

## Alchemy 511

### Chapter 511: Level Up

"Tempering skin, huh?" Alex asked. He remembered that it was only the skin of Song Zun that was tough. Once he broke through that with the Ebony sword, the rest of Song Zun wasn't so tough.

"So I can use it to make my skin more durable too? Can you teach me how?" Alex asked.

"Do you have knowledge of formations?" the zebra asked.

"A little, yes," Alex said. "I'm an alchemist by profession, but I dabble in formations too."

"If you can understand the terminologies, then I can teach you," the Zebra said.

"Every formation has nodes where the different strokes meet up at. For example, this formation has 10 separate nodes. What you will have to do to make it work automatically is put your energy source around the ingredient."

"However, you cannot just put it just randomly. Each node must have the same ratio of energy as the strokes in the nodes. Also, depending on the distance between each of the adjacent nodes, you may or may not have to add even more energy to the nodes."

"Once you are done, and it is perfect, the energy will start to flow on its own, and the formation will automatically start. At that point, the formation will last for as long as the energy remains," the Zebra said.

"Oh, so I don't need to worry about making a mistake right? Since the formation won't even start if I made a mistake," Alex asked.

"Yes. You can make as many changes as you want. You can even stumble upon the correct answer by just trying. Just hope that there aren't other formations that work with the same energy source but have a slightly different formation design," the Zebra said.

Alex nodded when he heard that. "Can I use other formations without metal as well?" he asked.

"I mean, you can, but I don't see why you would. Using formations without metals, especially at the Saint rank and below is a lot less efficient than using metal as support."

"Not only is the efficiency bad, but you also can't even keep the formation continuously running since the energy in it will die. Then you will have to use another batch of energy source and put them in the same pattern all over again."

"There is no reason people in the saint realm or below should even try to make anything other metal-based formation plates and rods," the Zebra said.

"I see," Alex said. "Thank you, sir. That was all I wanted to ask."

"This enemy of yours you got this formation from... be careful of him. He might be in league with some very strong individuals to be able to get such fearsome formations," the Zebra said and walked back in.

Alex didn't even get to say anything else before the Zebra was gone back to his hut-like home.

"Was that the answer you were looking for?" Yao Jia asked.

"Yes, that was exactly what I needed to know," Alex said.

"Good for you. Let's return now."

They returned back to the palace and separated. Just before they went their ways, Alex asked for permission to use some area to make formations for himself.

Yao Jia told him he could use one of the empty rooms right by his room and left. Alex smiled and excitedly went back underground.

The more he went in, the more excited he got. The formation was something to be excited about, but that was not the reason why he was so excited right now.

There was something he needed to do before he could use the formation. He went back to his room and found Pearl on the bed.

He meowed when he saw Alex walk in and welcome him back.

"Today's an exciting day, isn't it buddy?" he asked with giddiness in his voice

"Meow?" Pearl asked, not understanding what was so exciting about this mundane day.

"You will find out soon enough," Alex said and got onto the bed. He sat cross-legged and took a deep breath.

"Status," he called out before a blue screen appeared in front of him. The screen had information written on it that made him feel the excitement he was feeling right now.

[Player Name: Yu Ming

Cultivation: Mind Tempering 9th Realm (1,000,000,000 Qi : 100%)

Body: Sun God's Divine Yang Body

Talent: God

Spiritual Roots: 5 elements Yin-Yang roots

Cultivation Method: Starry-Sky Cultivation Method

Qi: 1,128,383,384

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The breakthrough button was bright green, and everything was set. Alex felt his heart start to beat faster as his hands refused to follow his orders. Finally, he controlled himself and slowly reached for the button.

And he pressed Breakthrough.

Alex felt it happen. All the Qi that was hiding all over his body started moving in unison. It was different from any feeling he had felt while breaking through up until now.

The Qi started following a certain path around his body through the meridians, which Alex had never seen them do. He had no clue why his Qi was even taking that path, but for some reason, his body seemed to be familiar with that path and it allowed the Qi to do its own thing.

Alex thought about it for a second and his eyes went wide. "No way, is this the cultivation route my Qi takes every day?" he asked himself.

He had always fallen asleep when cultivating, so he never knew what happened during those moments. This was the only time he could see and feel the cultivation happening in real-time without falling asleep.

The Qi in his body slowly started to get denser and denser by the second and soon all of it had turned denser to the point where it was basically the True Qi his body made every time after cultivation.

He was simply watching it happen in real-time right now. Once all of the Qi in his body turned to True Qi, including the ones that were hidden most of the time, he felt a slightly muffled boom coursed through his entire body.

He had broken through. Notifications started appearing, congratulating him for successfully breaking through.

"Nice," Alex said as he felt his own cultivation base. What he was feeling now was many times stronger than what he was feeling just moments ago.

Breaking through to the True realms had increased his strength by a lot. He was about to get up from bed to check himself properly when another set of notifications arrived, notifications that made his eyes pop out in surprise.

«Your Spiritual Roots and Talent satisfy the conditions»

«[Alchemy God's Knowledge] has successfully leveled up»

[Alchemy God's Manual:

Grade: Earth (Growth)

Level 1:

Unlocked: You have knowledge of all alchemy material.

Unlocked: Can learn any alchemy recipe instantly.

Unlocked: +50% chance to produce an extra pill during alchemy.

Level 2:

Unlocked: You can tell the age of Alchemy materials

Unlocked: You can tell the elemental alignments of all materials

Unlocked: You have a chance to improve Common rank recipes

Level 3 is required to Unlock more

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Alex was really very shocked when he saw that. He had expected to see something like this long ago but had long since lost his hope for it.

So, when he finally saw the notifications, he was really surprised. "So those levels really do come every major realm," he thought.

He was about to look through the newly unlocked skills of his Alchemy God's Knowledge when suddenly more notifications came his way.

«Your Spiritual Roots and Talent satisfy the conditions»

«[Flame Mastery Scripture] has successfully Leveled up»

[Flame Mastery Scripture

Grade: Earth (Growth)

Level 1:

Unlocked: Can freely control existing fire and influence its temperature

Level 2:

Unlocked: Can create fire and influence it with greater control.

Unlocked: Fire Energy deal reduced damage to you

Level 3 is required to Unlock more

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"Oh god, I forgot this was even a thing. That's right, this too was a growth ability, wasn't it?" he thought. He was a little disappointed with the new unlocks since he had already found himself other ways to create fire, but it was still better than nothing.

Also, the technique wasn't really an Earth grade technique and only was written that since it could grow. It was the growth attribute of the skill that was more important than the grade itself.

And somehow, neither of this two skills had the 'MAXED' attribute to them which was a cause for celebration in and of itself.

Alex opened the Flame Mastery Scripture's information and read it again to make sure he didn't miss anything. From what he could see, there was nothing he could miss even if he wanted to.

He then opened up the Alchemy God's Knowledge and read up on the new unlocks.

"Hmm, knowing the age of an ingredient will be super useful, won't it?" he thought. "That's like having one of those instruments that vaguely checks the age of ingredients."

"As for being able to tell what energy an ingredient is, I can always tell them after I am done with them. I guess it will be useful for new ingredients I have no clue about, but at that point, I'm not sure how useful that information could be," he thought. "Anyway, it's always good to have more information I guess."

Alex read up on the final unlock and fell into thought. "Being able to improve common pills... how exactly does it work?" he wondered. His eyes shined with a hint of anticipation.

"I guess I will have to check it right now."

## Chapter 512: Missing Elements

Alex felt very excited. He didn't even care that he had just broken through to the True realm and might need some time to get used to his new cultivation base.

No. He wanted to try out the new unlocked skills of his Alchemy skill.

"I'll be back in a bit, okay?" he told Pearl and left the room. He walked over to the alchemy room and sat down in front of the furnace.

He brought out his cauldron and let it heat up while he tried to think of the perfect pill to test out his new unlocks with.

"Hm, let's try out the Nail Elongating pill," he thought. Up until now, the best harmony he could create for the said pill was 52%. So, he wanted to try and see if he could improve on it.

"I wonder how the improvements will happen. Will it be similar to the pill splitting Qi that comes out randomly?" he wondered.

He brought out the first ingredient for the pill and immediately 2 distinct thoughts came to his mind. It wasn't a notification or a panel that popped up at all. It was just a simple thought.

The first thought was about the age of the ingredient in his hand. Without even doing anything, he had a distinct idea that the ingredient in his hand was about 2 years and 5 months old.

That age however did not include the time since the ingredient was picked up and only how long it had grown before it was picked up.



The thought about age was a simple one, and so was the next thought about the energy of the ingredient.

However, that one thought alone made him feel like a whole new path of alchemy had been opened up to him.

The first ingredient was Black Vine Water. It wasn't a liquid ingredient, but a vine that held water elements in it. At least, that was what Alex had come to learn about the ingredient up until now.

However, the information he was getting in his mind now was different. The thought that had randomly popped up was that the Black Vine Water he held in his hands contained all 7 of the different energies and not just water.

Only thing was that the Water energy it held was in far superior number than any of the rest.

"An ingredient can have all the energies in it. How does that not mess up an alchemy session?" Alex wondered. "Also, is this a one-time thing or what?"

He brought out the next ingredient on the list which was a Red leaf from the Mulberry tree. It was supposed to be a Wood Element ingredient, however, the information he was getting was once again very different.

Similar to the Black Vine Water, the Red Leaf too had all 7 elements in it, and only the Wood element was in high number.

"Wait, so it's all of the ingredients that have it all?" he wondered and started bringing out every ingredient he had for that recipe.

Every single one of the ingredients was as suspected. They all had the 7 different energies in them, with only a single one that was very high in number.

"That's not true, right? How is that possible?" Alex thought. His basic understanding of Elements and Elemental theories was starting to have tears in them. He was starting to have doubts that what he knew was even true at all.

"No, wait. The theories perfectly work when making pills. So maybe these energies don't really have much effect when we use them. That should be it," Alex thought.

He then casually brought out a True rank ingredient to see if the information held true for those as well.

"Hmm," Alex was a little surprised when the information for the True rank ingredient came to his mind.

As expected, the information about age was similar. The ingredient was about 7 years old. However, the information about Energy was slightly different.

The ingredient he had gotten should have had high Fire energy with the rest 6 being very low in amount.

However, what it actually was was that the ingredient had high Fire Energy with only 5 other energies being in low amounts.

One of the energies from the list was missing. It didn't take very long for Alex to realize that the Earth energy was missing.

He brought out another few True Rank ingredients and checked them out as well. As expected, each one of that ingredients had one energy missing from the list of 7.

"Hmm... is it True rank because an energy is missing? Or is the energy missing because it's True rank?" Alex wondered.

Alex wanted to know if it was the missing of energy that made the Primary energy so strong, or if the energy was missing because the Primary energy was so strong.

"Wait, is there even a logic to what energy is missing?" he wondered. He picked back up the first ingredient with the Fire energy that had the Earth energy missing.

He kept that in mind and brought out another of the same ingredient. That too had Earth energy missing.

Alex then went ahead and looked through the other ingredients and noted which ones were missing.

With that information in hand, it didn't take long for him to realize what energy would be missing from each of the ingredients.

"It's the energy that Weakens it," Alex said out loud. Looking at the first ingredient, the ingredient had Fire energy.

Water that Controlled Fire was there. Metal that Ruined Fire was there. And finally, Wood that Empowered Fire was also there.

However, Earth that Weakened Fire was no longer there.

The other ingredients followed the same rule as well. Any energy that weakened the primary energy was missing from the ingredient.

"So, I can freely say that True rank ingredients always have 1 missing element, that being the one that weakens right?" he thought.

"If I were to guess that the weakening Energy not being there was the reason why an ingredient became True rank, then I would be wrong. That wouldn't explain why the primary energy is what it is. Also, that wouldn't answer why some other energy didn't leave first."

"So, the correct assumption would be that it was the primary energy that got rid of the energy that weakened it," Alex thought.

He was happy to learn something new today when suddenly he remembered something. "Wait, what about Saint rank ingredients?" he thought.

He had never really used Saint Rank ingredients, so he didn't even know what ingredient had what energy.

However, thanks to the unlocked skill, he could do so without having to waste the ingredients now.

Alex brought out a wooden box with the ingredient inside and opened it up. As he looked at it, all 3 information entered his mind.

The ingredient was called a Demon Moon Grass, and it was about 26 years old. The first two pieces of information were normal and he was expecting them, albeit they too were a little intriguing.

However, the third piece of information took him by surprise once more. The Demon Moon Grass was an ingredient with Earth as the primary energy. The thing that was surprising however was the fact that the ingredient not only had an element missing but it had 2 elements missing.

Alex could see that the Demon Moon Grass had Metal and Water energy missing from the list. This was likely due to the Earth energy being very strong to the point that only Saint Qi could control it.

However, Alex was once more stuck with finding logic behind the missing ingredients.

"If I go by last time's logic, then Metal which Weakens Earth should be missing, and it is. Then, since Water is also missing from an ingredient with Earth primary element, can I assume that the second energy missing is something that Ruins the primary element?" Alex wondered.

He brought out the other Saint rank ingredients he had and weighed their information against his new theory.

"I was right," he thought with a massive smile. He put the ingredients back into his storage bag and started wondering about the reason why it was all happening.

Unfortunately, he couldn't see any logic behind why only Weakening and Ruining elements were disappearing.

Unable to understand anything, he decided to give up for now. "Let's just forget about that for now. I should start making the Nail elongating pill."

### Chapter 513: Improving a Recipe

Alex had a recipe for the Nail Elongating pill. It was a recipe he had made himself and he was quite proud of it.

However, he was never able to improve it past making 52% harmony pills and that bugged him a lot. There were too many permutations and combinations he could do with the speed of the ingredients in the cauldron, the rate at which they were heated, and the direction in which they were moved in.

All of these things were very important to making the pill, but they were too many for him to properly know which to change to improve the pill.

Now that he had his new skill unlocked, he was hoping that would automatically tell him what to do.

The cauldron was hot enough, so Alex put in the first ingredient. He followed the recipe and did what was needed, but on the back of his head, he waited for something to happen.

He vigilantly checked for anything that was happening on its own. However, nothing of that sort happened. Everything was going normally as it would.

"Hmm, that's weird," he thought and continued. The True Qi was making it extremely easy to control the ingredient and the energy in the cauldron.

Somehow he felt like if he used Elemental guidance now, he could easily guide the energy without missing the tiniest amount.

He put in the second ingredient and moved it around. He waited for something to happen, but nothing did once again.

"Do I have bad luck or is this not how it's supposed to go?" Alex wondered.

He tried with the next two ingredients once more, but unfortunately, nothing happened. "Maybe I'm doing something wrong," he thought.

He continued normally with the remaining ingredients and soon was close to being done with it. Right before he was finished, the pill-splitting Qi, which he hadn't seen for a very long time came out from within him and separated the powder to form two different pills.

The vortex appeared once again above it that pulled in the energy from the cauldron and the two pills were ready.

Alex pulled out the pills and saw that the harmony in them was 25% and 26% respectively. '1% less than ideal. Something must've been wrong with the ingredients,' he thought.

He stored the pills in a ceramic bottle and into his plastic bag. Then he started thinking. "What's going on? What was there no improvement?" he wondered. "Am I missing something?"

Alex was confused, so he opened up the description about Alchemy God's Knowledge and read up on it again.

"Unlocked: You have a chance to improve common rank recipes," he read the main part he was concerned about. Suddenly, his eyes squinted as he read it again.

"Wait... chance? Is that... for every single ingredient I put in? Or for every single pill I make?" he wondered. "If it's for the ingredients, then the chance must be egregiously low, but if it's for each pill then... oh god, how many pills will I have to make before I see any improvements?"

Either way, he would have to make pills for hours on end to see any improvements at all. Now, all he could hope for was that the improvements were so good that he didn't need to make it that many times.

Alex brought another set of ingredients and made the pills once more. While he waited for something to happen, he was realizing an interesting fact about himself at the moment.

Thanks to the common grade pills required not as much Qi during its making, Alex could easily replenish the True Qi he lost while making the pills.

Meaning, if Alex chose to make only common grade pills, then he could likely go for as long as he could mentally handle.

Given that he had gone through the mind tempering realm and had eaten all 3 of the mind improving pill, it was probably going to be multiple days.

Alex put in the 2nd ingredient and continued making the pill. During the whole time once more nothing happened. No extra Qi from in him, no feeling, nothing.

Alex was starting to doubt if something was even going to happen. If it was meant to, it would have happened already.

He was dejected and disappointed at the 52% harmony pill that formed in the end. Still, he didn't let that beat him down and tried once again.

His expectations were at an all-time low, but he kept his hopes up. He brought out another set of ingredients and tried again.

He put in the first ingredient. Nothing Happened.

He put in the second ingredient. Nothing Happened.

He put in the third ingredient. Nothing Happened.

Alex was damn near sure that this one was a failure as well. Then, he put in the fourth ingredient. That was when something happened.

When he put the fourth ingredient in, he was supposed to move the ingredient clockwise about 5 times with each rotation taking about 3 seconds.

The heat at the moment was supposed to be really low to compensate for the rather slow-moving speed of the ingredient.

But, for some reason, when Alex put in the ingredient this time. He didn't want to do that. He could tell that while that would bring out a result, there was another way to bring out a better result.

It was a piece of knowledge rather than a feeling that came from deep in his mind. It felt like a thought that he hadn't thought of himself, so it was a weird experience for Alex.

He let the knowledge move him and instead of going clockwise, he went counterclockwise. The only difference between being clockwise and counter-clockwise was the shape of the ingredient when it was powdered would turn out to be different.

He moved the ingredient at the same speed, with the same temperature, and followed the rest of the recipe.

Not a single piece of information came to his mind after that, but that one information alone left a mark in his mind.

Alex waited for the pill to be made and in the end, the pill-splitting Qi came out to make it into two.

"Dammit, not now," Alex said with a sigh. He wanted to see what results would happen after what he just went through, but the stupid pill-splitting Qi messed it all up.



"Sigh, I hope it's good still," he thought and pulled out the pills. He looked at the first pill and suddenly his eyes went wide.

"31%?" he exclaimed. He couldn't believe how high that one pill was. "Then what about...?" he pulled out the other pill and read its harmony too.

"33%?" he shrieked.

"Huh? Wait, huh? 64% in total? Just by reversing the direction of one ingredient? Is that what I was missing?" Alex was seriously taken aback. He questioned how he could've missed something so simple, however, there was no way for him to know that something like this would've happened.

"I need to try it once again," he thought and took out another set of ingredients. He followed the recipe once more, but this time, he changed what he did for the fourth ingredient to what he did in the last batch.

When he was done with the ingredients, it was time to form the pill. He prayed that the pill-splitting Qi didn't come out, and somehow his prayer was answered.

He managed to make the pill without splitting it into two. "Nice," he said to himself. He pulled out the pill from the cauldron and looked at it.

"58%?" he cocked his head to the side in confusion. 58% was obviously better than the 52% he was making previously, but it was nowhere as good as the 64% he was getting from the two pills.

"What's going on?" he wondered. He decided to try once more.

He went through the whole ordeal of making the pill once more to end up with the pill splitting Qi forming two separate pills.

"No, that's fine. No need to be mad. Let's check this again," he thought and pulled out the two pills.

31% and 32%. He had managed to make two pills with 63% total harmony. That went in line with the other two pills that made 64%.

"I did nothing different though. Why do these end up with 63% and 64% total harmony, while the single one ends up with 58%? Am I doing something differently?" Alex wondered.

He quickly came to the conclusion that something was indeed being done differently, and it was quite obvious at a simple glance.

The pill-splitting Qi formed the pills on their own, while Alex had to make the pills by himself.

"There must be something unique about the formation technique with which the two pills are formed. Maybe there is a secret behind it that allows for the highest amount of energy to be stored in the pills?" Alex thought.

That would make sense since it was something that belonged to the Alchemy God's Knowledge skill. Anything named 'Alchemy God' must be a very high-tier skill after all.

"Maybe I should learn how it works even. It would be great if I learned something from it that improved my pill-making process," he thought.

He put the pill back into a ceramic bottle and started making the same pill once more.

Over and Over, he continued making the pill for an entire night. He didn't waste a single moment and made over 100 pills.

By the time he was done in the morning, he had managed to improve the recipe to a point that he could now consistently make a 70% harmony pill if the pill didn't split into two.

For the first time, Alex was getting close to making an Immortal grade pill whose final energy wasn't Metal.

## Chapter 515: Intense Hea

The light that was shining started getting brighter and brighter now. "Oh shit! What do I do now?" he thought.

He quickly ran to the center of the formation and sat down. "What happens now?" he wondered.

Soon he was starting to feel the heat coming off of the yang jades. "Is this it?" he wondered. The heat wasn't strong at all.

"No way this is it," he thought. That small of heat would do nothing for him. Just then, he felt the intensity of the heat grow a little bit.

"Oh, it's going up," he thought and waited. A few moments later, it got even higher. The heat was so high that it was starting to get a little uncomfortable now.

A few moments later, Alex couldn't stand staying in the center of the formation anymore. It was way too hot.

"No, I must persevere," he thought. He took off his upper robe and threw it towards a corner. He also threw away his storage bags and his ring and sat there with his well-built body.

Beads of sweat formed all over his body as the heat got higher and higher. The uncomfortableness soon disappeared, and all that was remaining was pain.

Alex felt like he was being cooked from all around him. The heat was just way too high.

"Oh no. I got way too hasty," he thought. Just eating a single yang jade would give him quite a pain while it was being digested.

And right now, he was suffering the direct influence of nearly 300 yang jades. He hadn't thought of the consequences when he started this.

"Dammit! Because Song Zun did it, I thought I would have an easy time. That bastard must've used not many yang jades then," Alex thought.

It was either that, or he was very bad at making formations and thus couldn't bring out the same intensity as Alex did. If not, there was no way someone with a mortal body could have survived such a harsh formation.

The pain just kept ramping up as the heat around him got hotter and hotter. Alex tried his best to hang on, but the pain was way too intense.

"Aargh!" he started grunting. He was in more pain than he had been during his cultivation with Pearl in a long while. The only other times he had likely felt more pain was during the first times when his body cultivated.

And yet, the heat was still increasing. The pain was reaching a point where all Alex could do was struggle to keep his wits about everything.

"No! I won't give up. I will survive through it all," he cried out and stayed in there.

The heat he was suffering wasn't normal heat. It was the heat of Yang itself. Even though his body and spiritual roots had yang affinity to it, somehow this Yang was far more potent than either could handle.

So, the pain was all Alex could feel.

Alex's body convulsed as his skin started getting red from the heat. The pain reached a staggeringly high level as splits started appearing on his skin as well.

The hot skin was starting to dry to the point that it was stretching on itself to tear at places. Marks of burnt skin could also be seen all over his body.

Fortunately, that was the extent of the damage. The heat was for some reason not entering his body and he felt nothing on his muscles and organs. It was just the skin that was hurting.

Alex wasn't conscious enough to know that at the moment, however. All of his senses were being fully focused to stop himself from going mad over the pain he was feeling.

The event went on forever, or just an instant. Maybe it was an hour or 10 hours. Was Alex even feeling anything? Why was he feeling so much pain?

Did it stop? Why would it not stop?

Alex couldn't keep his thoughts straight and his mind wandered everywhere. He had lost track of everything and at some point, he even lost track of the pain.

Even then, somehow, he didn't log out. He never lost consciousness during the whole event, so he never logged out.

After some unknown time, Alex could feel the pain once more. His wits were returning to him as he could gather his thoughts to himself to realize what was happening.

He tried his best to ignore the pain and soon the pain itself started growing dull. No, it wasn't growing dull. Rather, the heat was lowering.

Alex had his eyes shut, so he couldn't see anything that was happening outside. He tried to open them, but they wouldn't follow his orders.

He released his spiritual sense to see that all of his body was in ruin. His crusted skin was starting to flake away as new skin was showing up underneath many of them.

Even his eyelids had crusted away and refused to open up. He then looked outside of himself and saw that the lights coming out of the formation were already very low.

The yellow yang jades were looking very pale, and almost white as well.

He struggled for a few more moments and soon it was over. He stood up from the place and felt his entire body make a crackling sound as flakes of dead skin fell onto the floor.

"Ouch!" he said as the pain still existed somewhat. He still couldn't open his eyes, so spiritual sense was all he could use to navigate the room for now.

He took one of the lightless yang jades and saw that it had turned to just jade.

"So, I was successful, right?" he thought. He wanted to test it out, but his skin was hurting way too much to try right now.

"Later," he thought and got his clothes. He cleaned up everything and went back to his room.

"Meow!" Pearl cried out. He wanted to know Alex had been all these hours and why he left him all alone once again.

"Eh? How long was I out?" Alex asked and looked out of the corner of his eyes. "Holy! 2 AM? I was out for over 12 hours?"

He didn't know that such a lot of time had passed while he was in pain. "No wonder I look so bad right now. A night of cultivation should... uh, maybe I shouldn't get pearl to cultivate. It might aggravate my wounds more," he thought.

"Pearl, can you not cultivate today? I'm in pain and I don't want to be in pain anymore," he said.

"Meow!" Pearl said that he wanted to get stronger.

"Just for today. For me. Please?" he asked.

"Meeow~" Pearl accepted his request.

"Thank you," Alex said and got on the bed.

"Meow?" Pearl asked why his eyes were closed.

"Yeah, I'm hurt. So I can't open my eyes. After I cultivate overnight, I will eat a pill tomorrow morning and see how much it helps," he said.

"Meow!" Pearl said.

"Thanks. I hope I get well soon too," Alex said. He picked up Pearl and caught him in his lap. Then, he slowly started breathing in and out, and waited for himself to soon fall asleep.

#### Chapter 516: Cannot Cultivate

It had just been 2 minutes since he started cultivating, but Alex realized that he couldn't fall asleep at all.

"Huh? What's happening?" he thought. Nothing was happening inside him as well. No Qi movement, nothing.

"Damn, did the formation screw up with my body?" Alex wondered. "That can't be. The heat shouldn't have affected my meridians," Alex thought.

"What's going on then?" he wondered and started breathing once more. A few more minutes passed and he realized that it was just not happening.

"Something's wrong," Alex thought. He put Pearl aside and got up. "Is something wrong with me?"

He used his spiritual sense to check everything inside of him. However, he could see that everything was perfectly fine.

"Huh? Is it because I'm hurt?" he wondered. He decided not to wait at all, and brought out a pill from his storage. It was a True rank healing pill that he had made himself and he immediately ate it.

The moment he swallowed the pill, a cool sensation passed through his entire body. The energy rushed through his entire body and soon arrived at his skin.

The cool feeling got rid of the slight heat and pain that he was still feeling and healed the parts where he was hurt. It helped his new skin grow faster and his old skin flaked off of his body.

By the time Alex was done, there was a bunch of old skin on the ground in front of him. He was truly surprised to see such a large amount of skin fall beneath him.

His eyes finally opened and he was a little happy about that. "Sigh, will this help me now?" he thought and sat back on his bed.

He then closed his and slowly breathed in and out. Unfortunately, nothing of what was supposed to happen was happening at all.

"The hell is going on?" he wondered. "Can I not cultivate at all? Is True realm just that—"

He suddenly stopped speaking as a thought occurred in his mind. "Status!" he shouted and a blue panel with his player information appeared in front of him.

His eyes slowly widened as he finally learned what the problem was. "So that's what was happening," he thought.

His eyes fell onto the part on the screen that said that he no longer had a Cultivation method. The Starry Sky cultivation method he had been using all this time was no longer usable at all since he was now in the True Realm.

Now, he had to find a new cultivation method of his own to use. "Damn, where the hell am I supposed to find a cultivation method in this place?" Alex wondered.



Alex sighed seeing no hope and closed the panel in front of him. He then told Pearl that he could cultivate if he wanted to.

Pearl meowed happily and started cultivating. Surprisingly, there seemed to be almost no cut on his skin due to it being way too strong for the cultivation Pearl was in right now.

Still, the inside of his body was in pain. He meditated to keep the pain in check and waited out the cultivation.

Before he knew it, it was early morning and time for breakfast. He logged out and got his breakfast before returning back to the game.

With no way to improve himself, Alex was looking ahead at days that were mundane and monotonous.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the middle of the forest was a massive tree with a hollow trunk. Inside the hollowed-out tree was a girl who was crouched on the floor holding her knees to her chest.

One could see signs of fear in her eyes as she couldn't manage to stop herself from shaking in terror.

The girl looked to be in her mid-20s, and was wearing a lime green robe that was dirty all over.

She jerked in fear when she heard a noise coming from next to her, but felt relieved when she saw that it was the man returning.

The man's age was in the late 20s, or at least that was how he looked physically. With his cultivation base in the True Realm, it wasn't easy to tell exactly what his age was.

He was quite tall and well build, and had a clean-shaven face to make him look younger. He was wearing a red robe with golden embroidery on it.

"Brother Tao, you are back," the girl said with a happy face.

The man looked at her and smiled, but hidden in that smile was a sense of loss.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I just... I just saw a beast kill someone from the Shen family," he said.

The fear in the girl's eyes increased as tears started flowing from it. "I knew it. We are all going to die. We shouldn't have come here at all. We made a mistake," she started crying out loud.

"Sshh, the beasts will hear us," the man said softly.

The girl immediately quietened as much as she physically could. Despite being a cultivator, fear was not something she could easily get rid of.

"Wh-what do we do?" she asked.

"I don't know. But, I think we should try to get away from here for now," he said. "Damn those old foggies. They said it would be a simple adventure, going in and out. They didn't even tell us there were such strong beasts in here."

The girl ignores the complaints. She had them too, but they wouldn't help them live right now. "Where do we even go? I don't even know the way back," the girl said.

"Sigh, me neither. This stupid jungle is way too dense. I can't even see the direction the sun rises up from. Anyway, it isn't wise to stay around here, we need to keep moving so that the beasts won't find us," the man said.

"And do what? There is no place to leave at all," the girl said. "Didn't you listen to the elders? They won't open up the formations until after a full 30 days goes by. There is still nearly half a month left before that happens."

"We will be dead by then," the man said. There was no doubt in his voice. Every single beast they had met until now was not something they could mess around with.

"Come on, there is one hope of survival, and we have to take it," the man said.

The girl wiped away her tears and curiously asked, "What hope do we even have, brother Tao?"

The man took a deep breath and said, "I know the way to open up the formation. If we can get to the platform we entered from, I can get us out."

\* \* \* \* \*

Deep in a forest, but not a very dense one, there was a cave by the side of a small hill. The cave was well hidden amongst the flora of the surroundings and was easy to miss if you weren't looking for it.

Inside the cave were a few people gathered around. A lantern-lit upon the side of the cave wall, and nearly 3 dozen people were surrounding a lone elderly man.

Every single one of the 3 dozen people wore black robes and had long black hair. At the center of them was an important figure that wore a similar robe and had a cultivation base that was much higher than theirs.

The figure wore a black mask with which only the amber-colored eyes were visible and they were staring directly at the old man the group was surrounding.

The old man wore dirty green robes and had thin gray hairs on his head. He showed no fear of being in the midst of the bandit group at all.

"We've heard a lot about you, bandit killer," the boss said in a hoarse voice. "Have you come here to try and kill us too?"

"Depends on how you respond to my proposal," the old man said.

"Your... proposal?" the boss asked. "You came here to make a proposal? For what?"

"There's something I need in a place protected by many. I need your group to act as a diversion while I get it," the old man said.

The boss didn't say anything and kept listening.

"So?" the old man asked.

"So? So what?" the boss asked in reply. "No way, that was not your proposal right?"

"Of course it was. Now answer me, do you agree?" he asked.

"Are you shitting me, old man? That proposal had almost no information in it. Give us something more," the boss said.

"Little girl, that is the most you will get for now. Accept the proposal and you will obviously learn more about your task," the old man said.

"Little girl?" the boss asked in surprise. "It seems you did not come here without doing some homework."

"It's not that hard to guess that the boss of the Black Venom bandit group is a girl. I would be food if I didn't know that by now. So, do you accept or not?"

The boss turned to look at her men who had no mind of joining with the person that was known to mercilessly kill bandits for the last few months.

"What if we don't accept?" the boss asked. Sounds of weapons being pulled out of their sheaths rang out everywhere.

The old man looked around and saw the many weapons being pointed at him. Sword, saber, spears, bows. Every conceivable spear was being pointed at him right now.

He scoffed at them all with a mocking smile.

"Well, then you will force me to keep my Bandit Killer title for a little longer, I'm afraid," the old man said and started pouring out his cultivation base.

The boss' eyes widened in fear when she realized that the old man in front of her was stronger than her, far stronger.

"You are no easy man to deal with, huh?" she said.

She immediately took off her mask to use her voice on him, but the old man suddenly moved and caught her by the throat, refusing to let her talk.

"You can't use your tricks on me, little girl. Now choose. Do you want to work for me? Or do you want to die?"

The girl felt fear like never before. A single misstep and she would surely die at this place. She put her hand forth to stop her men from attacking. Then, she nodded vigorously to let the man know that she and her bandit group would follow them.

"Great. We will go to work in a week. I want every single one of your men on the job that day."

The old man left as freely as he came, but in his wake, he left his terror all around him.

Alex woke up early in the morning to the sound of his alarm. He got up from his bed and put aside his blanket.

He went to the bathroom to freshen up and then made his way to the kitchen.

"Good morning," he said to the three girls that were already having breakfast. He got himself a plate as well and sat down.

He mindlessly ate the food on the plate as he made small talk with the girls.

"Why do you look so tired?" Hannah asked, watching him yawn all the time while eating.

"I do?" Alex asked. "That's probably cause I am."

"What's wrong?" Hannah asked.

"Well, I've been sleeping in my bed this last week, and I've learned that my sleep schedule had been horrible. So I can't go to sleep on time, and end up waking earlier than I should."

"So, I've been feeling a little tired for this past week," Alex said.

"What happened to sleeping in the capsule?" Hannah asked. "Is your capsule broken?"

"No, it's not," Alex said. "But I currently can't cultivate in the game, so I have no point in staying overnight in the game."

"What's wrong?" Sarah asked.

"I broke through to the True Realm," Alex said.

"Oh, congratulations. That's a big step," Hannah said. "So, what's the problem?"

"Well, I don't have any cultivation method to continue cultivating at night. Thus, I've resorted to not spending the night in the game," Alex said.

"Oh," Hannah said. "Have you tried taking one from the internet? You said you learned one a while ago right?"

"I did," Alex said. "But I could only find Earth grade ones, and for some reason, they were impossible to remember all the way through. So I just gave up."

"I would rather find a proper one once I leave where I am," Alex said.

"Okay, you do you," Hannah said and got back to eating her breakfast.

Alex finished his not long after and returned back to his room. He entered the capsule and returned back to the game.

He opened his eyes and immediately felt the pain coarse through all of his body. "Argh! Pearl, can you stop please?" he asked.

"Meow!" Pearl heard him speak and immediately stopped. "Meow?"

"Yeah, I just got done cultivating," Alex lied. Ever since he entered the True realm, he had let Pearl cultivate alone while he left the game to sleep on his own bed.

He looked at the time and saw that it was around 7 am. "Let's go to the garden," Alex said.

"Meow!" Pearl said. He was excited to go fight once more. By now, his cultivation base had reached Mind Tempering 5th Realm, and soon, he too would enter the True realm just like Alex.

'Damn, if I don't improve by then, my body will hurt a lot more, won't it?' Alex thought.

The two of them walked out of the room and went to the garden. Alex stayed in the sun for a while and simply felt too bored to even do anything anymore.

Yao Jia came up to him and said, "Let's go."

"Can we delay the training a little bit? I'm not really improving a lot, so I would rather have some peace for now," Alex said.

"MEOW!!" Pearl cried out that he wanted to train right then.

"Uh, no. You can go, buddy. I was only talking about myself," Alex said.

"Meow!" Pearl said as he smugly nodded to himself and walked away.

"Have fun. I'll see you later," Alex said as he watched Pearl leave.

"Is something wrong?" Yao Jia asked.

"Not really. It's just that I don't have any cultivation method to cultivate, so training isn't as efficient as it used to be," Alex said.

"Ah, I see. Unfortunately, this place doesn't have any cultivation methods for humans," she said.

"It's okay. I will get it somehow," Alex said.

Yao Jia stopped speaking and laid down by his side, basking the sun in peace. They stayed there for a while before Yao Jia remembered something.



"Ah, I have some bad news for you," she said.

"Eh, bad news?" Alex got a little scared. "What is it?"

"Almost half of the people who entered the secret realm have died by now," she said.

"Huh?! Ah, you're talking about the humans?" Alex said.

"Of course," Yao Jia said.

"It's fine. I don't really feel anything for them," Alex said.

"Weird. I thought you would show more emotions towards your own species," Yao Jia said.

"I said it before right? I don't really feel anything for people I don't really know about. I mean, it's not like I don't think it's sad that they're dying, but... it's not really bad news for me. It's just news," Alex said.

"I see, so you don't care about them because they are from the Luminance empire, huh?" she asked.

"Kind of, yes," Alex said. He wondered how different those people must've been. He said he didn't feel anything for them, but there was a sour feeling growing in his heart when he heard that news.

He would've wanted to help them if he could. They must've had families waiting for them to return as well.

"Have you ever been to the Luminance empire?" he asked.

"Ah, no. I haven't left this place ever in my life," Yao Jia said.

"I have always wanted to leave the Crimson Empire and go to the other locations in the world to see how they are. The first location on that would be the Luminance Empire for me. I wonder how it is compared to the Crimson Empire," Alex wondered.

"Ah, you can ask uncle. He's been to the Luminance empire," Yao Jia said.

"Oh no, it's fine. I wanted to know about the more recent stuff. They must only have knowledge about the stuff from years ago," Alex said.

"No, no. Uncle went to the Luminance empire just a couple of months ago. Multiple times at that too," Yao Jia said.

"Eh? He did? I should ask him about that when I see him again," Alex said. "Was there a reason why he went there?"

"Oh, you know, to get a candidate for the throne. When the fountain called out to the bloodline, while my father went to the Crimson Empire, Uncle went to the Luminance empire," Yao Jia said.

"I see," Alex said. "It must've sucked for him then."

"Hmm, why would you say that?" Yao Jia asked.

"I mean, how many times did the fountain call for us again? 4?" Alex asked.

"Uh, I believe 5. But they didn't leave the first time, I think," Yao Jia said.

"Yeah, 4 times. Imagine getting a reaction 4 times to leave and go find candidates only to return empty-handed each time. It must've sucked for him," Alex said.

Yao Jia chuckled a little. "Who said he returned empty-handed?" she asked.

"Huh? He didn't?" Alex asked.

"No, he returned with candidates each time he went out there," she said.

"Oh," Alex was surprised. He wasn't expecting there to have been candidates to be the ruler of this continent before Pearl.

"So Pearl isn't the first one?" he asked.

"No, silly. We've had candidates before," she said.

"I see," He said. "What happened to them? Did they not have enough bloodline or something?"

"Something like that, I would say," Yao Jia said. "All of them failed the ritual."

"So, they weren't successful, huh? Poor guys, they lost their chance at making it big in the future," Alex said. "Are they still in the palace? Can I talk to them?"

"What?" Yao Jia's expression changed when she heard that. "Why would you want to talk to them?"

"Oh, it's nothing. Pearl is getting stronger and stronger each day and soon enough he will enter the True realm. After that, it shouldn't be long before he is made to go through the ritual."

"I don't know much about the ritual, so I wanted to ask them if their experience with it was good or bad. I really don't want Pearl to go through pain if he can," Alex said.

Yao Jia looked at him dumbly without uttering a single word back.

Alex looked at her confusedly and asked, "Are they not here? Can I not talk to the candidates?"

Yao Jia continued looking at him dumbly and finally uttered a sentence.

"You cannot talk to any of them. All of the candidates that went through the ritual are already dead."

#### Chapter 518: Confrontation

"What?" Alex asked with a stunned face. After spending nearly 2 months in this place, this was the first time he was learning of this information.

"They died? All the candidates did?" he asked.

"Yes, every single one of them," Yao Jia said softly.

Alex had already thought of the worst possible scenario that could've happened to them, so he deluded himself to thinking maybe that was not the case.

"Did they suffer from some sort of injury during the ritual that killed them later on?" he asked.

"No," Yao Jia said. "There was no injury or anything. They just couldn't handle the ritual and died before they even finished it."

Alex suddenly stood up, his face pale with fear. "And you guys want to let Pearl go through that?" he asked.

Yao Jia shrunk a little. "We have to, I think. That is the only way to find a successor now that the fountain won't form any more drops of blood for a long time," she said.

"No way. I won't allow it. Where are your father and uncle? I want to talk to them," Alex demanded.

"I don't know if they will—"

"I don't care for their permission. I won't be sitting still while they want to play with my Pearl's life," Alex said with a furious face. "If you won't tell me then fine, I will go find them myself."

Yao Jia tried to say something, but Alex ignored her. Pearl's safety was the most important thing for him, and so he ignored everything that didn't concern that point at the moment.

He suddenly turned around and left for the underground palace. That was the only place any of the 3 could even be in at the moment.

It was either the Palace hall, the training room where the Puma trained Pearl, or the library. It was already daytime, so he cut off their living quarters from the list of places they could be at.

There was also the fountain where the ritual would take place, but he doubted they would be there.

Still, there were chances they could be elsewhere as well, so the moment he entered the underground corridor, he immediately spread out his spiritual sense in all 4 directions.

Having gone through the Mind Tempering realm and eating the 3 pills that improved his mind, he now had a spiritual sense that spread nearly 80 meters in all directions.

When stretched to the extreme, Alex could spread it up to 120 meters. With this, he could easily search the underground palace without any worries of missing anything.

He walked around the underground while looking through every corner of it, and for the first time realized that there were so many metal rods hidden amongst the ceiling.

He did not understand what the metal rods were for, nor did he care. He simply walked around searching for any of the 3 saint realm beasts he could find.

"Boy, what insolence is this?" A voice entered his mind that belonged to the Puma. He had noticed Alex using spiritual sense in the hallway before Alex's spiritual sense had even reached him.

"Where are you, Senior? I want to talk to you," Alex said.

"I don't have the time, boy. Go away," the puma said with a bored voice.

"No, you will have to speak to me. I am not going to let you guys make Pearl go through the ritual," Alex said.

"What?" A threatening voice entered Alex's mind. Suddenly, a gust of wind struck him as the Puma stood before him.

"What sort of nonsense are you spouting?" the puma asked with a snarling face.

"As I said, I will not let Pearl go through the ritual. I just learned that there have been many before that died when going through the ritual. Knowing this, you guys still want to make him go through it?" Alex asked in an angry voice.

"We don't like it either, but we have to do what we have to do. Besides the child has a higher chance of surviving thanks to his bloodline," the Puma said.

"That still means that there is a chance that he will die, right? I won't let you make him do it then," Alex said.

The puma scoffed when he heard that. "Are you forgetting who you are speaking to, boy? I don't hear any respect in your voice. You won't let us do what we want? You think you can stop us?"

Suddenly, a massive aura appeared around the puma, as he used his cultivation base to threaten Alex.

"Young human, don't think that just because we let you do what you want in this place that you are a guest. No, your identity here had always been that of a prisoner."

"You do what we say here, not the other way around. Without our permission, you won't even be able to talk so much as a word," the puma said.

Alex felt the pressure crush on him worse than it ever had. The puma was really using the full force of his cultivation base to threaten him, something he hadn't even done when facing the 3 human saints.

Still, that wasn't enough to keep Alex quiet. A warm feeling rushed from inside of Alex that alleviated some of the pressure, allowing him to at the very least speak.

"I won't let you," Alex said in a grunting voice.

The puma looked surprised. He hadn't expected Alex to be able to talk at all. "How can you talk?" the puma asked.

"Not even the White Tiger's blood essence could make me shut up. Do you believe yourself to be stronger than that?" Alex asked.

The puma's eyes widened even more. "It seems you are not an ordinary human after all. I should have known. After all, you are the very first human to have acquired and integrated the White Tiger's bloodline into you," the puma said.

Alex felt the intense aura around him leave. Just then, he saw a paw moving towards him.

Alex was hit square in the face and sent flying at the wall. "However, that does not mean that you get to be insolent in front of me. You are still under our rule. You will do what we tell you to do."

"If I tell you to die, you will die," the puma said.

Alex felt a stream of warm blood flow from the side of his face. He still stood up and glared at the Puma through his blurry vision.

"You may as well kill me then because that is the only way I will ever let you make Pearl go through the ritual," Alex said.

"Hmph, You talk big for a tiny human," the puma scoffed. It was very angry right now. "If only you didn't have the White Tiger's bloodline, I would've killed you right now. However, that doesn't mean I don't have other ways to take you out of the picture."

The puma suddenly picked up Alex with his aura and sent him hurling inside an empty room. Alex struck the wall and fell to the ground.

By the time he stood up, the door was locked. Alex went up to the door and tried to open it, but he couldn't open it. He punched at the door and walls as hard as he could, but he couldn't damage it at all.

Anyone in his place right now would've started to despair, but Alex didn't. He kept calm and immediately sent out his spiritual sense to see the outside.

"Keep that thing to yourself," A voice came from outside, and he felt his spiritual sense being pushed back into his head. It hurt quite a bit, but Alex had the information he needed.

He suddenly disappeared from inside the room and appeared outside, right in front of the puma. He then suddenly turned around and started running away.

"I see. You won't be so easy to confine huh? Teleportation skill... that is not something so easily found in this realm," the puma said.

He then stopped Alex mid-sprint and pulled him back. "You were trying to get to the little child huh? You must've thought that if you put him back into the bonded space, we wouldn't be able to get to him."

"And you would be right. Without your permission, we would never be able to get to him. However, you should've thought of this before you came to confront us."

"The child is currently training in the upper palace, and you won't get to him at all now," The puma said.



Alex cursed himself for thinking that these beasts would ever give a thought about his concerns. 'Fuck! I spent so much time here and forgot the most integral part about them. They are beasts, and that is how they will always act,' Alex thought.

"I can't kill you, I can't confine. I can't even force you to stay quiet, huh? If you won't follow our orders and let the child go through the ritual, then there is really only one thing left that I can do," the Puma said.

Alex tried to understand what he was going to do and anxiously waited.

"You see, we brought you here because you had the White Tiger's bloodline. A human with that bloodline was unique, and we thought you would turn out to be something amazing."

"However, after days of research, we didn't find anything about humans with the bloodline blessed by the gods. Furthermore, we can't even extract the bloodline from you given how well it had integrated."

"Also, since you are a human, you can't even go through the ritual to awaken it. So, considering all of this information, we came to the conclusion that... there was absolutely no reason to keep you here anymore,' the puma said.

"However, lady Ren let you stay here since you would be an emotional support for the child while he grew up."

"We've been monitoring you, and we know that the child doesn't rely on you as much anymore."

"So, the only reason you had of staying in this place is also gone," the puma said.

"What?" Alex asked with a shocked face. He understood where this conversation was going.

Suddenly, he felt himself being moved at an incredible speed. When the blurry surrounding disappeared, he found himself in the same place he had been in when he had first arrived in this place.

The Teleportation formation platform.

The puma brought out a medallion of sort from someplace and started using it. "Goodbye, little human. I hope I never see you again," he said.

The formation platform lit up with no prior warning. "NO!" Alex shouted, but his cry was cut off midway through as the light enveloped him completely.

When the light died down, Alex was gone.

#### Chapter 519: No Way Back

When the light disappeared, Alex found himself on top of the stone platform out in the middle of the forest.

"No! NO!" he shouted. He had realized what had happened. The puma, in his attempt to keep Alex away from Pearl, had decided to send Alex out of the secret realm, with no way back.

"NO!! Let me in," he shouted. He looked around, trying to look for a way to go back into the secret realm. But no matter where he looked, all he could see was just a bunch of withered trees.

"What do I do?" Alex put his hands on his head as he started suffering from an anxiety attack. He crouched on the floor, trying to control his fear.

However, no matter how he looked at it, he had no way of going back. And if he didn't go back, they would kill Pearl.

A few minutes passed, but Alex couldn't calm down at all. The worry he felt for Pearl was making it too hard for him to think of anything other than his upcoming death.

Alex decided to wait around, hoping, foolishly for someone to come get him. He hoped that maybe the puma had a change of heart. He hoped that Yao Jia spoke some sense into him. He hoped that Lady Ren would see how important Alex was to Pearl's life and make them come get him.

He foolishly waited for almost the entire day. In the end, nobody arrived. That was when Alex truly understood just how worthless he was to the beasts.

Maybe the ones that benefited from his pills cared somewhat for him, but the saint beasts didn't.

"I understand," he said calmly. "They think they can step all over me just because I'm weak, huh? Just wait, I will come to get my revenge."

Alex's face twisted with anger and determination. Separating him from Pearl was the worst thing the beasts could have done to themselves.

He placed his palm on the formation and softly spoke. "Wait around, Pearl. I will come to get you for sure," he said.

He then took out the boat from his storage bag and flew away.

He had been flying for just a minute or two when he suddenly saw the formation light up again from far away.

Alex's hopes grew high. "Did they really come to get me?" he thought and flew back.

However, when he reached there, there was nobody. Alex couldn't see or feel a single soul around.

"What the hell?" he thought and waited around for a bit longer. However, at some point, he assumed that he must've been mistaken and flew away once more.

\* \* \* \* \*

A man and woman were running away from the platform they had just arrived in. They were afraid of the beasts coming after them, so they concealed themselves and hid on a tree while they waited to see if any beasts would come.

"Phew, it seems we are finally out, brother Tao. We are safe," the green-robed girl said after a few minutes of noticing no light from the direction of the platform they had just left from.

"Yes, but... are we really out? Why are we still in the middle of the forest?" the red-robed man asked.

"Who knows? Maybe there was another formation platform in the northern forest that we never knew about" the girl said. She then brought out a curious-looking artifact and looked at it.

"Which way?" the man asked.

"It says... that way," the girl pointed.

"Alright, let's go. I hope we get out of this forest soon," the man said and brought out a flying boat. He and the girl got on it and started flying south, deeper into the forest.

\* \* \* \* \*

A man was sitting in front of a group of similarly dressed people, listening to one of them speak.

"Compared to last month, our earnings have increased by a total of 12%. If this goes on, we should be earning a similar amount as before the beast invasion by next month. This is a really good improvement, sect master," The elder in charge of finances excitedly said.

However, the news brought no excitement to the sect master's face, just more sorrow.

The elder quickly hid his excitement and bowed to go away. Another elder came up and gave another statistic that the sect leader needed to care about, but just couldn't.

He would get especially depressed when they talked about how much better it had gotten compared to the past few months when the beasts attacked every month.

"Since more and more merchants and travelers are going around the empire, the demand for guards has helped the disciples get a way to earn money once more," the elder said. "Our missions boards are also starting to get filled the way they used to before..." the elder trailed off.

"Anyway, if we go on like this for just the next month, we will be back on track," the elder said. He too bowed and walked away.

The sect leader waited for someone else to come up and say something to remind him all over again of the day he lost his disciple, but no one else came up.

"Sect Leader," a thin man called him.

"Hmm," the sect leader looked at him.

"The meeting is over. Please dismiss it," the man said.

"Oh, uhh, the meeting is over. You may leave now," the sect leader said unenthusiastically.

The elder sighed and started to leave one by one. All of them left except for the thin elder that had spoken up earlier.

"You need to get a hold of yourself. Is this what a sect leader should be like?" the elder scolded.

"Okay," the sect leader said.

"Hey! Are you even listening to me? You are just ignoring me again, aren't you?" the elder asked.

"What the hell do you want me to do? My disciple is gone, and I as his master couldn't do a damn thing to save him. All I could do was stand around and watch the beasts take my disciple."

"Do you know how it feels to have your disciple taken away from you? What would you do if it was your little Yuhan, or little Su that was taken away, huh?" the sect leader shouted his words at the thin man.

The thin man kept quiet and just shook his head.

"I... I'm sorry. I shouldn't be shouting at you when all you are doing is trying to help me. I promise I will get a hold of myself. Just... let me be a mess for a little longer," the sect leader said.

The thin man sighed. "Wasn't little Mei there too? Have you talked with her? Is she okay?" the man asked.

"I... I have talked with her, but all I can do is lie to her that everything will be okay. I'm sure that even she knows that I'm lying," the sect leader said.

"It doesn't matter. Lie to her even more. She lost her younger brother too. The both of you need each other more than anything right now," the thin elder said.

He then sighed again and said, "at least you have each other to pick you up when you fall down. I wonder how much of a mess sect leader Ma has been these last months."

"She is surely the worst of us. I hope she finds someone to rely on too. She definitely needs it," the sect leader said.

"Alright, go to your disciple and help her. Fortunately, your other disciple is doing better and doesn't need your help," he said.

"He wasn't there. He doesn't understand the despair and helplessness we felt," the sect leader said.  
"Alright, I will leave now. Thanks for the talk."

"Anytime," the thin elder said and left.

The sect leader also walked out of the room to the evening lights in the crater of the sect. He made his way to his disciple's house and knocked on it.

The door opened and a girl walked out. However, this wasn't his disciple. "Little Xing, how is your sister holding up?" he asked.

"She's fine, uncle. Come on in. She's doing much better than before once she started focusing on training. I think the bad thoughts have gone away now," she said.

The sect leader walked in and knocked on a door on the inside. "Little Mei, can I talk to you?" he asked.

He waited for a moment and the door opened up. "Master, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"I was just here to check up on you. How are you doing, lately? Do you need something?" he asked.

"No, I'm fine, master. How are you though? You don't talk about yourself," she said.

"Don't worry about an adult. That's not your job. Just worry about yourself. How is the training coming? Do you feel like you're getting stronger now?" he asked.

"It's okay, master. Du Yuhan is a good training partner. Although... I feel like he's hiding his strength from me," she said.

"Oh, why would you say that?" the sect leader asked.

"Well, you see, Every time I push myself to the extreme and bring out something stronger than before, he always has the strength to handle it. I think he's toying with me," she said.

"No way. It's probably just a coincidence. Are you going to go train now?" he asked.

"In a few minutes, yes," she said.

"Good. Take c—"

Suddenly, he felt a vibration from his storage bag and he brought out the talisman. However, when he saw which talisman he brought out, his eyes went wide with shock.

His hands trembled as he brought the talisman close to his head and read the content inside.

It said "Master! I'm back."

Chapter 520: Return

"Master!" Alex shouted as he looked away from his older brother and towards Wen Cheng.

"Y-Yu Ming?" Wen Cheng couldn't believe his eyes at all. He ran up to Alex and grabbed him by the shoulders. "Are you really here? I can't believe this!" Wen Cheng said.

"It's me, master. I really am back," Alex said with slight tears in his eyes as well.

"Junior brother!" Luo Mei didn't even wait to find out if he was real or not, and immediately stole him from Wen Cheng and hugged him.

Alex felt warmth in his heart that slightly lessened the pain of losing Pearl. He could feel tears that were not his drenching his robes. Luo Mei really couldn't handle loss very well.

Losing her mother at an early age, she thought the worst of every event. She was worried about her father before she even returned to see how bad his health was.



When Alex was taken away, she fully believed him to be dead and turned into a mess. If it wasn't for her sister looking after her, she would be in a lot worse state than she currently was.

"I'm so glad you're back," She cried out. Liu Xun walked up and hugged the two of them as well.

"Welcome back, junior brother," he said.

Wen Cheng smiled as he realized how close his 3 disciples were. The hug lasted for a few moments before Wen Cheng separated them to ask Alex some questions.

"How are you, Yu Ming? Are you okay? How did the beasts treat you? Are you hurt somewhere?" Wen Cheng asked with concern.

"Right! Are you alright, junior brother?" Luo Mei asked as her face suddenly turned concerned as well.

"I... I am fine, but..." Alex stopped. Tears filled his eyes which made the other two believe something bad must've happened to him.

"What's wrong, Junior brother?" Liu Xun asked.

"The beasts... they took Pearl. They are going to make Pearl go through a ritual where none of the other beasts that have gone through it before have survived. I tried to complain to them that I won't let them do it, but... they threw me out of the secret realm."

"Now Pearl is there alone, and I have no way of returning to him," Alex said. His voice choked a few times as the tears made it hard to speak.

Luo Mei's eyes turned watery as she felt the sorrow Alex was feeling and hugged him again. "It will be okay. We will get Pearl back, don't worry," she said. It was all a lie, there was no way she or anyone in the empire could do any of that. However, it was a lie that Alex needed to hear right now.

"Come, let's go to my place. You must be tired and need to rest," Wen Cheng said.

"No, master. I need to go to the Hong Wu sect before that. I will need to let them know that I am back as well," Alex said.

"Right, you should," Wen Cheng said as he realized. "Ma Rong is a mess. Let's get you to her quick."

"I will bring him there, you guys go back for now," Wen Cheng said to the other 2.

"Okay master," Luo Mei said and turned to Alex. "It's really good to have you back, Junior brother."

"It's good to be back, sister," Alex said. Wen Cheng flew high and Alex followed. Just as they flew a bit in the sky, Wen Cheng noticed something unusual.

"What happened to your cultivation base? I can't feel a single thing," he said. He was looking directly at Alex, but he realized there was no aura coming off of him. If not for his spiritual sense, he would actually believe that he was hallucinating Alex right now.

"Oh," Alex said as he looked at himself. "I had to fly through the forest, so I concealed myself. I forgot to remove the concealment."

Alex then let go of the concealment technique that hid all of his auras, and soon his mortal and cultivation aura both returned to him.

As they did, Wen Cheng's eyes started to widen more and more. He was dealt such a shock that he had to stop flying and look at Alex with a gawking face.

"Y-y-you! You entered the True Realms?" He asked in surprise.

"Ah, yes. I did so a week ago," Alex said

"But wait, didn't you enter the Mind Tempering realm just 2 months ago? How are you so quick?" Wen Cheng asked.

"Umm... I am one of the new cultivators that can cultivate very fast, master," Alex said.

"Is... is there a reason why you are so fast?" Wen Cheng asked. He had always knew or at least suspected his disciple to be one of the new cultivators that could cultivate fast. But he never expected to see him be this fast.

"Reason... not really. You can also cultivate fast, but I would suggest you don't. There are a few other minor reasons, but... I will tell you about them someday, master. You will learn the truth behind it all," Alex said.

"Okay," Wen Cheng didn't pry anymore. "I will wait for the day when you will tell me more."

Alex thanked his master for not asking for more information and kept on flying.

The sky had turned fully dark, and the stars were visible, some brighter than others. Finally, the two of them reached the Hong Wu Sect and dropped in front of the sect gate.

The elder standing in front of the gate suddenly stood upright when he noticed people flying down from the sky. Not anyone could fly inside the city, so whoever it was must be a big figure.

When the two people came into the light, he realized that one of them was Sect Master Wen Cheng from the Tiger sect.

Beside him, the elder saw someone else from the tiger sect, going by the yellow robe. However, when he looked closely at the face, he couldn't believe his eyes at all.

"Disciple Yu Ming?" he questioned. The face, it was the same face he had seen with the sect master so many times, but... he was supposed to be dead.

Alex didn't recognize this elder at all. There were many elders that he didn't care for and didn't keep in mind, so he was surprised that he was even able to recognize him back.

"Hello Elder," Alex said and bowed a little. He then walked past the elder and entered.

The elder wanted to stop him to confirm if it was him, but with Wen Cheng's presence, it was hard to even doubt if it was him.

Alex entered the mountain and flew again. He brought out a talisman from his bag and talked into it.

"Master, I have returned," he sent a message.

Deep in her manor, surrounded by iced-up walls, Ma Rong's sickly thin body was breathing in and out as she cultivated.

When the deep vibration of the talisman came from her storage bag, she stopped to see who it was as she had told the elders to not message her unless it was urgent.

However, her eyes went wide when she read the message in the talisman. Her lips quivered in shock at who had sent her the message.

She couldn't help but mutter softly to herself.

"Alex?"