

Alchemy 421

Chapter 421 - 2144

Alex finally made his way to his master's manor and entered it.

"Ah, you're here," Wen Cheng said out loud when he saw Alex come inside. Luo Mei and Meng Yun were right behind him, waiting to welcome him back.

They talked for an hour or two. Wen Cheng had a lot of questions that he couldn't exactly ask Alex back when he had visited him in the Hong Wu Sect and could only feel okay to ask him that in the privacy of his own house.

Alex answered as many questions as he comfortably could. In the end, Wen Cheng was satisfied with what he had learned.

"By the way, what's up with your cultivation base, junior brother? I can't sense it at all," Luo Mei said.

"Hmm... even I am having trouble pinpointing what your cultivation base is right now," Wen Cheng said as he tried to feel the aura coming off of Alex.

"Oh, right. I probably shouldn't keep it hidden now. It will only make people more suspicious," Alex said and started letting out his cultivation base to a higher realm. When he reached the Meridian Tempering 1st realm, he stopped.

"This should be fine," he said.

"Woah! Junior brother, you've reached Meridian Realm already? How are you so fast? You are like one of those new people that come to the sect," Luo Mei said out loud.

Meng Yun's eyes were wide open in shock. During their battle 2 months ago, Alex wasn't even in the Organ Tempering realm, and yet in just 2 months, he not only entered the Organ Tempering realm, but also the Meridian Tempering realm.

Wen Cheng's eyes were wide too, but not for the same reason as the other two. "You are hiding your cultivation still?" he asked Alex directly in his mind.

Alex smiled and replied, "I just thought that it would be too much of a shock if I didn't do this. It was either this or tell people that I was hiding my cultivation base previously."

"I see, that makes sense," Wen Cheng said.

"Wait, that means junior brother is a Core disciple now, right?" Luo Mei asked excitedly. "Woah, you climbed the ladder so fast."

"Huh? Oh right, I forgot about that," Alex said. "Where should I register myself as a Core disciple? The Disciple hall, right?"

"Yeah, that's where you should go. Come, I will take you right now" Luo Mei said.

"You don't need to do that for today," Wen Cheng said from the side, stopping Luo Mei. "Little Mei, just go back to your home for the night, I'm sure your junior brother wants to rest too."

"Ah, okay. He can go in the morning then," Luo Mei said. She then checked her clock artifact and exclaimed, "What? It's already close to 9 pm? That's so late," she said.

"I need to properly cultivate today. Goodbye," she said and took off. Meng Yun too bowed towards the two of them and left behind Luo Mei.

Wen Cheng shook his head and sighed. "What would that girl do if she ever really became in charge of something," Wen Cheng said.

"Well, she did do quite well in the competition, so I don't doubt people would mind having her be in charge of something," Alex said with a chuckle.

"Oh right, master, what happened to the rewards? Did the finale ever happen?" Alex asked.

"Sigh, it was supposed to, but it never happened," Wen Cheng said. "After learning about your disappearance, your sister basically forfeited the match to search for you."

"Well, not that it mattered. The tragedy at the capital was too big for anyone to demand they get their prize at such a time. It could've been asked for in the next month or two, but given how the beasts have started to attack in unison as opposed to the random attack they did around the forest, I don't think the competition holders will even think about prizes anytime soon," Wen Cheng said.

"Well, we at least got the points, right? We should be a first grade sect now," Alex asked.

"Haha, of course. No one can deny us of our legitimacy as a first grade sect. In fact, the sect has been steadily growing for the last month, ever since we made our name," Wen Cheng said.

"Oh, and what about the new cultivators that popped up out of nowhere? Has any such people come to the sect in the last month?" Alex asked.

"Of course, many did and many left," Wen Cheng said. "Only a few truly stay behind though. There is this Trevor guy that joined a week or so before the competition, a few days after you had left actually, and he's been steadily increasing his rank in the sect."

"In less than a month, he went from being a Muscle tempering realm cultivator to a Meridian tempering realm cultivator. Even while I was outside, Liu Xun would send me a message about how quickly this guy is rising through the ranks," Wen Cheng said.

"What rank is he at now?" Alex asked.

"Uh, I don't know. After he beat a disciple at the 43rd rank, he was recruited by the Fifth Elder, and ever since then, he has stopped showing off. It seems the Fifth elder has recruited him and told him to properly train to become strong."

"Although, these new people are hard to tame. So, I am sure he will break through soon and go challenge someone high up soon," Wen Cheng said.

"Anyway, it's time for you to go rest soon too. Do you want to train to start tomorrow, or do you want to wait a few more days?" Wen Cheng asked.

"Um, tomorrow should be fine. Although, it will have to be normal training, since I will have to body cultivate overnight most of the time," Alex said.

"Hmm, why don't you do it during the day?" Wen Cheng asked.

"Uh... it's a little inconvenient for me to do it during the day," Alex said.

"Why?" Wen Cheng asked.

"Well, the cultivation method I use is very effective at night only and completely ineffective during the day, so I can only cultivate at night," Alex said.

"Ah, I see. You have one of those cultivation methods huh. I guess you can only cultivate during the night then," Wen Cheng said. "Alright, leave now and go back to your room. We will start training tomorrow night."

"Good night, Master," Alex said and walked away from the manor. He started walking down the mountain under the moonlight when he suddenly realized something.

"Oh right, what's my rank right now?" he wondered. The rank was what decided your status, house, and a lot of things in the sect. Since he had left the sect for nearly 2 months and without the authority of the sect at that, his rank was surely to be towards the bottom.

He took out the badge and looked at the number that was written on it and nearly laughed out loud.

He was currently an outer sect disciple and would have to stay in a house ranked just that. Not only that, but since the lower-ranked houses held multiple disciples, he was going to be staying a night in house number 2144 with 4 other people.

'Sigh, whatever. I will fight someone tomorrow,' Alex thought and walked all the way down to the foot of the mountain. He sent out his spiritual sense and finally found the house numbered 2144.

'Last time the rank I got was 20- something right? Does that mean around 500 new disciples joined by now?' Alex wondered.

He went to the very cheap-looking house and placed his badge on the room to open the door. He walked in and closed the door behind him only to see 5 compact rooms with a main room where the screen was kept.

A door opened and a young girl walked out. Alex looked at her cultivation base and saw that he was a Skin Tempering 3rd realm disciple who must've only just entered the sect.

At first, she didn't see any cultivation base coming off of Alex, so she thought he was a newbie as well, but then she saw the blue lining in his robe and gasped with her palm to her mouth.

She quickly ran over to another room and knocked on the door. "What?" someone's voice came from inside. The door opened and a man walked out.

He looked towards the girl who was pointing towards Alex and then turned to look at Alex. His eyes suddenly got serious.

"Are you the disciple that beat Core Disciple Huo Tu?" the man suddenly asked.

"Oh, I'm surprised you know about that. How do you know?" Alex asked. He was truly surprised. He wondered if it was his face, or if someone else let this disciple know.

"Well..." the man answered. "That's because this number belongs to the disciple who beat Huo Tu. Ever since you beat him, he's been looking for your return, so he made everyone remember about the man who won't fight."

"Oh, yeah. I was out of the sect for quite a while, so it's obvious my rank will fall down. Still, I'm shocked that people still remember that," Alex said with a smile.

"But... that was only 2 months ago. Even core disciple Huo Tu himself only regained consciousness a little over a month ago, so it's obvious everyone would keep track of this number," the man said.

"I see, well, you won't have to worry about me. I will leave this place tomorrow morning.. Good night," Alex said and entered the empty room next to him, leaving the little girl and the man dumbfounded in the hallway.

Chapter 422 - Attack & Weapon

Alex walked into the only empty room and sat on the empty bed. He then called Pearl out, but immediately told him to not make any noise.

"Why?" Pearl asked.

"Send your spiritual sense out and you'll understand why," Alex said. Pearl did as he was asked and quickly saw the people that were around him.

"Alright, let's start cultivating," Alex said to Pearl. Pearl's skin started glowing a bit and soon there were cuts all over Alex's body too.

Alex closed his eyes and started breathing in and out calmly. Before he even knew it, he had fallen into a trance that led him to fall unconscious.

Early in the morning, he woke up from his sleep and opened his eyes. He quickly sent out his spiritual sense and saw that the man from yesterday was absent.

Alex had a general idea where he might have gone to, but he didn't care much about it. He stopped Pearl from cultivating any more and logged out.

He had some breakfast with the ladies and returned back to the game. He logged into the room at around 8 am and started planning for the day.

"What's my plan for today?" he thought.

"I... need to get registered as a Core disciple of the sect, then I will have to challenge someone at rank 50 to get their house, and then I should spend the day learning formations. I can then practice with master afterward," Alex thought to himself.

So, he got out of the room and walked out of the house without letting anyone know. He walked towards the left side of the mountain, instead of going to the right and walking up the mountain.

The road going left also curved and went up the mountain too before finally reaching a road where every horizontal road ended up. The road would then follow the curve of the crater to reach directly into the crater.

Alex looked at the many disciples and elders that were already working on their day. Some were going to the library, while some were going to the production hall.

'The Fighting Hall should open up in about half an hour. Since today is a limitless challenges day, there should be a lot of people that plan to fight. I should be ready,' Alex thought.

Alex went to the disciple hall that was just a simple building. Although it was called a disciple hall, it was also the Elder hall of the sect. The elders mostly worked out of buildings so the sect had never bothered creating a hall for them.

Similarly, since this was the Elder Hall, there were no disciples working in this place, and all the tasks were handled by the disciples themselves.

Alex got into one of the many queues and waited for the people to move on. After a few minutes, he finally came face to face with the elder working there.

The elder was a man that looked to be in his 50s. Perhaps due to his old age, the elder decided to take on this desk job rather than being a referee for the fighting stages which was a way more active job.

"Badge!" the elder said without even caring about how he looked. He seemed to be too tired by the monotonous job while not wanting to do anything different.

Alex took out his badge with the number 2144 and handed it to the elder.

The elder took the badge and looked at the number written on it. He then looked at the disciple in front of him, and then back to the badge.

There was a level of cognitive dissonance happening in his mind right now by 3 different sets of information that were clashing with each other.

He was currently looking at a Meridian tempering 1st realm cultivator, who was normally what the sect called the core disciple, wearing a robe that belonged to an inner disciple, bringing a badge that belonged to an outer sect disciple.

After processing the information for more than 5 seconds, the elder came to a single conclusion.

"Is this a joke? Are you messing with me?" he started to get angry.

"Sorry?" Alex asked. He was confused by the sudden outburst of the elder too.

"Where is your core disciple robe? Where is your actual badge?" the elder asked. "Don't you know that stealing someone else's badge is a crime punishable by expelling?"

Alex finally understood what the problem was. "Ah, no elder. I did not steal any badges. This is my badge, and this is my robes. I was out of the sect for a little while without the sect's authority, so my rank declined while I was out."

"At the same time, I also broke through to the Meridian Tempering realm. So I came here today to get my new robes. As for my badge, I will go fight someone in the 50th rank as soon as the Fighting hall opens up," Alex said.

The elder thought for a while and found that what the disciple was saying was indeed possible and that he had gotten angry a bit too early.

"That is a sound excuse, however, I still do not know if what you are saying is true. Do you have any elders or other trustworthy disciples that can vouch for you?" the elder asked.

Alex chuckled a little and said, "Yes, I do. I don't know if you have heard of it or not, elder, but I am the sect leader's new disciple."

"You can ask him, or my senior sister, Luo Mei, or my senior brother, the Guard leader, Liu Xun," Alex said.

The elder's eyes suddenly went wide. He had indeed heard about the Sect Leader's elder coming back. "I see, wait a second for me to confirm," the elder said and pulled out a talisman to send and receive messages.

The elder talked in the talisman for a few moments and made a weird face as he put it down. "Did you beat any core disciples before today?" he asked.

"Oh yes, I beat Huo Tu about 2 months ago. He was... 18th rank at that time if I remember correctly," Alex said.

"I see. I have confirmed it is you, disciple Yu. Welcome back," the elder said as he brought out a set of robes and a few other talismans that told him about the rules and regulations the core disciples had to follow.

"Thank you, Elder," Alex said and walked away. He put the robes into his storage bags and made his way to the fighting hall.

As he was walking there, he stopped and turned left.

Just as he remembered, it stood there in all of its glory and magnificence. It was still unknown to everyone what it was, but Alex knew that most probably, this was the most important thing in the entire Tiger sect.

The Black Stele.

The Black Stele stood there in the middle of the crater as if it was the one that caused it. Looking at the shape of the crater, it most likely did.

The Black Stele didn't have anything guarding it or any perimeter around it to stop the disciples from walking in. Alex slowly walked up to the stele and placed his hands on it.

The last time he was here, he had hastily used his spiritual sense to read it and was traumatized when his spiritual sense had been nearly depleted. After that, he had always been afraid of the stele and stayed away from it.

But now, he was a different person. Not only had he learned more about the world and was more mature than he was last time, his spiritual sense was also at least 3 times more in quantity and a bit stronger than last time.

He also had the added benefit of knowing what would happen if he didn't put his spiritual sense under control.

"Oh, it's not metal," Alex thought as he touched the black stele. Although it did look like stone, Alex still believed that the black stele was totally made out of metal due to the iridescent colors that the letters in it shined in.

"What sort of rock is this?" Alex thought as he knocked on it. He didn't have much knowledge about stones so he was totally blank on the answer.

"Should I test it once more?" he thought. He still had some lingering fear from last time, but he was confident he wouldn't lose all of his spiritual sense this time.

"Here goes nothing," he thought and spread out his spiritual sense. Slowly, he approached the text on the stone and started reading it.

Immediately, as if retaliating, something grabbed onto his spiritual sense and followed the thread back to attack his spiritual sea.

Alex read as much as he could and immediately stopped his connection to that thread of spiritual sense. When he was done and safe, he quickly checked his spiritual sea and saw that nearly half of it had been destroyed.

'Damn, that's truly terrifying. If I had spent a second longer reading, I would have lost it all again,' he thought. Spending all of his spiritual sense while he was outside of this spiritual sea wasn't dangerous at all.

However, it still hurt like a god damn b*tch.

He didn't dare try it again and tried to remember what he had just read. "... weapon?" Alex thought. He didn't know what words meant, so he could only go off of what information his mind got.

Most of the words seemed normal everyday words, but two of them gave an idea of what the thing is written on the stele was about.

One of them said 'weapon' and another one said? 'attack'.

"So, it's an offensive technique that requires you to use a weapon?" Alex thought and was a little disappointed. Similar to Heaven's Impact, he also wanted this technique to be a spiritual technique.

Alas, it wasn't. "I shouldn't have got my hopes up so much. At least, since this language came from the Immortals or whatever, this should be a pretty good technique, right?" Alex thought.

"Whatever, I will think about this once again when I eat those mental pills and enter or maybe even exceed the Mind tempering realm. My spiritual sense should get a little stronger after that," Alex thought.

He left the black stele and went towards the Fighting hall. By now, the fighting hall had fully opened up and so Alex got in line.

He didn't bother changing his robes as he would do that after the fight. The queue was already long so he had to wait for a few minutes before he could register a fight.

Finally, it was his turn and so he spoke to the elder.

"Good Morning, Elder.. I would like to register a fight with the disciple at rank 50.

Chapter 423 - Rank 50

The elder looked at Alex with a bit of a surprise.

"Disciple, did you say 50?" he asked.

"Yes, Elder," Alex said and handed the elder his badge preemptively. The elder took the badge and looked at it.

'2144? What's going on?' the elder wondered. He was having the same problem as the elder from the disciple hall. However, since fights required cultivation base and not a robe's color, the elder didn't say anything as he could clearly see Alex's cultivation base.

"Alright, go to stage 12," the Elder said. Alex took his badge and walked away.

Even though it was early in the morning, since this was the last day of the week with unlimited fights, people were pretty excited and were already here to fight.

Alex went to the stage that was numbered 12 and waited. He watched the fights that took place on the stages with a hint of curiosity in his eyes.

He was trying to predict what happened in the fight based on the usage of the elements and the fighters' cultivation base, but in the end, there were simply too many variables for him to keep track of.

The fight ended, and Alex's number was called, but the fighter wasn't here yet. So, Alex had to wait for another fight to end.

That fight ended, and his number was called again, but his opponent didn't come. Alex had to wait for nearly 1 hour with his number being called all the time.

Alex wasn't really worried about his opponent showing up or not, as not showing up for 1 hour simply forfeited the battle in the favor of the one that did show up.

However, Alex was worried that he would have to wait until the end of the day before he got his own house when the elders kicked the disciples that didn't leave.

Fortunately, his opponent did show up in time.

"Number 50 and Number 2144," the referee elder called out.

Alex raised his hand and walked up onto the stage. From the other side of the stage, a brown-haired girl with a frowning face walked up onto the stage.

When Alex laid eyes on her, he was genuinely surprised. 'Meridian Tempering 3rd Realm? What?' he thought. He had mistakenly assumed that the core disciples ranking also consisted of inner sect disciples in his mind. Not many people could possibly have such a high cultivation base in the Hong Wu sect, so he assumed the same for the Tiger sect too.

'Well, should I show my strength a little or try to stay a little lowkey?' he wondered for a bit, but then soon realized that it wouldn't be lowkey if he beat the girl with a lower cultivation base than her.

He slowly increased his cultivation base aura such that it matched the same as the girl's. The referee asked the two of them to move to the opposite ends of the stage, and as he did, he heard the girl say something under her breath.

"God damn NPCs and their rules. I should just leave this shitty sect and go elsewhere soon," the girl said.

'NPC? A player?' Alex thought curiously. Wen Cheng talked about the Trevor guy, but he also said there were quite a few players that decided to stay behind.

'She must be one of those players. Her name is probably randomly generated too, so most people here don't realize it,' Alex thought.

He brought out a common sword for this fight and waited for the girl to bring out something. However, she did nothing. Instead, she just rolled up her sleeves and got into a boxing stance.

'Is she gonna fight me... barehanded?' Alex couldn't help but get a fond sense of curiosity when he saw that.

"FIGHT!" the elder shouted.

The girl dashed forward. She prepared a punch that suddenly came alight as if it was burning with fire.

'Physical and Elemental?' Alex thought and attacked her with his sword. The sword hit the right hand of the girl stopping her in her place. However, the left hand of hers attacked without stopping and flew towards Alex.

Alex dodged to the right and hit her overextended hands with the common sword. Since he hadn't used any Qi at all, most of the strength that hit her came from his body, and that wasn't strong enough to put a cut on her.

But it was surely enough to hurt her. "Ow!" the girl cried out and jumped back.

Alex looked at her and thought, 'she isn't used to fighting very much, is she?' Even though he himself was a beginner to fighting styles, he had just enough training to know what one should and should not do during a fight.

When fighting against a person with a sword, the woman should have been keeping in mind the reach a sword had compared to her hands.

With that in mind, she should have only gone in on an attack like that when Alex's sword was not so freely sticking right next to her left hand.

The girl looked at the red on the skin of her left arm and got angry. Alex didn't smile or make any signs of provocation and just waited for her to attack again.

As expected, the girl jumped at him again. She punched him with her right arm again. Alex could guess where this was going but decided to indulge in this.

He hit her hands with his sword once again, however, this time, instead of hitting the sword, she decided to catch it in her grasp. Taking the opportunity, she threw her left punch once again.

Seeing all of this coming from a distance away, Alex dodged to the left as her arm flew past his right ear, and then hit her square on the stomach.

He didn't hit hard enough to hurt her extremely, but just enough so that she would loosen her grip on the sword and start catching her own stomach.

Alex took the opportunity and struck towards the girl again. The girl quickly used her arms to try and block the incoming attack, but in the last second, Alex switched to the flat side of the blade and hit her on the arm like hitting the ball with a bat.

The girl was sent flying away and landed outside of the stage. This fight was an easy victory for Alex.

"You Win!" The referee said as he pointed towards Alex. Alex walked up to the referee to take his new badge and bowed.

After that, he left the fighting stage. The disciples that were watching weren't very surprised when they saw the match but still talked about it as Alex walked away.

'Finally, a good house,' he thought and left the area. He walked back up the right side of the crater and walked towards his new house.

He reached the upper area of the side of the mountain and searched for his house. He finally saw the number 50 and opened the door.

There was still a female scent in the room as if it was occupied by the girl for quite a while, but Alex didn't let it bother him. He quickly entered and looked around.

Since this was a core disciple's home, this was different from the other two houses he had been to. The outer sect houses 5 people in a single house and people had to share the living room.

The inner sect houses had a single room, but it was big and spacious.

Now, the core disciple house seemed much better than the other two. This house had 4 rooms in total. The living room itself was as large as the inner sect house and there was a backyard as well.

While it didn't measure with the backyard he had back in the Hong Wu Sect, it was still quite good to have. The best thing of all in this house was that there was a damn pond in the backyard where people could bathe.

The entire area was warded off with high walls, so people couldn't enter easily, and Alex didn't doubt that there were many other sorts of formations in the house.

He went back inside the house to one of the empty rooms and sat down. It was finally time for him to not worry about his master, his sect, and his pills and fully focus only on the formations that he was so desperate to learn about.

He had already learned all the basic formations he could and was only waiting to learn to make the best he could with it. He brought out the formation plates and inscription pen and started carving.

The most important thing about the formations was the stroke. Alex needed to make sure the formation strokes were perfectly straight, and smooth, as well as make sure they didn't stray far from the angles that were in the formations.

As long as he did that, he was sure he could come up with a high-efficiency formation. He was sure that it wouldn't come up to be of the most possible efficiency however just because the metal he held had most likely some impurities, and the inscription pen didn't carve the smoothest.

Thankfully, he had something the other formation masters didn't. Spiritual sense.

Using Spiritual sense, he could perfectly keep track of the strokes' perfections and imperfections. Thanks to it, he immediately knew when he was making a mistake as keeping track of everything was very easy.

He wondered how long it would have taken him if he did not have spiritual sense.

"Even then, this is a little too easy, right? I wonder if they consider the formation flag the real formation," he thought. "Wait, how do you make formation flags again? It's by employing an artifact maker, right?"

The artifact maker would make flags and metal poles into shapes that the formation master wanted, and then the formation master would have to carve on it on their own. After that, the user of the formation had to set the formation up themselves.

So, there were three chances of mistakes during all of this. The artifact maker could make mistakes, the formation master could make mistakes, and the user could make mistakes.

This was one of the reasons why formation flags weren't pushed towards the beginners for learning even though it was the most versatile method of setting up formations and most certainly the better one.

"I should go pick up some formation flag poles and try to make my own formation too," Alex thought. But that was for later on. Right now, he needed to keep on making formations to improve his carving ability.

For the next 3 or 4 hours, he ended up using the majority of the formation plates he had previously bought. He looked at the fire breathing, water condensing, Qi gathering, wind blowing, heat emitting, loud buzzing, fog making, and other types of base formations.

He was quite happy with the results he came up with but was unsure how good they were. He could check this on his own by getting a formation tester, however, unlike pill testers, those cost quite expensive.

"Let's just finish these remaining plates," Alex thought and continued. He could tell that he was gradually improving at his carving ability and was sure that he was making better formations, but he just wasn't sure how good it was.

For that, he really would have to go check his formation in the shop.

He put the final stroke on the final plate he was carving. Once it was fully done, he put a spirit stone under it and used his Qi to activate it.

Once it was activated, slight frost appeared on the surface of the plate, and soon the temperature of the room went down a few degrees lower.

Alex smiled; he had successfully created a Temperature Lowering formation.. Finally, the last of his formation making for the day was done.

Chapter 424 - Selling Formations

Alex walked out of his new house and went down the mountain. It was around late in the afternoon right now, so the sun was getting low.

Just a few more hours, and it would be totally dark. He had come out to buy the new formations, but he didn't have any spirit stones with him at all. Most of what he had was spent buying the same formation plates in those other two cities.

Alex had thought of selling those formations to get the money first, but he had a better source for it right now. So, he went to the auction house.

"You are here, Fellow Daoist Yu," Cai Ping said as he walked in through the door. He seemed quite happy today, meaning the sales must have been great.

"I assume the auction went well today?" Alex said.

"Of course. It went great. Hardly any alchemist sells pills through us unless it's a major auction. So when we do get pills, the customers get quite happy and buy a lot of them," Cai Ping said.

"I see. I'm sorry but I need to be somewhere else today, Miss Cai. Can we hurry this up?" Alex said.

"Ah, yes, here," Cai Ping said and handed him a storage bag. Alex checked the storage bag and saw 82 True Spirit stones. That was quite a lot, but given that he had exclusively sold pills over 40% in harmony, the earning was a given.

"Thank you, Miss Cai. I will take my leave now," Alex said and stood up to walk away. Cai Ping nodded and bade him farewell.

Alex walked back to the sect in less than half an hour and reached the mini-market that was outside of the sect. This market was run by the sect, so he didn't have to worry a lot about getting screwed up on his sales.

He walked into the shop that dealt with formations. Inside was an Elder and a disciple working in the shop. The elder seemed to be busy with the other customers in the shop, so he walked up to the disciple who had their backs turned.

"Excuse me," Alex called out to the disciple.

"Yes, what is— Aah! It's you," the disciple called out.

Alex was quite surprised to see her here too. "Oh, I didn't expect to see you here, hello sister Su," Alex said. The person working in the shop was the direct disciple of the First Elder, Su Min.

"You really are alive. I thought master had gone mad when he said you returned," she said. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I'm here to sell some formations. What are you doing here?" he asked back.

"I work here. Also, what? Do you want to sell formations? Why does an alchemist want to sell formations?" she asked.

"Well, because I have nothing to do with it, I guess?" he said and brought out a few plates. "Can you tell me how much these will sell for?"

Su Min looked at the formations Alex had just dropped and got a little curious. So, she picked up one of them and checked it out.

Suddenly, she squinted her eyes and looked at it more closely. "Who made this?" she asked.

"I did," Alex said with a smile.

She looked up and frowned. "Stop lying, and just say who made these. These are quite good," she said.

"Haha, I'm not lying. I made them myself. Just a few hours ago too actually," Ning said with a smile.

"Whatever, if you don't want to say, then don't say," she said and took the formation plate with her to a giant machine-like artifact behind her.

The machine had a massive metal base and four metal rods popping out of each side. 'That's the formation efficiency tester, right?' Alex thought.

He hadn't seen it closely from the coliseum seating area, so he wasn't absolutely sure, but it did look just like the machines they used there.

Su Min placed the formation upside down and waited for something to happen. Suddenly, light sprung forth from the lowest part of one of the metal rods. It glowed yellow and started climbing up it in chunks.

Alex waited as watched as more and more of the rod glowed fully.? '25 chunks of light? for one rod?' Alex thought.

"It's at least an Earth grade formation; that I was confident on," Su Min said from the side. Then, the next rod started glowing. It too glowed in chunks and had 25 different parts that could glow.

'So, there are 25 chunks to each rod, making up 100 for the efficiency measurement?' Alex wondered. That did seem to be the case from how Su Min was speaking.

The rods glowed more and more and the 2nd rod fully glowed as well.

"Oh, it's a Heaven Grade formation. Not bad," Su Min said. Alex was a little surprised when he heard that.

'Not bad? That's a Heaven Grade formation,' he thought. "Um, is a Heaven Grade formation easy to come by?" he asked.

"The base formations, yes. Those are easy to make. We really only consider someone as talented in formations when they can inscribe the formation onto metal rods," Su Min said.

"That or when they start making True formations plates," she said.

"You guys can make True Formations? Don't you need True Qi for that?" Alex asked.

"That's just for the activation. Just making the formation itself is just a lot of accurate carving. As long as you can do that, you can even make a saint formation," she said. "However, the metals the formations are carved in get stronger and stronger, so you do need quite a high cultivation base if you want to make the higher formations."

Alex nodded when he understood that. "So, setting up a formation doesn't count towards one being a formation master right?"

"Yeah, since anybody can set a formation. You are only considered a formation master if you can make one," Su Min said.

The third rod glowed to about 12 more chunks and stopped. 62% was the final efficiency of the metal formation.

"Hmm, not bad. Let me check the others too," Su Min said and started checking through all the formation plates he had made.

The lowest efficiency he got was 38% on one of the first ones he had made, and the highest efficiency he got was 79%. Surprisingly, he had created another Immortal grade item so quickly. Only, this one didn't hold as much value as the other immortal grades.

"These formation plates are actually quite good. I can give you... hmm... 62 True spirit stones for these," she said.

Alex was about to thank her for a moment when he stopped. "Wait, I spend 80 True Spirit stones myself just to buy these materials, and then I carved the thing myself too. Are you trying to rip me off right now?" He asked.

"W-What? Why would you say that?" she suddenly started getting flustered.

"Um, should I ask the elder for his input then?" Alex asked.

"Tsk. Damn, you're annoying. Here, 112 True Spirit stones, that's all you will get," Su Min said as she handed him the money. That was quite a return for him and he was pretty happy with it.

"Can I buy some formation plates? Since you said True formations can be made, maybe I should try it out too," Alex said. "Actually, do you have..."

Alex listed off a few metal names and waited for Su Min to find them. She only found 3 of the metals he named and brought them to him.

"Yeah, I don't think you can find those alloys here. You will have to ask an artifact maker to make them if you know the composition," she said.

"Oh, at least there are 3 here," Alex said. He then went ahead and bought a lot of True Rank formation blueprints. Once he was done, he paid the price of the blueprints and left.

Su Min still seemed annoyed at him, but he couldn't do anything about her misplaced anger. 'She really must like her master quite a lot to hate me for rejecting him,' he thought.

He walked past the gate, and as soon as he did, his badge went off.

"Hmm?" he thought and brought out the badge to see something written on it.

-You have been challenged by badge 52-

-You have 18 minutes remaining to go to Stage 3.-

"Oh, someone challenged me? 52... that's quite high. I wonder what cultivation realm this person is at. Must be Meridian Tempering too right?" Alex wondered and walked towards the crater.

He was still quite far away, so it was going to take him quite a while to reach there. That didn't bother him very much and he leisurely walked from the right side of the crater.

It took him about 15 minutes before he reached the Fighting hall and walked over to Stage 3. The fight on top of the stage was ongoing, meaning his fight would be next.

In a few minutes, the fight ended and the referee announced the victor. After the two fighters left, the referee called out the two numbers.

"Number 50 and Number 52," he said.

Alex walked up the stage and as he was doing so, he saw a few people looking at him from the corner of his eyes. "They are..." he thought and finally realized what was happening.

Only when he reached on top of the stage did he fully notice the number of disciples that were hanging around this one particular stage.

There were even elders standing far away to look at the fight.

"Finally, I can clear up my name by beating you today," a voice came from the side. Alex turned around to look at the person.

As expected, it was Huo Tu.

Chapter 425 - Golden Fist

Alex cringed a little when he heard his voice. This was the one person he probably hated the most in all of the sects.

'He must've let everyone know about the battle happening right now. No wonder all of these people are here,' Alex thought and looked at the crowd.

He walked up to the elder and handed him his badge and walked back. Huo Tu did the same thing as he kept an angry eye on Alex the entire time.

The elder working as the referee was also interested to see the fight happen. Not just him, all the elders watching the fight were interested.

The one thing that had puzzled them until this day was how an Organ Tempering 3rd realm cultivator could have possibly beat a Meridian Tempering 3rd realm cultivator.

When the news had spread, everyone had wanted to see how Alex had done that, but a few days later, Alex disappeared from the sect.

It wasn't until the competition that they finally saw him again and realized the truth about him. The son of the 3rd wealthiest merchant in all of the Crimson Empire and the direct disciple of the Sect Leader of the Tiger sect.

This was a match that the people just didn't want to miss. Alex was currently giving off an aura that said he was a Meridian Tempering 3rd realm cultivator, while Huo Tu had only improved a single time and had reached the 4th realm of Meridian Temperature.

Even if that was Alex's original cultivation base, winning against Huo Tu would be a breeze, however, he needed to worry just how great he wanted his performance to be.

He looked around and noticed a few elders that were clearly high-ranked. One of them was the First Elder too. Even his senior sister was looking at him from far away, with slight concerns in her eyes.

He walked to the other end of the stage and weighed his options. 'Should I hide my abilities and use Heaven's impact once again to finish the match mysteriously like last time?' he wondered.

However, the elders were all focused on him right now. Using Heaven's impact here was basically inviting them to see that he had a mental attack. With how long it took for Huo Tu to wake up last time, they were probably already suspecting that.

'Sword Intent then?' he wondered. That was an option too. After all, during the last week or so, he had improved his sword intent to the level that he could surely beat Huo Tu right now.

"You have some sort of mental skill, don't you?" Huo Tu asked.

Alex was surprised, but at the same time, not really. Huo Tu might look and act like an idiot, but he was also a Meridian Tempering realm disciple. One did not reach that high with simply money.

'Or maybe they did. Isn't that what all of those players are doing basically?' Alex thought. So, he couldn't put it past Huo Tu to have learned about this from somewhere else.

'Isn't his master like an elder? 7th elder or something?' Alex thought.

"You don't have to answer. I already know you use mental attacks. This time, however, you won't win," Huo Tu said and opened his robe a little to show the medallion he had on his neck.

"This is an artifact that can stop all-metal attacks from hurting me. Adding onto the fact that my armor still remains one of the best in the sect, You have no chance of beating me."

"Fall down on your knees and beg for mercy. I might end up taking you in as my lackey then," Huo Tu said.

The Elder waited for Alex to respond, but Alex remained unspeaking. Alex sighed when he heard Huo Tu. He doubted he had even heard such disrespect towards him even from Song Zun or Zexi.

Seeing that Alex wasn't going to speak anytime soon, the elder decided to start the match. "Fight!"

Immediately, black lines appeared all over Huo Tu's body as if it were a jade's pattern stamped onto his body. He was using the jade-skin technique. With this, his defense was one grade higher than normal.

Immediately, he brought out a handful of pills and a handful of talismans from his storage bag. Although he wasn't going to immediately fight with them, it was better to keep it handy.

"What? Aren't you going to attack me?" Huo Tu asked out loud.

"Very well," Alex said, finally speaking after staying silent for a while. "If it is a fight you want, then I shall give it to you."

Suddenly, the aura around Alex started to shift. Both the elders and the disciples alive suddenly got alert at the sudden change of it. Little by little, Alex's cultivation base started to grow larger and larger.

The First Elder as well as the various other elders that were watching Alex had their eyes go wide. Luo Mei couldn't help but block her mouth with her hand as it opened in surprise.

The disciples that were watching the fight were also surprised as well as terrified.

Even so, the aura kept increasing and increasing.

"You! You have been hiding your ability all this time. Y-You..." Huo Tu could speak anymore as Alex's cultivation base stopped at a stable level for everyone to see.

Meridian Tempering 8th Realm.

He was strong, and there was no reason to hide it. Since there was no reason to hide it, he might as well show it for everyone to see so that they didn't have the naive idea of challenging him to waste his time.

Alex looked at the cowering Huo Tu and said, "Come, let's fight."

"Die!" Huo Tu shouted and threw a pill towards Alex. This was one of the exploding pills that Alex had a hard time dealing with last time.

However, this time, before the pill was even half the distance away from Huo Tu, it struck an invisible wall made up of Alex's Qi and exploded.

The force of the explosion did nothing to Alex, but the shockwaves did shake Huo Tu a little. He started to get scared.

One of the reasons he had ranked 18 previously, despite being a Meridian Tempering 3rd realm cultivator was the fact that he had many of these pills and talismans, and that nobody could really stop them.

While they weren't enough to trouble the Mind Tempering realm disciples, the Meridian Tempering realm disciples had a hard time standing up against it.

Combined with the fact that his defense was one of the best in the sect, he was a walking tank that could bulldoze his way through his opponents.

However, now that he had run into a mountain that he could not bulldoze his way through, he was starting to get scared.

"Die! Die! Die!" he shouted and threw in more and more talismans and pills. However, they all exploded before they even reached Alex.

Huo Tu sent a talisman towards Alex and at the same time sent a pill hidden behind it. Alex stopped the talisman with his Qi, but the pill used the opening in the Qi made by the explosion to pass through and reach Alex.

BOOM

A massive explosion rang out as the pill directly hit Alex in the face.

"Haha! How's that!" Huo Tu shouted out loud. The referee started moving in to check that Alex was okay. The elders and the disciples were a little surprised at the sudden turn of the battle.

They were about to start talking when suddenly, they saw a silhouette moving inside the smoke and dust.

"Congrats!" a voice came from inside the smoke. A figure appeared from inside and stood in the light. "You managed to rip my new clothes a bit."

"Wh-What?!" Huo Tu said in surprise. Alex was fine. Despite taking an explosion to the face, the most that had happened to him was his robe was a bit destroyed.

Alex dusted himself a little and wondered how well he could've survived the damage if it was not for the last moment's use of the Jade-skin technique.

"How are you okay?" Huo Tu asked, but Alex didn't answer.

Alex looked at the surroundings and once again saw the many people looking at him. "Time to end this farce."

He suddenly dashed towards Huo Tu. Huo Tu who wasn't expecting him to move so quickly tried his best to use the Jade-Skin technique and put on a layer of defense on his body, other than the armor.

BOOM

The sound of Alex's fist hitting the armor alone was enough to scare the surrounding people. Even though the Armor could stop a physical attack from anyone that wasn't Mind Tempering 7th realm or above, it was still unable to stop the momentum and Huo Tu was pushed back.

Luckily for him, the armor had stopped most of the momentum and he was sent back only a little bit. Still, that was a very scary experience for him.

"Hmm, I will have to put on a bit more damage behind my attacks huh?" Alex said and dashed forward once again. Huo Tu threw the talisman and pill in his hands, all of which directly landed on Alex.

However, that wasn't able to stop Alex. He flew past the explosion and landed another strong punch towards Huo Tu's face. Huo Tu managed to twist his body in time so that the armor was the thing that took the hit, not his body.

"Tsk," Alex said and started relentlessly punching at Huo Tu. Huo Tu tried to block as much as he could, but from time to time, he would mess up and Alex would end up hitting his exposed body parts. Still, till the end, he managed to block all of the hits coming to his head.

"You are lucky. You will be the first to witness the technique I am working on," Alex said. Suddenly, a golden aura sprang forth from his body, blinding the audience that was watching.

Suddenly, the light converged as it stuck around his right arm as if they were a metal glove for his hand. Alex had come up with this simple technique after he was able to freely control the metal Qi and energy whenever he wanted, so long as it did not have someone else controlling it already.

He had based his technique on what Pearl did with his golden paw, and also the Sword Qi that Du Yuhan used in the competition.

"I don't have a name for it yet, but here it is anyway," Alex said and suddenly sprang forth towards Huo Tu.

Huo Tu's skins were as marbled as they could possibly get and he crossed his fists in front of his to block the attack.

Alex reached right next to Huo Tu and punched directly onto the arms. Huo Tu's arms broke upon contact and were immediately thrown outwards, however, they were barely able to stop Alex's momentum at all.

The first landed on his armor next and that was able to block most of the damage from Alex's fist. The little momentum that was remaining would send Huo Tu flying back, but not by much.

However, just then, the golden aura on his fist exploded out as it created an attack on its own and immediately struck both the armor and the man.

The little momentum that the armor was struggling with suddenly grew to an exponential amount and Huo Tu was sent flying away, out of the stage.

Alex stood up straight as he watch Huo Tu land almost 2 stages over and smiled. His new technique was acceptable.

Everyone was shocked at what had just happened. Nobody made a single sound and kept on looking at Alex at the stage.

"Elder?" Alex looked at the referee and reminded him.

"Ahem, You Win!" the referee shouted.

Alex walked up to the referee and took his badge before walking down the stage amidst the gazes of everyone there.

Chapter 426 - Training With Luo Mei

Alex walked down the stairs under the gazes of the hundreds of disciples and elders that were gathered there. He made no effort to change his aura and let the people see and feel it clearly. Only then would the small fries leave him alone.

However, this would also mean that he was now a viable target from anyone in the higher ranks that were threatened by him.

'Let them come. I doubt I will lose to anyone other than the top 3 now,' Alex thought and kept walking.

He looked at Huo Tu's lackeys who were looking at him with horror in their eyes. Alex couldn't help but sigh. He rummaged into his storage bag and brought out a pill.

He suddenly tossed it towards them. The lackeys who had been watching the match quite intently mistook the pill for an explosive and stumbled backward in horror only for it to land on their body without anything happening to them.

"It's a healing pill for your boss. Give it to him, and tell him never to bother me again. I won't be as lenient next time."

The lackeys immediately started nodding like crazy and ran to where Huo Tu was. Alex shook his head and walked towards his senior sister.

"You... have become quite strong. Just like those new people," Luo Mei said with a sad smile on her face.

"Yes, well, I guess I count as one of them," he said.

Luo Mei's face got even sadder when she heard that. "Does that mean you will leave us when you get what you want?" she asked.

"What? Of course not. I will stay in the sect as long as the sect welcomes me. The Hong Wu sect and Tiger sect are like my home now," Alex said.

This refreshed Luo Mei's mood a little and smiled. "Alright, let's go to Master's place. I want you to tell me how you got so strong," she said and started walking.

Alex followed behind her too. With the Prime Disciple taking away Alex, no one dared bother him anymore. Even the First Elder who was looking from the side didn't do anything but keep smiling.

Through the right part of the crater, they walked back up to the front side of the mountain.

"By the way, Sister, how did you know to be there?" Alex asked.

"Oh, Huo Tu made quite a noise about how he was going to beat the person that underhandedly beat him and get his honor back," Luo Mei said.

"Oh, he must've made quite a noise for so many people to wait for him there," Alex said.

The two of them soon reached his master's manor and entered. Seeing that there was no one there, Luo Mei took Alex to the training hall behind the manor and entered.

She then sent a message to her master. "Alright, master will be here soon. Come on, tell me then, how did you become so strong in such little time," she asked.

"Well, like everyone else that cultivates fast," Alex said.

Luo Mei thought for a second and asked, "Pill?"

"Yeah, I made and ate a lot of pills during my month-long entrapment. I had nothing to do but train and cultivate, so I got strong quite fast," he said.

"That's... bad you know?" she said.

"I know. I made sure to put in training between each breakthrough. If not for waiting, I could've probably reached the True Realms by now," Alex said.

"Woah, I knew you were fast, but this is just..." Luo Mei didn't know what to say.

"I can't be as fast anymore though, with each increasing realm, the time I need to wait in between to stabilize my foundation is increasing. "

"It wasn't until 5 or so days of hunting in the jungle that I felt comfortable breaking through to my current realm from the last one," Alex said.

"5 days to breakthrough... if the others heard you, they would flay your skin to see what you are made up of," Luo Mei said with a chuckle.

Suddenly, Luo Mei looked to the side. "Master is here," she said.

After 2 seconds, Alex too felt him fly towards the Training hall through his spiritual sense. 'Sister's spiritual sense must be quite strong. I will need to give her that pill too,' Alex thought.

"Yu Ming, are you okay?" Wen Cheng asked the moment he entered the training hall.

"I'm fine, master," Alex said.

"Oh, I see. I heard you gave quite a beating to— Woah, that's your true cultivation base?" Wen Cheng asked. He could finally see his cultivation base clearly thanks to Alex not hiding anything.

"Yes, master," Alex said.

"Ah, I see. I had nothing to worry about then," Wen Cheng said. "Alright, I have a little task that will take me an hour. You two stay by yourself for that time okay?"

Wen Cheng left before they could even say anything. "What do you want to do?" Luo Mei asked.

"I want to fight you, sister," Alex said with a voice full of determination.

"Fight me? You aren't satiated from fighting with Huo Tu?" Luo Mei asked with a smile.

"No. That wasn't even enough to make me really use anything. I want to have a real fight against you. I have been training for a while now, and I want to know if I made any mistakes while training by myself," he said.

"Very well then. If that is what you wish," Luo Mei said and brought out a blue rapier-like sword. Alex brought a normal sword as well.

"Huh? Didn't you have another better sword?" Luo Mei asked.

"Yes, but I'm trying to learn swordsmanship with this common sword. Just like how Du Yuhan learns," Alex said.

"Tsk, don't say his name," Luo Mei got annoyed when she heard his name.

'She must still be angry from the time when he refused to fight her in the competition,' Alex thought.

"I have a True Mortal Armor, sister. So you can attack my body without reservation," Alex said.

"Very well," Luo Mei said and immediately disappeared. If it was not for focus mode, he wouldn't have noticed when she arrived right next to him.

Alex brought up his sword as fast as he could and blocked the sword strike. The next moment, another sword hit from his left side.

Alex couldn't keep track of Luo Mei when she moved, and only noticed her when she stopped to attack him.

'Dammit, she is way too fast for me. Is this because of her cultivation base?' Alex thought. He returned the sword back to block that strike as fast as he could with the least effort put into it.

Luo Mei disappeared again. Suddenly, he got hit on the back and was sent flying forward until he hit the wall and was stopped.

"Argh! You are too strong, sister," he said as he looked towards Luo Mei who was smiling.

"You are the one who said he wanted a serious fight. Do you want me to slow down?" she asked.

"No, keep it going," he said and ran forward. He felt himself dash forward with very high momentum, but just as he reached Luo Mei, she suddenly moved and disappeared from his view once more.

If not for this spiritual sense, he would be a sitting duck right now. He sent his sword backward to stop her sword and they clashed, but Luo Mei didn't stop there.

She disappeared once again and appeared in front of him, swinging her sword at his chest.

'Stop her' he thought and swung his sword forward. The two swords hit each other, and both of them were pushed back. Alex nearly flew the entire room's width, while Luo Mei only stumbled back a few steps.

Alex got up immediately to attack, but then he saw Luo Mei stop in her tracks, with her eyes wide and her mouth open.

"Sword Intent!" she said in shock. "You used Sword Intent!"

"A version of it, yeah," Alex said. "I've been trying to learn it for a month now, ever since I saw it being used in the Annual Sect Competition. However, even though I take pride in my ability to learn anything, this thing has taken me way too long."

"Even after a month of training, I can only use it to a rudimentary level," Alex said.

"That's... impossible. Didn't you only start to cultivate a few months ago? You hadn't even touched a sword before that. How did you learn the Intent so fast," she asked.

"I... can't answer that. I just learned it while fighting a few beasts in the forest," Alex said.

"Come, attack me. I want to see how strong your Sword Intent is," Luo Mei said.

"Okay," Alex said and rushed forward. The moment he arrived in front of Luo Mei, he struck down.

'HIT'

Another force, much stronger than the last time, hit Luo Mei sending her back more than just a few steps.

"That's... strong, but how much of it is just your strength, and how much of it is the Intent?" Luo Mei asked.

"How do we determine that?" Alex asked.

"Hmm..." Luo Mei suddenly moved her arm and blue light shined from it. The blue light then condensed to become an Ice Armor around her.

"Try to break this with your normal attack," she said.

Alex nodded and attacked. He expected a strong rebound from the sword, but it cut through the ice like it was butter. "What? I told you not to use intent yet," Luo Mei said.

"I'm not, sister," Alex said.

"Uhh, but this ice should be able to stop any Meridian Tempering 9th realm cultivator's attack. Are you stronger than that?" she asked.

"Yes, sister. My body cultivation alone is at the 5th realm of Organ Tempering and I can output damage equal to 1st Mind Tempering realm just with those two alone. If I use skills, I should be able to output about 3rd realm of Mind Tempering in terms of damage," Alex said.

"I-Is that so?" Luo Mei said with an awkward smile. "Very well," she said as he made a much more robust sheet of ice. "This will block 4th Mind Tempering Realm cultivator's attack," she said. "Now attack."

Alex nodded and poured golden Qi into the sword he was holding. The common sword glowed yellow suddenly and Alex struck the ice.

BENG

His sword hit the ice at an acute angle and entered about a few centimeters in. After that, however, it was stopped.

"I see. So, 4th Mind Tempering realm is the strongest attack you can make right now," Luo Mei said. She moved her hands once more and the ice healed again.

"Try it again, but this time, use your Intent," Luo Mei said.

Alex nodded and propped up his sword to attack. He then took a deep breath and released it.

'CUT'

He swung it down.

BENG

Once again, a strong sound rose from his sword hitting the ice, but this time, his sword managed to reach all the way to the other side of the thick ice sheet.

"I see. Your sword Intent makes you stronger by a single realm," Luo Mei said. "Unlike the others who have their damage increased by at least 3 realms," Luo Mei said.

"Their damage increases by 3 realms?" Alex asked in surprise.

"Yes. That's what you get when you have a proper sword Intent. It's something I could never hope to achieve. It's something even master could never hope to achieve," Luo Mei said.

"But you have a chance to reach where we couldn't. You will have to now practice this every day, refine it. When master returns, we can ask him to teach you all about it."

"Even though he doesn't have it, he should know a bit," Luo Mei said.

Alex nodded. A fire started burning inside of him with the desire to achieve more in the realm of Weapon mastery.. He promised himself, he would master Sword Intent one way or another.

Chapter 427 - Sect Matters

"What about the merchants? Have their numbers really dropped that badly over the course of the month?" Wen Cheng asked the group of elders in front of him.

He was currently in the Disciple's Hall which was also the Elder's hall of the Tiger sect. In front of him were many elders ranging from ones that were in charge of security, and fights, to elders that were in charge of disciples, and rules to elders that were in charge of sales and finances of the sect.

They were all gathered together for the weekly meeting at the end of the week before they took their one day of a break on Sunday.

"Yes, Sect Leader. Ever since the beast hoard attack 3 weeks ago, the merchants have been scared that it will be a repeated thing and have decided to stop selling anywhere for a while."

"It is taking us way too much to convince them to go to other cities with their goods," an elder who was in charge of finance said.

"Sigh, so I guess that the disciples haven't been earning as much then?" Wen Cheng asked.

"No, Sect Leader. Compared to last week, we have seen a slight increase in earnings, but it's still nowhere compared to what it was before the Beast attacks," the elder said.

"What about other sources? Are the sales going well in the market?" Wen Cheng asked.

"It's not bad, I guess, but it's certainly not good either. Due to the lack of new people coming into the town, the overall growth has stagnated for the market too," the elder said. "If this continues on for even two months, we will have to start selling sect treasures to keep our businesses afloat or deny entry for new disciples."

"Sigh, I'm sure something good will happen," Wen Cheng said. "Elder Xuan, you are the person that knows the most about beasts amongst us. Do you have any idea what is possibly going on with these beast hoard attacks?"

Elder Xuan simply shook his head. "There are many possibilities, sect leader. I can't tell exactly what is causing these beasts to act the way they are," he said.

"Possibilities? Like...?" Wen Cheng asked.

"Well, there are 2 big possibilities in my mind, "Elder Xuan said. "First is that there is a hidden danger in the Southern Forest, and it's driving the beasts out of their home and into our lands."

"Another possibility is that there is something in the Crimson Empire that they desperately want, so they are gathering strength and launching attacks periodically," Elder Xuan said.

"Wait... Periodically? Do you mean that there is a chance that they will attack again?" Wen Cheng asked.

"Yes, Sect Leader. If I'm not wrong, then there is another attack coming in very soon. We need to prepare," Elder Xuan said.

A small fear started brewing inside of Wen Cheng's heart. "Elder Jiang, Please go to the Hong Wu sect and send them a message from me telling them that there might be another Beast hoard attack soon. We need them to be as prepared as we will be," Wen Cheng said.

"Yes, Sect Leader," An Elder stood up and walked out.

"Sigh, let's just hope the beasts don't amount to the same as back in the Cardinal City. That was a truly horrific sight to behold," Wen Cheng said as he shook his head.

"That's all for today. You can return back to what you were doing," Wen Cheng said as he dismissed the elders.

The elders started leaving one by one, and in the end, only 2 remained. One of them was the First elder who Alex was familiar with on a basic level.

The other person was a fat man with short hair and a small stubble on his chin. He wasn't too fat, but his short height made him look overweight.

"I guess congratulations are in order, Mister Sect Leader. Your disciple put on quite a show today," the First Elder said.

"Hehe, I bet you wish you would have gotten him, don't you?" Wen Cheng said with a chuckle.

"Of course, who wouldn't?" the First Elder said with a smile.

"Seriously though, I watched the fight and I was surprised too," The fat man said. "Very soon, he might beat my disciple and I might end up as the fourth elder," he said.

"Don't joke around, Dong Chen. Little Ma is still very strong. If not for Yuhan and little Mei having unnatural strength, I have no doubts he would have become the Prime Disciple by now," Wen Cheng said.

"Alas, those two do have quite the unnatural strength, don't they? One's spiritual root is so strong that she can control water as if she commands them, and the other has such deep respect for swords that he has already touched onto the realm of Sword Qi."

"Seriously, what sort of monsters did you two raise?" he asked.

"Alright, let's talk about this later. I'm late to train my disciple," Wen Cheng said and walked out. The other elders decided to leave as well.

Wen Cheng walked onto the lantern-filled sect crater in the evening with stars glittering all over the sky. The white moon shone quite brilliantly tonight.

He looked around for a bit to see how everything was and flew away. That was the quickest way to return back to his manor on top of the mountain.

As he reached the mountain, he released his spiritual sense to look inside the training hall and saw both Luo Mei and Alex training.

Just as he was walking in, he noticed something with his spiritual sense. Every time Alex attacked, there was a slight hint of light that unstably formed on his sword that would disappear as soon as he attacked.

"No way!" Wen Cheng thought in amazement. He immediately walked in and indeed saw the same thing happen once again in front of his eyes.

The two of them stopped fighting when they saw Wen Cheng enter the room. "Oh master, you're back," Luo Mei said.

"Yo-You... that was Sword Intent. I saw Sword Intent just now, didn't I?" Wen Cheng asked, fully flustered.

"Yes, Master. Junior brother has started to learn about Sword Intent. He was waiting for you to return and teach him what you can," Luo Mei said.

"Uhh, You know I don't know have Sword Intent, right?" Wen Cheng awkwardly said.

"You don't have to have it. Just teach him what you can," Luo Mei said sternly.

"Oh, right, Of course, I'm going to do that. Come here, Yu Ming, tell me how you got it," Wen Cheng asked.

Alex explained everything he could to Wen Cheng and told him how he acquired his current low-level Sword Intent. Unfortunately for Alex, Wen Cheng didn't know a lot about how Intents worked, only how it was acquired.

So, for the next 2 hours, he made Alex fight with him using solely a sword and nothing else. It was similar to his fight with the lionesses, except he didn't have his life in danger.

Still, Wen Cheng didn't hold back when he hit him. Every single strike, he put in enough force to leave Alex gasping for breaths. Alex needed to learn Intent, and simple training wasn't going to achieve that.

Finally, Wen Cheng stopped after seeing Alex have a hard time even standing up. "Alright, let's stop here for today. We will continue it tomorrow," he said.

"Arghh..." Alex grunted as he stood up. "Okay master," he said.

"Sigh, I'm sorry I can't teach you anymore. I don't know Sword Intent myself," Wen Cheng said.

"It's okay, Master. I can learn it myself," Alex said. "I will leave for now."

"Alright, go and cultivate. Since it's Sunday tomorrow, you can take the day off too," Wen Cheng said.

"No, I will come back, master. I need to learn," Alex said.

"Sigh, do what you must. I will be here if you need me," Wen Cheng said.

Alex nodded and left. It was close to 10 pm the night, and the air was getting chilly too. 'It's starting to get cold here too, huh?' Alex thought.

His body hurt quite a bit, but it was slowly healing itself. So long as his body didn't have broken bones or really bad wounds, his normal Qi would heal itself up.

Still, he had quite a few internal wounds this time and he couldn't just wait for it to get healed while he kept hurting all the time. So, he brought out a pill and ate it.

Soon, the energy from the pill washed over his entire body and healed him from inside out. "Ahh, that feels better," he said.

"Sword Intent... so,? master can't teach me much about it, huh?" Alex thought. "I guess I can still learn it on my own."

He returned back to his room and started cultivating with Pearl. Before he knew it, as every single time, he fell asleep.

He woke up in the morning and stopped cultivating. He logged out to have breakfast with the ladies and returned soon enough.

"Should I continue trying to improve the pills?" He wondered for a few moments before choosing not to. Any improvements he could make now would be minuscule in comparison to what he would learn if he learned the formations.

"I should try and make the True formations in the formation plates I bought. Although, I will need master's help to test them later on," Alex thought.

So, he left his room and went to the Production hall. There was quite a large number of people who had decided to make stuff on their free day.

Alex walked up to the elder and got a formation making room for the entirety of the day to try and learn his formation carving skills.

The formation-making room was just a simple room with a Formation tester inside. Aside from that, it was just a sturdy room where Alex didn't have to worry about making formations of any kind

He first started with the common formations and made those. Once he felt like he was ready, he moved on to the True rank formation plates.

The True rank formation plates were definitely must stronger to carve on than the common rank ones.

"It seems I will have to take it slow or I will make too many mistakes," he thought and took his time with every single stroke he made.

By the end of the day, he only made 3 True rank formations that ranged from 36% to 51%. He stopped there and walked out of the room at around 4 pm.

"Do I go train next?" he wondered. He wanted to go directly to his Master's manor and start training again, but he realized that might not be the best choice.

He had someplace else in mind that he thought was the best choice to go right now.

Chapter 428 - Challenge

Alex walked up the mountain towards his master's manor but didn't go there. Instead, when he reached the top of the mountain, he took a left.

He searched for the house and didn't take long to notice it. This house looked remarkably better than the one he was living in, almost to the same level as his senior sister.

He walked up to the door and knocked on it.

KNOCK KNOCK

He waited for a while and finally heard the door click open. Slowly, the door opened and a young man stepped out of the house. He had a lean and stoic body with a handsome face that was underused thanks to his usual emotionless face.

"Hello bother Yuhan, do you have some time?" Alex asked.

Du Yuhan looked at Alex with a weird look on his face. "I heard you were alive. Congrats," he said. "Say quickly what do you want?"

Alex gave an awkward smile when he saw how on point Du Yuhan's conversations were. He really wasn't one for the small talks.

"I was hoping you could teach me the ways of the sword," Alex said.

"... Just ask your teacher," Du Yuhan said and closed the door, leaving Alex alone.

KNOCK KNOCK

He knocked on the door again, and Du Yuhan opened it again. "What?" he asked.

"Master can't help me. I need to learn about the Sword Intent," Alex said. "You are the only person I know that is farthest in their understanding of the sword," Alex said.

"... you want to learn Sword Intent?" he asked.

"Yes," Alex said.

"What makes you think you can learn it?" he asked.

"I already have some achievement in it, but it's at a rudimentary level," Alex said.

This caught Du Yuhan's attention for sure. "You know Sword Intent?" he asked.

"Yes," Alex said happily. It seemed he was about to get what he wanted.

"Then you are already on your way. Learn on your own," Du Yuhan closed the door once again and disappeared. This time, no matter how much Alex knocked, he did not open the door.

In the end, Alex had to leave with no result. He went to his master and trained for another 3 to 4 hours. Even Pearl joined in on this fight.

His skills which he improved over the course of the month-long entrapment were definitely getting refined so that they didn't have glaring problems he might have missed here and there, but his Sword Intent wasn't getting improved at all.

Wen Cheng tried his best, but he didn't know Sword Intent like people who had grasped it did.

Alex really did need Du Yuhan's help. So, he decided to ask for it tomorrow.

He left for the night and cultivated the entire night. He also gave Pearl a monster core to break through fast and help him get a stronger body.

When Alex woke up in the morning, he saw that the plan was working. Pearl was now at Organ Tempering 6th realm in cultivation base, which meant his body cultivation was the same too.

He smiled and logged out. He had breakfast with the ladies and went to his classes with Emily. His assignments were done, so he only had to wait for the exams now. After that, he would move on to the 2nd semester of the 1st year.

Alex returned back home and had his afternoon lunch with Emily. They talked for a while and decided to go to the amusement park soon on a romantic outing.

Alex was glad that his obsession with the game hadn't hindered his budding relationship with Emily. He was super grateful for her to be so understanding of him.

After lunch, he returned back to the game and logged in. Once he was up, he decided to go ask Du Yuhan once again.

He trekked up the mountain again and reached the place with Du Yuhan's house. He walked up to it and knocked on it.

Du Yuhan opened the door and frowned when he saw that it was Alex.

"Stop bothering me," he said.

"Teach me about Sword Intent and I won't bother you again," Alex said.

"Go learn on your own. I'm not teaching you," Du Yuhan said and closed the door. Alex tried knocking again, but it didn't work.

"Sigh, do I really have to do that?" Alex said lightly and walked away from the house. Instead of going back to his home or up to his master's house, he walked to the crater.

Once he reached there, he walked over to the fighting hall and got in the queue. People were surprised when they saw him there. By now, his name was one of the most popular amongst the disciples.

Alex waited until it was his turn and debated whether he should do this or not. However, he couldn't think of any other way, so when it was his turn to register the fight, he made up his mind.

"I would like to register a fight with Du Yuhan, Rank 2," Alex said.

The elder that was about to register the fight stopped. He looked back up towards Alex and asked, "Did you just say Du Yuhan?" he asked.

"Yes, Du Yuhan Rank 2," he said as he handed his badge up to the elder.

"Disciple I want to confirm one last time, do you really mean the 2nd ranked disciple, the direct disciple of the first elder, that Du Yuhan?" the elder asked.

"Yes, Elder," Alex said.

The elder didn't say anything else, but his eyes said everything that needed to be said. He certainly thought that Alex might have gone crazy after his win against Huo Tu.

Alex took his badge and went over to Stage 1 to wait for the battle to finish, and Du Yuhan to come. Alex waited for a while and a few matches went by, but Du Yuhan didn't show up.

However, Alex wasn't worried. If Du Yuhan didn't come here by 9 pm, he would lose his status as the 2nd Ranked disciple. And while he might not care much about it, his Master would lose his status as the 2nd in command of the sect, and he certainly wouldn't let that happen.

So, after an hour and a half of waiting, Du Yuhan came to the sect crater.

"Number 2 and Number 50," the elder himself was very surprised when he announced the number on the stage.

Alex walked up to the stage and so did Du Yuhan, only he looked considerably pissed off. It seemed he didn't like being called to battle so suddenly.

Alex and Du Yuhan walked to the opposite end of the stage and waited for the referee to signal the start.

"Begin!" the elder shouted.

Du Yuhan slowly brought out the garbage-looking common sword. As if copying him, Alex brought out his too. "Please help me learn," Alex said and bowed to Du Yuhan.

Then, he dashed forward and slashed horizontally. Du Yuhan casually brought up his sword to block the attack, but when he felt the impact travel to his arm, he realized that Alex didn't have the same strength as what he was showing.

'He's still hiding his strength?' Du Yuhan thought. The damage he felt was nowhere near the 8th Realm of Meridian Tempering.

Alex on the other hand cursed at himself. Due to being too excited to learn, he couldn't control himself enough to use his Sword Intent.

'This time I will do it,' he thought and attacked vertically this time.

'CUT'

Du Yuhan brought up his sword to block the attack. He knew exactly what damage he was going to get, so he didn't strengthen his hands any further. However, when he saw the slight light on Alex's sword, he immediately got alert and increased his guard.

CLANG

A loud sound was released from the two's clash that did not seem to match the current cultivation base of Alex.

"You really do know Sword Intent," Du Yuhan finally spoke, a little amazement in his eyes. "However, that won't mean I will teach you. It only means that I now have one more rival to fight in the sect."

Immediately, Du Yuhan's sword started lighting up as he slashed towards Alex. Alex dashed backward, but that wasn't enough. As he left, a white slash escaped Du Yuhan's sword and flew towards Alex.

Alex wanted to use only Sword Intent to fight, but that wasn't possible right now. Immediately, his sword turned golden as the metal Qi was pushed into the sword.

"HAH!" he shouted as he used the Smiting blade on the incoming slash.

BOOM

A massive explosion rang out, along with an audible sound of metal dropping to the ground. When the visibility returned, everyone could see Alex on the ground his half of his sword missing.

'Dammit, that was too strong. His attacks are nearly as strong as senior sister's,' Alex thought. He tried to stand up, but suddenly a cold feeling appeared from his neck.

He looked up to see Du Yuhan standing in front of him and his sword on his neck. "You lose," Du Yuhan said. "Don't bother me now."

"I will challenge you when I improve a little," Alex promised.

Du Yuhan stopped for a moment and said, "I felt your strength, and it's not bad. If you want to learn from me, come find me once you reach a similar rank as mine."

"I-I understand," Alex said with a grunt. Du Yuhan took his badge and left. Alex was left there on the ground looking at the crowd awkwardly.

He stood up and walked over to the elder to get his badge. However, he didn't return back to his house once he got it. Instead, he went over to the Fighting hall.

Since Du Yuhan had promised him to teach him once he reached a similar rank as him, Alex now had a clear goal in mind. 'I will need to beat Yang Ma as soon as possible,' he thought.

Alex remembered the red-haired disciple that was the third ranked disciple of this sect and had a Superior Fire spirit root. After losing to Wan Li, his pride had taken quite a hit, and Alex was sure that he would do anything to win against a Hong Wu sect disciple.

So, he would have to fight him sooner or later. Alex hoped it would be sooner since he wanted to learn from Du Yuhan. 'That means, I will have to now rank up like crazy,' he thought.

Alex walked over to the elder in charge of the registration for the fight looked at Alex weirdly and asked, "You want to fight him again? You should know repeat challenges daily are not allowed."

"No, this time I want the person at rank 45," Alex said.

The elder nodded and quickly registered the fight. Alex took his badge and went to stage 15 to wait. After about 20 minutes, a man wearing a core disciple robe appeared.

Alex looked at the man and his cultivation base and snickered a little. There wasn't going to be a problem for a while now.

Once their number was called, Alex and the other disciple walked up to the stage and handed the elder their badges.

The disciple seemed a little scared right now when he saw who his opponent was. The number of disciples that saw his match against Huo Tu wasn't small.

So, by now, everyone knew to avoid Alex if they saw him. The two of them walked over to the opposite side of the stage.

"Begin!" the elder said.

Not missing a beat, the other disciple spoke loudly as well. "I concede."

Alex was a little surprised that there wasn't any fight, but he understood what had happened. He took back the new badge and walked over to the Fighting hall to queue up once again.

As long as he had any energy in his body, he would continue fighting the higher-ranked disciples.

Chapter 429 - Shan Ling

Alex placed his badge on the wooden block next to his door to open it. A simple light flashed from inside the block that illuminated the number 13 on the badge.

That was the rank he had reached in the last 4 days Of fighting.

He didn't increase his rank very quickly as he was afraid the elders would retaliate in some ways. Unfortunately for him, they did.

Ever since he reached rank 20, the elders made their lower-ranked disciples target him consistently. During the entire 5 hours he had yesterday, he could only increase his rank by 7, and that was after directly challenging the person at rank 13.

He walked out of his house with his badge vibrating nonstop. He was already challenged by someone just to waste his. However, that was not going to stop him.

He made a commitment to get rank 3 to learn Sword Intent from Du Yuhan and he would see to it.

There was one benefit to all of this constant fighting, however. Thanks to it, he was now one realm higher in his cultivation base and was one realm away from entering the Mind Tempering realm.

He reached the sect crater at around 4 pm and spent the next hour defeating the low-rank disciples sent at him by the elders.

Once that was done, he walked over to the Fighting Hall and recorded a fight with the person at Rank 10. The elder recording the fights was used to Alex challenging high-ranked disciples by now, so he registered it without a peep.

Now that he was done challenging, Alex went to the production hall to make some formations. Since the elders wanted to minimize the 'casualties', their disciples were made to go to the fighting stage as late as possible.

There was also the chance of Alex not being there when the disciples came to fight, but if that happened, he would simply challenge someone else.

For the next 3 hours, he made as well of a formation as he could. Even when making True Rank formation plates, he was used to consistently making ones above 50% Efficiency.

"The real test is when I carve the formation onto the metal rod. That's what really matters in the formation," Alex thought to himself.

Once he was done, he walked outside. He left the building and walked towards the fighting stage. The sky was fully dark by now and the stars were already out.

The moon wasn't full, but the light still shined brightly. However, it couldn't hope to outshine the lanterns that were hung around the sect.

Alex was reminded of the festive atmosphere for a second before he saw all the fighting happening on the different stages and immediately lost all feelings. It was a good reminder of where he was at.

He walked over to the first stage and waited for his name to be called out. It was nearly 9 pm, and he got no message about himself losing the match, so his opponent had to come here any moment now.

"Number 10 and Number 13," the referee elder on the stage called.

Alex raised his hands and walked up. At the same time, another disciple raised their hands and walked up to the stage.

Alex saw a girl with blonde hair walk up to the stage. 'Oh, a player?' Alex wondered. While hairs with color weren't impossible to come across, they were still quite rare.

So, when he saw the blonde hair, his first instinct was to assume that the girl was a player. Alex remembered back to the list of names for the board and tried to remember the person at the 10th rank on the board.

'Shan Ling? That sounds... normal. Is she not a player, but a normal person from here?' Alex wondered. He could see that she had a cultivation base of Mind Tempering 1st realm, 1 realm above him, and wondered how easily he could win against her.

Still, it was quite surprising that the top 10 were already in the Mind Tempering realm. 'The sect seriously didn't bother taking any other disciples than the top 3 for the combat-related competition huh?' Alex thought.

"I see... so you are the new kid that's going up in ranks quite quickly. Unfortunately, you met me, kid," Shan Ling said.

"Aren't you like 23? Why are you calling me a kid?" Alex asked curiously.

"Well, you are not completely wrong... but I am quite old mentally," the girl said.

"I see," Alex said. 'Yep, that's a player. I wonder if she got a young corpse to be her clone, or if she was able to hide her age somehow,' Alex thought.

He walked over to the edge of the stage and got ready for the referee. He brought out a common sword and watched the girl see if she would bring out something.

Surprisingly, he saw nothing being brought out. However, since the girl's sleeves were quite long, they were already hiding her hands, so Alex didn't know if she was holding a weapon, to begin with.

'Should I check?' he wondered but decided not to. He was trying to temper himself through the fighting, so it would be better if he learned to survive against an unknown fighting style.

'She's probably an Elemental attack user,' he thought.

"Begin!" the elder shouted.

Immediately, Alex dashed forward to close the gap between them. That was the best way to fight against an Elemental fighter. Invade their space and take away their freedom of using skills by sending a barrage of physical attacks.

However, just as he started to dash forward, Shan Ling did the same thing and dashed forward too. She suddenly brought out her hands from inside the sleeves and revealed something long in her hands.

'Weapon?' Alex wondered. However, he soon realized what it was. 'Long nails!' he thought in surprise. He wasn't in the correct stance when he reached her, but he still chose to swing the sword.

His strike wasn't as strong as it should have been, but it still had a considerable force behind it.

CLANG

The sword was stuck in its place. "Urgh!" Shan Ling grunted a bit under the sword's force but was able to stop it.

"Damn, you're strong kid. But you won't beat my nails," she said and suddenly pushed his sword back. Then, she lunged forward and tried to claw him with her incredibly durable nails.

'It can't be, right?' Alex thought as he blocked attacks.

CLANG CLANG CLANG

He was slowly getting pushed back due to her attack, and he needed to use one of his own. However, since he was forcing himself to stick with the sword, it was quite hard to find an opening.

'What will happen to her hands if I use Sword Intent? Will I cut through it?' Alex worried. That was one of the reasons he was getting pushed back so hard. Since the lady didn't seem to have any armors from what he could see, any attack could be fatal, and from what he could see, the referee wasn't close by at all.

'Screw it,' he thought and decided to attack. He immediately focused on his own will to cut and created Sword Intent out of it.

He brought the sword up above his head and slashed down. An almost visible white line appeared around the sword as it flew downwards.

The woman brought her fingers up to block it, but this time she was going against the force of both Alex and his Sword Intent.

Without a single mistake, Alex cut through 8 of her nails in one clean sweep. Shan Ling was surprised and immediately ran backward, but Alex wasn't going to let her.

He followed her and started attacking. He swung his sword left and right at her, but somehow she was dodging it way too well. 'Damn, did she get lucky and get a fantastic movement technique?' Alex wondered.

Suddenly, Shan Ling blew out air in the middle of him chasing and brought out something from her storage bag. Alex tried to see what it was, but suddenly, he started getting a little dizzy.

'What?' he thought as he saw Shan Ling put something in her mouth through his double vision.

'Am I drunk?' he thought for a second before realizing. 'No, I'm poisoned.'

The moment he thought that, Shan Ling jumped towards him again. However, at the same time, he also got a set of notifications.

<Toxic Substance detected>

<Sun God's Divine Yang body disintegrates everything>

<Toxins have been destroyed>

<No Qi found>

The poison in his system was destroyed and he immediately got his vision back.

Shan Ling was just upon him with her broken fingernails and slashed towards him once again. Alex was too late to block with his sword and was forced to protect himself with his elbow.

Just then, the broken fingernails of Shan Ling immediately grew out until it was the same length as before and sliced at him. The fingernails were strong enough to put a scratch on even him, although they weren't enough to make his elbow bleed.

"What?" Shan Ling said with surprise. But it didn't look like she cared about actually cutting him.

Alex felt himself get dizzy again and started to lose his vision. He got the set of notifications that said his poison was removed, but just then, Shan Ling scratched him again.

And it all started all over again.

Poisoned, Cured. Poisoned, Cured. That was what continued for nearly a minute as Alex refused to step back or stumble onto the ground. Now that he knew her nails couldn't truly harm him, he was standing his ground.

Shan Ling frowned too. Even though her nails were strong, they were somehow losing to Alex's body, which she couldn't understand. As she scratched more and more, her nails started to wear down and ground down to about half the length of what they originally were.

'Do I need to eat it once more?' she thought. She remembered the auctioneer saying that eating twice only gave half the effect for the second pill, so it would be a waste for her to eat it right now.

'Damn it, how is his body healing so fast from these scratches?' she wondered. 'Also, how the hell is he not unconscious yet? Is my poison not entering his body?'

Finally, her nails were ground up so much that she definitely needed another pill. She reached into her bag to get it out, but that was when she realized she had made a mistake.

She had given Alex an opening.

Alex immediately flew backward and kept his distance. Then, he readied his sword. He put his sword sideways as it started to glow green. He was about to use the 2nd strike of the Elusive Heavenly Sword, but it looked a little different from all the other times he had used it.

Other than the light green glow in his sword, there was a bright white outline that appeared but then dimmed. It was bright for another moment and dim one again.

The referee realized what was happening immediately. But Shan Ling didn't seem to know anything.

Alex breathed out and cut the air in front of him with a sole intent in his mind.

'CUT'

A green slash with a moderately white outline flew through the air towards Shan Ling. She who was bringing out a pill tried to dodge, but the slash was way too fast for her.

"Argh!" she shouted in fear, but nothing hit her. The referee had come in time to stop the attack.

The referee's eyes were quite open when he felt the true damage of Alex's attack. 'He's halfway there already,' he thought.

Being the referee of the First stage, he was used to seeing Du Yuhan use Sword Intent from time to time, and the attack he blocked was starting to get there too.

"You Win," the referee said to Alex.

Alex bowed to the elder and took his new badge before leaving behind a stunning stage and audience. He looked at the new badge in his hand and smiled when he saw the number on it.

He was now ranked Top 10 in the sect.

Chapter 430 - Problem

"Woohoo Brother Yu, good job."

"Brother Yu, you are amazing."

"I can't wait to see you reach the Top 3, brother Yu."

"Stop showing off you bastard."

"How dare you beat lady Shan like that!"

Both love and hate were thrown towards Alex's way as he walked down the stage and left the area. He flipped his torn robe to see his clear skin with no scars or scratches.

They were all healed by the time he left the stage. He smiled and went towards his Master's manor under the guise of the night.

'Finally, top 10.' He thought. 'I'm sure things will get only harder from here on. But I should be mostly fine as long as I don't come across some uniquely talented individual,' Alex thought.

He had a lot of things about challenging people and such in his mind. He was both looking forward to and not looking forward to tomorrow since there would be limitless challenges for him and he would have to accept each one in under an hour or he would lose his rank again.

Furthermore, he was sure there would be people ready to register to fight against him the moment he finished one, so he couldn't even register another one.

His only chance was making sure he was early to the Fighting hall and registering a match on his own first.

'Yeah, I should do that. I should skip breakfast if I have to,' he thought and walked directly to his Master's manor. He entered the manor and went to the training hall, but no one was there.

"Huh? Is Master not here yet?" he wondered and waited for a few minutes, but he still didn't come.

"Uh, I will just go and spend some time in sister's house," he thought and walked back out of the training hall. He went back into the manor and was about to exit it outside when he heard muffled voices coming from somewhere.

'People are here?' Alex was surprised and sent out his spiritual sense. He then saw his senior sister and Master in a room, talking to each other.

'Oh, the master is already here. And sister hasn't left yet?' Alex was surprised and walked towards the room. As he got closer, he could hear clearer sounds of the two of them speaking.

"...ter is still quite vague, but I'm scared, master." Alex could hear Luo Mei's voice coming from a room nearby.

"But I still don't think if it's a good idea. Especially, given the current situation of the empire," Wen Cheng said. "With all the beast invasion happening, I don't know if I'm okay with you going on your own."

"I'm not going to be alone. Mengmeng will be with me," Luo Mei said.

"She needs your protection rather than you ne— Oh, little Yu, you are here," Wen Cheng said as he looked towards the door.

Alex slowly opened the door and walked in. Wen Cheng looked quite serious sitting on the sofa. He then looked towards his senior sister and nearly felt his heart drop when he saw her red eyes with tears filled to the brim.

"Wh-What's wrong, sister? Why are you crying?" Alex asked.

"Sigh, you don't have to worry about it. Just go back to the training hall, or rather just go back to your house. There won't be any training today," Wen Cheng said.

"It's okay, master. Let him stay," Luo Mei said.

"Sigh, alright. Come here and sit little Yu," Wen Cheng said.

Alex went next to Wen Cheng and sat down. "So, what's going on? Are you in any trouble, sister?" he asked.

"I just got a message from my father. It said that he has been ill for a little while and they can't find any cure. If nothing improves then he—? then he—"

Luo Mei covered her face with her hands and started crying. Alex understood what was happening. 'Sister's father is dying?' he thought to himself in surprise.

"Wait, can we not do anything? What about the doctors? Are there none?" Alex asked.

"Due to the beast attacks, no alchemist is moving around the empire at all. So, we can't even check to see what is wrong with him," Wen Cheng said.

"I'm leaving right now, master. I need to go check on my father," Luo Mei said.

"As I said, it's dangerous for you to go alone. Wait until the morning and I will get you registered on a caravan that's going out. That way, we can get some people who protect the caravan to protect you too," Wen Cheng said.

"But Mast—"

"No buts! It's not just the beasts I'm worried about. There are bandits out there too. You think I won't be worried?" Wen Cheng said.

"If it were any other time, I would've gone along with you to see my dear friend. However, I have too many responsibilities to do so right now. The beasts could attack any minute now, the sect's finances are in shambles, and we are one step away from having to take drastic measures."

"So, just do what I say and leave tomorrow morning. It will only take 2 days to reach Rubyroad City anyway," Wen Cheng said.

Luo Mei wanted to argue more, but in the end she nodded and agreed.

"Should I go as well, Master?" Alex asked suddenly.

"What? Why would you go?" Wen Cheng asked.

"I can be of support to sister. Also, didn't you say they were lacking alchemists? I can help with that," Alex said.

"Huh? Can you diagnose people too?" Wen Cheng asked.

"Uhh, no, not yet. But with my memories, I can just go read the books in the library and be done with. I can also go make simple pills if need be," Alex said.

"What about your rank in the sect?" Wen Cheng asked.

"That can pause for a while. Besides, all I do is fight fodder 10 times before fighting a single strong person. It's getting a bit boring now," Alex said.

"Sigh! Alright, Fine." Wen Cheng gave up. "I will go set it all up. You go and rest for now," Wen Cheng said to Luo Mei.

"I will go to the library right now," Alex said and stood up. He quickly said his goodbye and went towards the library.

He could read the books that weren't techniques for free thanks to his divine sense, so he did that without any hesitation. He wasn't going to spend so many spirit stones for the records.

'Not that I think about it, I do need a few techniques too,' Alex thought and walked around, looking for techniques while he studied the medical books in the library. The knowledge in them didn't seem very extensive, but he was planning on buying the better ones in big cities anyway.

The techniques however were pretty useful for the current him. He got all the skills that he could get and left with them after he finished reading through the medical knowledge.

"I want to rent these books," he said to the elder.

The elder looked at the pile of books on his hand and asked, "You do know that you can only rent books for a week, right? And you don't get any discount for the techniques,"

"Yes, I'm aware," Alex said.

"And you still want to rent it all?" he asked.

"Yes" Alex nodded.

"Very well," the elder said as he took the pills and calculated the price. "Its 8 True Spirit stones," he said.

Alex nodded as he looked through the books he had. Only one book amongst these book was even worth any money in his opinion, but he needed to all if he wanted to improve himself at all. So, he paid the money and walked out.

He went back to his house which was just a house lane below Luo Mei's house and walked in.

It was dead in the night by now, so he had two choices. He could either go through his memories to understand the concept behind the procedure for diagnosis for his medicinal knowledge, or he could learn the techniques he had just brought back.

When he thought about it, only the techniques made the most sense to him. So, he poured out the techniques from his storage bags and started reading through them all.

These books were all simple techniques that were either Mortal Grade or Earth Grade in strength. He had strong techniques, and that wasn't what he was looking for.

He separated one book from the pile and called out Pearl.

"You need to practice this technique, okay?" he said.

"Meow?" Pearl questioned.

"No, I will read it to you. Just remember while you are in your space, okay?" he asked.

"Meow!" Pearl said with a bright smile. Alex smiled too and started reading the book to Pearl. Pearl had the comprehension level of a child, but thanks to his Spiritual sea opening, he should have been able to remember it all.

Once he comprehended what all of the words Alex had just said were, it would depend on his talent to understand it.

'The technique is metal aligned, so it should work for Pearl right?' Alex thought. Once he was done, he sent Pearl back into his beast space and continued reading the rest of the book.

The simple books took barely any time to read and learn thanks to his God Grade talent. Once he was all done, he close the books and started practicing what he could.

Once it was morning, he stopped.. It was time to leave with his sister.