount of swine as you wish. However, do try to be thoughtful of the people that work here and try not to use too many."

"I see. Thank you for advising me; I will keep that in mind," Alex said and walked past the elder.

Zhou Mei was pretty surprised when she saw what had just happened. She quickly ran behind him and asked, "What's going on? What authority were you guys talking about?"

"Oh, I have the authority to use whatever is there in this sect without requiring to pay a single contribution point," Alex said.

"Oh, right. I forgot you had that. Master never told me what it was for. He said you did something to gain all the contribution points in the world, but never what. Can you tell me?" Zhou Mei asked.

"Um..." Alex thought for a second. "It's quite a dangerous knowledge to have, so you will have to ask my master once she wakes up. She might scold me if I went around spreading sect secrets," Alex said.

"Oh, so it concerns the sect huh? Never mind then," she said and walked in front of Alex.

They reached a place where the pill swine were kept in simple, singular cages. When Alex saw them he was truly surprised. He was used to seeing pigs at his home with their pink snouts, open ears, and furry body.

However, these ones were different. These swine had no snout and instead had a human-like nose. They didn't have any fur on their body either. Only their ears were like that of a pig.

"These are creepy," Alex said as he looked at the uncanny face of the pig. If not for the cloven hooves and the ears, Alex would have certainly expected the pig to just be a really fat man in prison.

"That's what you get when you have something that is really close to a human in body composition," Zhou Mei said.

"Anyway, bring out the pills. Let's test them."

Chapter 408: Pill test on Swine

"Oh right," Alex said and quickly brought out the pink pills.

"Wait, don't we need to bring them out somewhere else? What if the pill turns out to be something like a poison that travels through the air or is contagious?" Alex asked.

"Don't worry. There is a formation carved inside each of these cages that will activate the moment they sense something enters these swine," Zhou Mei replied.

"Ah, I see," Alex said as he sent his spiritual sense behind the pill swine in the cage. There was in fact a formation etched on the metal behind the swine.

Alex looked at the formation carefully and realized that it was a True rank formation based on the number of strokes in it. Unfortunately, he couldn't really understand what base formations the True rank formation had in it.

It was not just the one as well. There were multiple formations etched on either wall of the swine as well. Alex couldn't help but wonder what each of the ingredients would be used for.

"Alright, before we feed it the pill, do you have any idea or expectations based on what it would do?" Zhou Mei asked.

"Uhh... sorry. I don't know what the ingredients I used to do at all. I was planning on asking Fanfan for help since she knows so much about the ingredients. Alas, I just hoped you would know it as well. I promise I will immediately go learn about the ingredients once I finish with this," Alex said with a dumb smile on his face.

He knew he was skipping many steps in terms of making pills, all because he had spiritual sense. But he also wanted to take the normal route sometimes so he experience what the normal alchemists experienced and hoped it would help him somehow.

"Uh... I'm not that great at knowing about ingredients either," Zhou Mei said.

"Oh, don't worry about that. I used the most basic of ingredients that any alchemist would know about. I am just skipping steps, which is why I don't know about them," Alex said and immediately started rummaging through his storage bag.

He found the talisman and handed it to her. "Here, this is the recipe," he said.

"What?! Why are you handing your recipe to me?" she suddenly shouted out loud.

"Huh? What's wrong with that?" Alex asked.

"You— You— Don't you know that Alchemists don't easily spread around their recipes. You can earn so much money if you end up making a pill that does something no other pill has done before," Zhou Mei said.

"Oh right, I did read about that, but the pill I have right now is honestly made up of very low-grade materials. So, I'm not sure it can even do anything well," Alex said.

"Besides, you are helping me with the testing, so letting you see the recipe is the least I can do," Alex said. This made Zhou Mei appreciate his honesty a little.

"Also, this variation of the recipe can only go up to 36% at best. I still need to fix the composition and structure of the pill," Alex said.

"Huh?" Zhou Mei asked with a confused face. "What's composition and structure?" she asked.

Alex made a weird face as he looked towards her. "Don't you know?" he asked.

Zhou Mei tried to think for a while and said, "I do believe I have heard my masters mention it once in a while, but I don't think they know what it means either."

Alex's face turned serious for a second. He was reminded of the Spicy_Gourd who messaged him to ask how he even knew about it. 'Is this really that bizarre of a concept?' he thought.

He decided to quickly explain what it was to Zhou Mei whose eyes widened to the point where it nearly fell out of her face.

"Th-There is such a thing like that in Alchemy? How come we never found out about that?" she asked in utter disbelief.

"I'm more surprised you didn't know. You should have noticed by now that moving the ingredients different from how it's mentioned in the recipe always changes the harmony of the pill for the worst," Alex said.

"Y-yeah, I have noticed that... but I just assumed it was just something that was obvious like how the formations just exist without anyone making them," she said.

'Just exist...' Alex repeated what she said in his head. He thought he was going somewhere with this, but soon realized he didn't understand it enough.

"Anyway, composition and structure help with the amount of harmony a pill can attain. The only problem is I can't understand what does what for the life of me," Alex said.

"Let's not focus on that right now though. I still need your help with the pill," he said as he put the recipe on her hand.

"Ah, right. Let me see.." She said and started focusing on the pill recipe.

"Hmm... so you start with Black Vine Water I see. That contains the Water element if I remember correctly. Then you add a red leaf of a mulberry tree... hmm... the red leaf, so... Wood element?" she questioned herself.

"Water and Wood... I see your movement with the leaf is quite fast so the Water can only empower the newly released Wood, instead of the Wood weakening the water," Zhou Mei started figuring out the information just from reading the recipe.

Alex was quite surprised and honestly amazed by how good she was. He couldn't imagine how much labor it was required to learn all of that without using a spiritual sense like he did to witness it firsthand.

She had to go off of others' words to understand what everything did, then try on her own once more to make sure it was correct.

Not only her, the entirety of the alchemists in the crimson empire, or probably all 4 continents had to go through this labor. They needed years of practice to understand it all.

He sighed as he once again remembered how lucky he was.

Around the fourth ingredient, Zhou Mei started slowing down. There were just so many ways the energy release could go that she didn't know which one took place for the next one, and then the one after that.

By the 6th ingredient, she had already given up on understanding what the result of the recipe would be.

"Yeah, I can't really tell what goes on after that," she said with a sigh.

"It's alright," Alex said. "I know what happens." He went on to explain every little change in the elemental constitution that is resulted from each ingredient he added.

He had made the pills just too many to not know what would happen by heart by now. Zhou Mei was quite impressed with how casually Alex was explaining everything.

"You seem to know quite a lot about it," she said with a smile.

"I did make it myself after all. The pill took so many iterations to make that it would be weirder if I didn't know it," Alex said.

"Ah, of course."

"Right, now we need to find out what the main ingredient of the pill is," Zhou Mei said.

"Mist Essence grass and Tail Hair from a Mudhorse are always supporting ingredients so we can let it go. Black Vine Water... can't be it either. Fire Rat's bones are Fire aligned ingredients, while the resulting energy is Wood, so that can't be it either," Zhou Mei read through the list of ingredients once again.

"Twelve eyes of the Twelve Eyed Spiders were a possibility too, but I don't think that's it given it's a neutral item. Red Snake fang... that's Metal energy. So not that either."

"So, it's either between the Red leaf from a Mulberry tree, or the pit of a Highberry. Both of them are Wood aligned, so either could be it honestly. It's hard to tell," she said.

"Is it possible for the pill to be poisonous?" Alex asked.

"Hmm... I don't think so. The poison pills usually have Water or Fire energy as the final energy of the pill, so it's unlikely that the pill with wood energy could turn out to be a poison," Zhou Mei said.

"Then... can we just feed the swine and see what happens," Alex asked.

"I don't think we have any other choice. Wood energy usually affects the physical body, so we should keep an eye on the physical feature of the swine amongst other things," Zhou Mei said.

Alex nodded and took out a middle-of-the-pack pill in terms of Harmony before putting it in front of the swine. The moment the pill dropped to the floor of the pill swine's cage, it immediately ate it up.

Suddenly, lights shined from all around the cage as the formations activated. They had sensed that the pill swine had in fact eaten a pill. The formations weren't very advanced, but they did show the temperature, heart rate, and other information about the swine.

Alex looked at the numbers that came up. Aside from a few changes that took place here and there, Alex couldn't really see any concrete difference as time went on.

The pill wasn't actually doing anything to the pig internally. Alex sighed in relief as he realized the pill wasn't doing anything bad either.

He then tried to look at the uncanny face of the pig to see if there were any changes, then he moved to the shoulders and the other parts of the body.

"There! Look," Zhou Mei shouted

Alex followed her fingers and his vision was directed towards the pig's feet. More accurately, it's hooves. As Alex watched, the front hooves of the pig got longer and longer and only stopped after it was twice as long.

"So... my pill makes its hooves longer?" Alex asked.

"Seems so..." Zhou Mei trailed off as she checked the pig's vitality once more. "Okay, it seems all is fine with the pig," she said as she did something on the cage.

As Alex watched, yellow lighting appeared on the interior of the cage. "What's that for?" Alex asked.

"Oh, it's to tell the elders and other disciples working here that we've just fed this swine a pill. Green light for nothing changed, Yellow for some outer change, Orange for some inner change, and Red for dead," she explained.

"So, now the elders can come back and see that only the outer physical aspect of the swine changed and can either fix it themselves or leave it to fix itself in a few days," Zhou Mei said and got up to leave.

"Wait, that's it?" Alex asked.

"Yeah, we got everything we came here to find," Zhou Mei said.

"Um... what about the other aspects of the pill? Like how long it lasts, or how strong the nails are?" Alex asked. He didn't want to leave without learning it.

"Oh, that. We already found that the pill only changes the swine physically and that it wasn't dangerous at all. So, you can now test it on yourself."

"Eat 2 different harmony pills at least a day apart and see how much it affects the changes in the pills. Check the duration of the effect, check the strength of the nail, and even check if the pill works on just humans or beasts as well."

"Finally, once you've realized that the pill is good enough to be wanted by the other people, you can sell it in auctions. Or just ditch that and start making a new one if that doesn't work," Zhou Mei said with a chuckle.

"Ah," Alex felt like he had a revelation about something that was always there. "Right, now that I know what it is, I can test this out on myself. Thank you for the help."

Zhou Mei simply shook her arm saying thank you wasn't necessary.

They both returned back to the Core mountain where Alex spent his time until it was dark and went back to his house to test the pill on himself.

Chapter 409: Different Tests

Alex was handed a book about the different ingredients that he could end up using soon. The book didn't have that many ingredients, however, as such books were expensive to get.

"If only the ingredients book in the library explained the energies and effect of the ingredients just as this book did. Although, knowing how they looked and where they were usually found isn't that bad of information to know either," he thought.

He reached back to his home, and by that time he was done reading the book. He could've done that right in front of Zhou Mei and returned her the book, but that would be showing off way too much.

He went to his master's home to check on her and saw that she was still sleeping.

So, he returned back to his home and decided to test his pills. He sat down in his courtyard and took out the pink pills. There were way more than 20 of them, and honestly, he did not know what to even do with them.

He quickly checked the harmony of all the pills and recorded it in his mind. He took out one of the pills that was exactly 20% in harmony and waited as he took a short breath.

Although he was sure it wasn't poisonous, he still got a little scared about using the pills on himself as they weren't something he could guarantee wouldn't hard him.

"Dammit, I need to stop being scared so much. I'm pretty sure my body will destroy anything it deems toxic," he thought. He looked at the time and waited, waiting for the perfect opportunity.

The time was currently 6:34, so he waited. Then, it became 6:35.

He ate the pill. Suddenly, the energy from the pill spread through his body, and the nails in his fingers started to grow. They grew until they were about 2 centimeters longer than before and stopped.

"Damn, that's really long," Alex mused to himself. He didn't know the exact length, so he took out a piece of paper to mark the exact length.

"Now... do I just wait?" he thought. There really wasn't much to do other than wait and test how long the nails lasted.

"Wait, I do need to check their strength too," he thought and decided to test the nails of his left hand. He thought for a few minutes about how best to test the strength of the nails.

Finally, he came up with something. He looked through his storage bags and pulled out a few things to set up a little contraption for the testing.

He dug a little and stuck block of wood that was flat on top. Then he took a really strong string and tied it to one of the black cauldrons and tied the other end of that string to the nail on his pinky finger.

He pulled up the pinky finger until it was placed on the flat top of the wooden block. After that, he made sure only the part that needed to break was the only part that was part that was exposed from the wood's surface.

Meaning, he only kept the newly grown 2 centimeters of nail out of the surface. Once that was done and the cauldron freely hanging, he started to bring out the empty pill bottles he had.

He dunked them in the lake and put the filled bottle into the cauldron. One after another, he added one by one.

No matter how many he put in it though, the nail just didn't seem to break. He kept on putting in more, and that was when he started wondering, 'Does me being a body cultivator influence the strength of my nail at all?'

He had just thought that when the flexing nail snapped in half. Thankfully, he had secured his finger in place, so it didn't hurt a single bit.

"Finally," he said as he picked up the fingernail and weighed the cauldron with all of the bottles in it. Even with his body cultivation, he could feel a slight weight to it.

"That... should be around 30 kilos hung from a single fingernail at the very front. Not bad," he thought to himself.

He kept back all the stuff into his storage bag and decided on the next thing he had to do. He was already testing the duration and had tested the durability. So, it was time to test the limitations of the pill and see if it affected anything other than a human being.

So, he called out Pearl.

"Meow!" Pearl called out, finally free once more.

"Brother!" Alex heard in his mind; he smiled. That was what he had been teaching Pearl to call him for the last few days in the formation and he finally did.

'I probably shouldn't have thrown him in the water the moment we returned. He might have called me that yesterday,' Alex thought.

"Hey, little brother," he started calling him now. "Do you want to eat something?" he asked.

"Eat?" Pearl's voice came into his mind, followed by an intense emotion of want. "Meow!" He shouted in elation.

Alex felt bad that the thing he was going to be eating was actually a pill. In addition to that, he wasn't sure of the effect of the pills on animals, so he couldn't really bring himself to force pearl to eat it right away.

"Sigh, I should at least test once on an actual beast," Alex thought and walked out of the house with Pearl behind him. He quickly took out a piece of meat and gave it to him for now.

"You want to hunt? I'm going out to hunt," Alex said as he walked through the evening sect valley and went up the outer sect mountain. However, he didn't go down to the gate. Instead, he hid Pearl in his robes and flew west from where he was currently. With him activating invisibility and completely killing away any aura, it was impossible anyone witnessed him leaving at all.

The walls of the Hong Wu sect entrance were actually the wall of the Scarlet City, so Alex could be outside the gates of the city from the very start and didn't need to leave through the city.

He could have asked the elders before he left, but he didn't know if he would ever get approval that way from them considering his worth to the sect.

He flew at top speed, but still took a little over 10 minutes to reach the forests outside of the walls. From there on, he wanted to rush inside, but he needed to scour the forest for what little ingredients he could find.

He dropped down and walked through the forest. His spiritual sense spread the full 22 meters it could and looked at everything. He took Pearl out, who was walking beside him to let him know of any dangers if he wasn't fast enough to catch any.

He felt another spiritual sense being spread out from right next to him that didn't intrude with his own and did its own thing. Alex smiled as he saw Pearl freely using his spiritual sense.

"Don't overextend it, okay? Keeping it within range lets you expend it at the same rate it regenerates," Alex taught him.

Alex started focusing back on his own thing. As his aura extended, his Qi extended as well, and one after another, he picked up any ingredients that he recognized, which was everything.

Some of the ingredients were abundant, while some were rare, but Alex made no discrimination and took all of them in.

"Ooh, that's rare," he thought as he saw something.

"I have enough of that... but taking more shouldn't hurt me at all. I can use it later," he thought as he saw something else.

"Finally, I needed that too," he thought as he saw something else.

He was like a kid in a toy shop, with all the money in the world in his pockets. One after another, he picked all the ingredients in the area as he walked deeper inside.

"What's the time now?" he thought as he checked the clock. It was around 8 o'clock. "Alright, let's search for a cat-like beast. Maybe a leopard or a lion," he said.

It took them another 15 minutes of walking to find such a beast. During this time, Pearl was the only one fighting and he ended each attack with a single punch.

Perhaps due to his child-like intelligence, he didn't know when to hold back and always hit everything at near full strength.

'I will need to teach him how to stay low,' Alex thought.

Finally, they found a jaguar beast that had a cultivation base at the beginning of the Bone Tempering realm.

"I guess this will work," Alex thought.

"Don't attack this one, okay Pearl?" Alex said.

"Not Attack?" Pearl sent back in confusion.

"Yeah, don't attack. I need to do something to it," he said and walked forward. The beast tried to attack Alex seeing that he did not have very high cultivation.

However, before its paws could even land on him, Alex grabbed it. He saw the nearly an inch-long claw coming out from within the fingers of the jaguar.

Alex then pulled out the pill and fed it to the beast. He used his Qi to force it down the jaguar's throat and just waited.

For the first few seconds, it didn't seem like anything was going to happen at all, however, Alex didn't lose hope. Then, the fingers on the jaguar started to wiggle a little.

Alex was still holding the paw next to his face, so he saw the nail claw of the jaguar increase by nearly 2 centimeters once again.

'So it does work on beasts. Not only that, but it also has almost the exact same effect,' he thought. He then let go of the Jaguar's hand and waited.

The jaguar was scared, but it still couldn't see any cultivation base coming off of Alex, unlike Pearl who was way back and had the aura of an 8th Organ Tempering realm beast.

The jaguar decided that it was not worth fighting Alex and decided to run away.

"Well, that is disappointing," Alex said. "Come on Pearl, hit him," Alex said.

Seeing that he was given the go, Pearl immediately dashed forwards and stuck the Jaguar directly on its back with his paws.

A massive cracking sound rang out a Pearl not only broke the poor jaguar's back but also split it in half. He heard the notification that said that his bonded beast killed something and that he got the materials from that.

However, the material he got wasn't the claw or the nails, so he drooped down to check on it himself. He first separated the hind leg's fingers to pry out the claws hidden in there and broke them out.

Then, he pried out the claws hidden in the forelegs and broke them out, but with a much higher difficulty. He then put the two together and started testing.

He did a few random tests like comparing durability and sharpness. Surprising, but perhaps not, the longer claw won every single comparison.

So, Alex came to the conclusion that his new pill helps animals gain better claws. He still needed to check the duration and the length of the nail that would change with each increase in the harmony of the pill.

But he could safely say that not only did eating the pill harm neither human nor beasts, but in some cases, it enhanced their fighting techniques too.

"Well, that was a successful test. Wouldn't you say that Pearl?" he asked back. Pearl didn't know what was going on, so it just meowed in confusion, not speaking a single word in response.

Alex just shook his head and brought out another pill before placing it before Pearl.

"Eat this and we can go forward," he said.

Hearing that, Pearl gulped the pill down with no hesitation.

Chapter 410: Battle against the Lionesses

Pearl ate the pill and meowed, making an 'ew' sound in Alex's mind.

"Haha, you don't like the taste?" he asked as he smiled seeing Pearl's disgusted face.

"No," a sound came back to his mind. Alex waited for a few seconds and just as he thought, sharp claws appeared from inside Pearl's fingers that were about 2 centimeters long.

'20% gives 2 centimeter long nails, 16% gives 2 centimeter long nails and now 26% gives 2 centimeter long nails as well. Does that mean that the 2-centimeter increase in the pill is a constant regardless of the increase in harmony?' Alex wondered.

'No, I don't know if there is a difference in the pill's effectiveness between humans and beasts, so I can't make any conclusions right now. I need to wait until my nails go away so I can take another one. After

that, I need to test if taking in 2 pills back to back causes anything. For that I might need to go find the swine again since that is too dangerous to check on my own,' he thought.

"Meow!" Pearl said from the side to urge him to keep on moving.

"Alright, Alright, let's go," he said and followed the path once again.

He walked for another half an hour and was starting to doubt if there was something wrong with his luck, or something was wrong with this place in general.

"There are just too few beasts in the forest for some reason. Did the rest die during the 2 previous invasions?" Alex wondered. Not only that, there weren't any disciples in the forest from either of the 2 sects that he came across.

"Damn, is there a curfew I didn't know about? That would make sense considering that the beast attacks happened twice already," he wondered. Still, he was out already, so there was no point in thinking about this problem.

He searched through the forest and found a lot more alchemy ingredients than he would have imagined. While their potency and number weren't to the same level as the ingredients from that one place in the southern forest, they were still better than what he had gotten the last time he had come to this place.

This time was especially better since he had nearly 45 meters of distance covered every second he moved. So, his harvest was a lot higher than before.

The ingredients he got started to refill the larger storage bags he had gotten in the cardinal city, while Pearl fought off the few beasts they came across.

They were now at the precipice of where the Organ tempering realm beasts started showing up. Only once they went deeper and deeper did the number of beasts start to increase once again.

So, Pearl got plenty of chances to fight the beasts and won almost all battles in a single attack. Only a few beasts needed more than a single paw attack to kill.

The beast corpses and ingredients were also now slowly filling his storage bag as well. They walked for an hour collecting both dead plants and animals as they made their way deeper into the forest.

Alex looked at his right finger once again. It had been nearly 4 hours since he ate the pill and it still didn't show any signs of changing. It didn't elongate, shorter, get weaker, or just fall off.

'This lasts for quite a significantly long time,' Alex thought. Since he knew the pill worked and make the nails stronger at least, he was starting to think of names to call it.

This was a pill he discovered, and he had full intention of naming it himself.

"Nail Elongating pill?... probably not. That sounds boring. Long Nail Pill... is also bad. Strong nail pi—" Suddenly, something entered Alex's area of Spiritual sense.

"Oh!" Alex sensed and slowed down a little. About 20 meters in front of him was a lioness-like beast that seemed quite strong. Alex smiled a little when he saw its cultivation base.

[Cloverstung Lioness - Meridian Tempering 1st Realm]

They were now at the Meridian Tempering realm. That was the perfect realm for someone to be Pearl's opponent.

Sensing the high cultivation realm, Pearl got wary too, but he was still confident in his own strength and walked forward to challenge the lioness.

The lioness got confused for a second watching the kitten walk out to fight, but soon discovered that Pearl wasn't as simple as he looked.

She got into a stance, ready to fight and so did Pearl. Suddenly, both of them clashed against each other and started hitting each other.

Pearl's 8th Organ Tempering realm Qi and Body cultivation based were just as strong as the Lioness' 1st Meridian Tempering realm, if not more.

They both slammed their claws at each other, but Pearl's body was smaller, so he was more nimble at dodging, while the Lioness got hurt by each strike.

Her patch of skin on the back that looked like a giant clover, the origin of her name, was starting to bleed. Alex could see that Pearl was doing quite a lot of damage, most of which he could associate with the new pill due to the long gashes in the lioness' back.

Slowly, but surely, the lioness started to get weaker and more fatigued, while the small Pearl was just as energetic as ever.

'He really is stronger than a 1st Meridian Tempering realm beast, albeit not by much. I guess he can be compared to a 2nd Meridian Tempering realm beast in terms of strength. Now I wonder what would happen if we put elements into the mix. It doesn't look like that lioness has any elemental attacks though,' he thought.

It didn't take much longer for Pearl to fully defeat her and finally the fight ended.

Suddenly, Alex heard movements. Another Lioness appeared in his spiritual sense, this one a little stronger. Alex was about to tell Pearl to get ready for the next fight when a much stronger lioness appeared once more.

He frowned a little. Pearl couldn't fight this one at all. After that, another appeared, then another, then another. Soon, there were around 10 lionesses standing in a group about a few meters away from them.

Alex hadn't managed to keep the body inside the storage as Pearl had just finished fighting, so the pride of lionesses saw the dead body of their companion and started to get angry.

"Pearl, come back here," Alex said as he noticed that even the weakest of them were at 1st Meridian Tempering realm, while the strongest was around 6th, the same as him.

So, he didn't think Pearl could fight them at all this time. Pearl quickly returned and jumped into his place in the tattoo. Now that Pearl was out of harm's way, Alex was free to fight by himself.

He took out a simple Common rank sword and got ready to fight.

One of the lionesses jumped at him and he simply cut towards it without moving an inch. The sword didn't cut very deep, but it did manage to send the lioness flying back.

"Tsk. That's not it. I need to make my blade sharper. Make it one with me," he thought and took a deep breath. He needed to forget about techniques and skills, and just focus on fighting with a sword. Only that way could he possibly get better as a sword fighter.

Once he felt like he understood what he needed to do, he dashed into the midst of the pride and slashed at one of the lionesses.

The lioness tried to go back but it wasn't fast enough.

THUD

The sword didn't cut enough of the lioness' head and instead just caused a massive open wound. If he had used Smiting Blade, the damage would've been much higher, maybe even a one-hit kill.

The lionesses on the side jumped at him, and he twisted his body just enough to dodge most of the attack. Still, some of the attacks landed on him, and his clothes tore up.

However, the lionesses weren't strong enough to make him bleed, especially with the armor inside of him.

'This won't work,' he thought. He quickly took off the armor and stored it in, he then did something that most people would call idiotic, but he felt was necessary if he wanted to improve.

He took in all the Qi around his body and took away his cultivation base. He was now going to fight these strong beasts with nothing but his body cultivation.

Despite the chances of his being fatally injured right now being zero, he was in quite a lot of danger of being hurt badly. However, that was exactly what he wanted.

It was only at the depths of despair that one's talent truly shined.

Alex jumped back into the fight and started attacking the closest lioness. He slammed the sword on one of the lionesses and then twisted to jump over it before attacking another one.

He pushed that lioness back and blocked the attack from another one. He then twisted his body to dodge the 4th one and sent back the one he was using his sword to block before attacking the one he just dodged.

He then kicked the ground before jumping backward to dodge two of the beasts. As soon as he landed, he immediately stepped back in to attack the two that were attacking him.

But midway through, he twisted his body to block the attack of the 6th realm beasts. He heard a crack as the sword he used to block the attack just now was broken.

"Tsk."

He clicked his tongue as he took out another one. He had many such swords in his storage and he would fight with every single one of these.

Then, he jumped back in once again. The 10 lionesses couldn't all fight at once and only 4 or 5 could really attack him at once realistically. He took advantage of that to jump into places where it didn't look like they could fight properly.

He ducked as he dodged one of the paw strikes and instead rammed the sword directly at the lioness. It took a bit of effort, but he managed to ram the whole thing inside the lioness.

The beast coughed up blood as it was half dead. Alex tried to take back his sword, but that was stuck on the beast and wasn't coming out at all.

He immediately let go of the handle and jumped backward to dodge the paw attack. He then ducked and rolled to dodge another one as he took out a sword.

'This isn't working at all. I need intent. I need the intent to wield a sword, the intent to fight with a sword, the intent to kill with one,' he thought.

He tried to feel the length of the sword without seeing it. He wanted to know where it was at all times without seeing it. He needed to know that.

He needed to know what part of the sword was cutting at the beasts, how long that part was, how far away that part was. And he needed to know it all instinctively.

He jumped back in to fight. He spun to the right to dodge as the first lioness attacked him, and stopped to slash at its neck. The attack cut more than a chunk of the neck and the lioness was starting to bleed profusely.

He turned around to parry away the paw of another lioness and cut the stomach of this one. It wasn't a deep cut, but it still would make them bleed a lot.

Alex felt like he was going somewhere. He felt like he was in the zone and the sword that he wielded was something he had with him all the time.

He suddenly dashed forward, dodging the attacks of multiple lionesses before he appeared next to the one that was breathing slowly on the ground, waiting to die.

"I shall make it quick for you."

In a flash, Alex brought up his sword and slashed it at the neck of the dying lioness. The slash cleanly separated the lioness' head from the body in one clean sweep, easily killing it.