

Alchemy 621

Chapter 621: Closed Cultivation

After making sure that there was nothing in the cave once more, and even going so far as to plunge into the pond once more to look if there was any strong beast in there, Alex finally sat at the edge of the cave to cultivate.

The Qi in the room was as low as not much had been able to permeate through the mountain and enter here.

Still, that didn't really matter to Alex all that much. He had never really needed Qi to breakthrough.

He then reached into his pocket and brought out the silvery-white beast core that was tainted a little red with the blood of the snake.

Alex wondered why he kept this core and not another one. Was it because he had been thinking of eating this for so long that he somehow didn't want to let go of it?

He wondered if he could keep the other beast cores when he traveled through the ground, but more than likely the same scenario would have happened again.

'I need to get rid of this core now,' he thought. He cleaned the core and prepared himself. Then, he ate it.

Alex didn't immediately get sent into his spiritual world, but he could sense the snake had appeared there and was about to wreck havoc.

'Oh, do I have to do it manually now?' he wondered. Maybe it was because he was the original soul of the body and not the clone's soul that was just controlling it, it seemed he had more control over himself than he initially thought.

He felt the slight numbness in his mind, while his body was already breaking down the core, giving him Qi.

When he sent his spiritual sense through his body, he could also sense that his Qi was being accumulated around the naval region.

The numbness though was more annoying than anything. He could likely go on for a long time, but Alex could feel his spiritual energy draining.

With vision, he could allow this. But now, he had no choice but to get rid of the snake.

So, he quickly jumped into his own Spiritual sea and looked around in awe as he saw the massive amount of floating silver threads in the air.

"What the hell?" he thought. "I know I haven't been here in about a week, but... no way there should have been so much gathered in that period of time right?"

Then, he looked around to attack the snake. However, there was no snake. "Huh? Where did it go?" he thought. He could still feel the numbness... was that not the snake?

"Thanks for the meal, kid!" a voice said to him from next to the mountain. Alex turned towards the voice to see a ball of black goo, what should have been a clear crystal, floating in mid-air.

'Dammit! Just a few days and it's already regenerated that much black goo?' he thought. Alex flew up to it and asked, "did you eat the snake that was here?"

"Of course," the spirit said. "You sent it here for me right?"

"Why the hell would I send something to you?" Alex asked with an annoyed look. He certainly hadn't lost anything by letting the spirit eat the snake's spirit, but for some reason, it made Alex angry.

"Eh?" the spirit was surprised. "Were you not trying to mend our relationship so that I can help you kill a god?"

"There is no god to kill here," Alex said. "Also, you shouldn't kill gods just because they are one."

"Huh? But they're gods. What do I, Godslayer, do if not slay gods?" it asked confusedly.

"Alright, I don't have the time to deal with you," Alex said and grabbed the floating ball with both hands before a yellow fog appeared around him, devouring the black goo, leaving behind the clean crystal ball again.

"Hey! Oi! What the hell are you doing? Why would you give me food, just to take my strength away?" the spirit shouted, but Alex ignored it.

He looked at the flying threads that originated from the silver mountain. It was to gather these too.

Alex wasn't sure why exactly he was doing this or if it was even beneficial at all. After all, after so many days, he hadn't even begun to see anything manifest in him to suggest it was working.

Still, he kept at it. Just in case that mountain was a parasite, like the Artifact spirit, he needed to keep his mind clean.

Once he was done absorbing all the threads, Alex left.

When he reappeared on the outside, he immediately shot out his spiritual sense to the furthest he could. Once he saw that no beast had walked out of the pond, he drew it back.

However, along the way, he couldn't help but wonder... did his spiritual sense grow in strength again?

It had grown once before this, by quite a massive amount too. It had been after the incident on the beach which gave him his freedom.

His 80-meter spiritual sense had become 100 meters, but Alex simply attributed this to his real soul finally being in control, which he still believed to be true.

However, this time it was different. 'Why did it happen?' he wondered. It surely couldn't just be him having secrets that he still didn't know, could it?

Alex shook his head and got rid of such useless thoughts for now. Right now, he needed to breakthrough.

Qi gathered around him as he used the Five Yang Divine Path to cultivate his Qi and put it through his body to seamlessly break through to the next realm.

It had been so easy that he felt he could do it in his sleep. 'This really is an amazing technique, isn't it?' he thought as he continued using it.

He needed to stabilize his cultivation base before he could do anything else.

From time to time, he stopped himself from cultivating any further and instead spent the rest of the time focusing on the ring at hand.

He felt like he was about to crack open some part of it, but that might have just been his illusion for all he could tell.

Then, at other times, Alex took his sword and practiced his swordsmanship, using it to hit the cave wall a few times before realizing that was not a very good idea. He shouldn't train in here as there was the chance of the place caving in on itself.

He wouldn't mind being buried, he could easily get out. But the problem would be that losing such a good cultivation spot would be unfortunate.

He also jumped into the water a couple of times. He couldn't possibly stay here forever, so he went into the water from time to time to see if there was a way out of this place.

Unfortunately for him, the underground pond was way more massive than he could have imagined. So, he couldn't roam all the location without some beast coming to attack him.

'The beasts must come from somewhere, so there definitely is a route,' he thought, but as of yet, he didn't find any.

So, instead of finding a way out of this place, he decided to carve one. Every single day, he turned his hand into a claw and took out a chunk of the land in a direction.

Since even 150 meters away he couldn't see any sight outside, he knew he would have to go at it for a long, long time.

In between cultivation, finding ownership of the ring, training, carving a pathway out, and finally, refining his new sword, Alex's days passed pretty quickly.

Before he even knew it, a month had passed.

During the month, Alex's cultivation base hadn't improved at all, but his meridians were now amazing in his eyes.

They kept their wide shape without it hurting much at all, but he would have to practice making the sun for much longer to be absolutely sure it became permanent.

He had also gotten close to making a pathway out. He could see the outside world just on the edge of his senses and knew that in just a week or so, he would be able to reach there.

And finally, as a reward for all of his hard work, the ring on his hand had become weaker at fighting back, and now Alex was able to open a small space in it, just enough to store his sword.

'Nice!' he thought as he tried to pull in and out his sword with just a thought. The ring was much easier than using his storage bag as his senses perfectly saw everything inside at once, whereas in storage bags, he would have to search for each item individually.

After hearing that the ring might have items that he could obtain if he tried to remove the ownership from it, Alex had been expectant of getting something valuable. But unfortunately, his wishes didn't come true.

"I shouldn't mind at all," he thought. "This is merely a small space. There is likely a thousand times bigger space inside, if not more. Surely I will find some things."

Then, he started his routine all over again. Cultivation, training, and making the path. Alex focused on just these three things for now.

And after a bit more than a week, he had arrived right at the edge of the mountain without having made an opening.

So, knowing that he would now have to leave and go train through real fights, he sat down one last time, employed his cultivation method once again, and broke through.

Chapter 622: BlueFlame Monkey

Alex could feel that his body was starting to get a little out of control, even for him, but a long period of cultivation with the Yin art controlled it to an extent where he could be fine.

Not for very long though. After cultivating for more than a month with the Five Yang Divine Path, he knew that sooner or later, he would end up having the same problem his master did, and a mere cultivation technique would not be able to stop it.

However, that wasn't right now. Right now, Alex needed to go out and train. So, he walked into the newly carved path through the mountain and appeared on the edge of it.

There was still a good 10 meters of distance to carve out of the ground, but Alex had stopped here. This was his way of hiding his entrance. To get out of here, he simply needed to do one thing. And he did it.

Alex teleported.

Once Alex was outside the cave, out in the forest, he marked the entrance to the cave with a few slashes from his sword.

Now, he was going to have to do 2 things. First, go find his cauldron. It was imperative that he found it.

2nd, fight a strong beast. There would be no point in coming to this place if he didn't find and fight a strong beast.

He wouldn't overreach and look for True King beasts, but True Lord 5th realm beasts were what he believed to be the perfect ones for him to fight.

Currently, together his strength should have been a little less than True Lord 5th realm, but he still needed that challenge to get stronger.

It turned out, he was right about being below a mountain. When he came out, he appeared in the valley. So, the beasts were plenty for him to fight.

To start off the training, he ducked. A bird about the same size as Pearl, when he was small, went flying past where Alex's head was.

That little bird was going for the kill. Alex recognized the bird as a Red Silverbeak. It was a more common variance of the exceedingly rare Azure Silverbeak that Pearl had beaten in the Riverweed city.

This one, however, wasn't as weak as that one. It was a True Master 8th realm beast. To it, Alex must've looked like a tasty little prey.

Alex sighed. He didn't want to kill such cute little beasts, but if it was going to attack him, he wasn't going to not fight back.

As the Silverbeak flew back towards Alex, his sword shined with white light and he flicked it, making an arch with his sword.

The next moment, the Silverbeak fell onto the ground, its body cut in two. Alex simply shook his head at the beast. So many were going to fight him because he was an easy target, only to come up dead not so long after.

He walked over to the bird and removed his core. This time, He had a place to keep it.

Alex then continued his journey. Since he was planning on only keeping cores in there, he skipped the bird's body, but he didn't skip out on the small alchemy ingredients he found growing around him.

He had enough space for now anyway. Alex didn't want to leave very far away, but it seemed he had to as there weren't many beasts nearby for him to fight.

So, he left the area. But, every couple of meters, he left a mark on the trees around him the direction he needed to return to the cave.

As he kept on walking, Alex fought 3 more beasts, but none of them were very strong. They were more of a hassle than a challenge.

Alex started to frown. 'Will I not find a good beast to fight against?' he thought. But just then, he saw something at the edge of his senses.

There was a beast sitting on top of a tree with its tail dangling beneath it. It seemed to be enjoying its time in the wind as it had its eyes closed and seemed quite relaxed.

Alex stopped. What should he do? Should he fight the beast? Or run away? He couldn't decide at all.

On one hand, the beast had a True Lord 6th realm cultivation base, with Alex's standards just a bit too strong for him. He didn't see any chances of winning on his side at all.

However, on the other hand, it was a Blueflame Monkey, one of the beasts that held the ingredient to his pill to regrow his limb.

Alex fell into a dilemma. Did he value his life more, or his limb?

"Don't be a coward now," Alex said to himself. "It's just a bit strong of a challenge. Nothing to run away from."

Thinking that, Alex gripped his sword tightly and ran towards the monkey, consciously letting it know he was coming.

The Blueflame Monkey was surprisingly red in color. The name Blueflame came from the little fire that burned at the end of its tail that was fully blue in color.

The monkey looked at the shouting Alex and frowned. It didn't know why such a weakling was coming toward it, but it didn't care.

It jumped down from the massive tree it called its home. There were many other stronger beasts nearby, yet the monkey was able to keep it for itself.

Alex noticed the tree it was sitting in as well as the massive fruits that grew in it.

His running slowed down as his breathing got heavier.

"Enlightening Mango!" Alex thought in surprise. The giant mangoes were said to have the capability to help someone gain some understanding in their cultivation path.

Alex didn't know what that meant or did, but the mangoes were really coveted and thus he wanted them too.

The monkey and the fruit were two things he wanted at the same location. Alex couldn't help but be extremely happy.

The monkey noticed that Alex wanted the tree and suddenly got angry. With a growl, the monkey jumped at Alex.

Alex was surprised at how quickly the monkey decided to attack, but he had been ready. So, as soon as it arrived, he brought out his gleaming, golden sword with white outlines around it, and tried to slice its hand.

The hand that struck the sword bled a little under the strike, but it was Alex who felt more of the damage.

His legs skid a few steps back before coming to a stop. 'Damn, this monkey sure is strong. I need to be careful,' he thought.

The monkey realized that it was the superior figure in this battle, so it started teasing Alex by showing its behinds.

It worked. Alex got mad. His sword moved in an arc in front of him, leaving behind 5 distinct phantom swords of the same sword he held, all of which were golden in color.

The swords slowly tilted until they were targeting the monkey, and flew off. The damage the Penta Sword Skill did was negligible to the monkey, but it was the visual Alex needed.

Once the 5 swords flew toward the monkey, the monkey got a little concerned, but still more or so careless about its situation.

The monkey punched in mid-air, sending a flying blue flame towards the swords, which when hit created a massive explosion that nearly knocked Alex off of his feet.

Alex stood his ground, however, and sent Heaven's Impact at the monkey. Right now, its blood was more valuable to him than the fight.

The monkey seemed to somehow notice the incoming mental attack and suddenly spun around. As it did, the blue flames in its burning tail lit up brightly, leaving a blue light where it passed through which created a barrier around it.

Heaven's impact landed on the firewall and destroyed it, not before being mostly destroyed itself.

"Tsk," Alex said as his only chance at victory was stripped away so easily. "How come the beasts are so good at blocking my mental attacks? Or am I just unconsciously drawn towards those that can block my attack?" he thought.

The Monkey had likely eaten the fruit and gained a lot of mental prowess as well since the remaining mental attack did nothing.

'Dammit, I don't think this beast is beatable right now,' he thought. So, Alex changed his target.

Instead of trying to go for the monkey, he decided to steal the fruit behind it.

Alex needed a distraction. Slowly, a yellow light glowed from Alex for a second, confusing the monkey.

Then the light down and nothing had changed. Alex was still there. He then took his sword in his right hand and ran towards the monkey with all of its speed.

The monkey ran faster. Far faster than Alex could've realized it was possible. However, he didn't let that distract him.

He still did what he was supposed to and ran. When he was right next to the monkey, he didn't stop and still ran. The monkey ran past him too, towards the 'Alex' that was running at it with his sword high in the air.

The monkey once again gave a punch, it didn't feel anything from its fist. It was like hitting a ghost.

The Alex disappeared into a burst of yellow lights, telling the monkey that it had been fooled.

The real Alex was on top of the tree, with his hand on one of the fruit. Just then, the monkey cried out and ran towards Alex.

Alex jumped away from the tree to avoid the monkey, but the monkey twisted in midair, sending a tiny blue ball of fire that struck Alex directly on his chest.

BOOM

Chapter 623: Explosion

As the blue ball of fire landed on Alex, it opened like a blossoming flower into a massive fireball that only grew larger to cause a great explosion.

Alex was sent flying away into the distance with terrible pain in his chest. When he landed on the ground, all he could do was writhe in pain.

He placed his hand on his chest and all he felt was heat and blood. This was a terrible wound.

It didn't end there. His arm, face, and legs had been scorched as well. His hairs were singed all over his body. His clothes were still burning with the terrible blue flame, which he quickly tore off and threw to the side despite the pain.

When he stood up, all he could do was limp. Fortunately, he hadn't suffered anything permanent, but he had taken a lot of damage.

The wound, the pain, the fire, it all told him one thing that he couldn't believe at all.

"That monkey is not an ordinary True Lord 6th realm beast at all. No way something like that could have done this much damage even when I was fully defending myself," he thought.

He coughed a bit in pain and felt a salty taste enter his mouth. 'Dammit! I'm bleeding internally too,' he thought.

Alex looked around and brought out the sword he had kept in his ring. He felt some sort of happiness in this tragedy when he saw the marks on the tree.

While constantly being aware of ambushes and attacks, Alex wrapped the remaining bit of cloth around his waist to hide his naked body.

Then, he walked— nay, limped back towards the cave.

Once he was inside the cave, Alex slumped to the ground and immediately started cultivating. That was the only way to heal himself right now.

While healing pills would've been instant, cultivating was also a good way of doing so. The only problem was that it took quite a long time to heal a non-serious injury this way.

Alex cultivated continuously for a whole day so that he wouldn't die from his injuries. While he wasn't healed a lot, he was healed to the point where the proper movement was possible.

On the end of the 2nd day when his wounds were healed to a point where cultivation needn't be his only focus, he brought out a giant, orange mango from his storage ring.

At the very last moment, he had been able to snatch this fruit and drag it into his storage ring.

'Dammit! There were so many of them, and I only got one,' Alex thought. However, this one fruit alone was quite coveted by many humans too.

So, Alex didn't beat himself over it. Not wanting to waste any part of the fruit, Alex took a bite out of it with the skin and all.

Suddenly, all sense of fatigue and sleepiness he had been feeling from the pain and days-long cultivation was immediately gone. Alex felt as if he had woken up from a 12-hour sleep, fully alert and ready.

His mind processed things so quickly, that everything started feeling like they were moving in slow motion.

At the same time, the pain became quite intolerable under his fully awake mind as well.

So, Alex's mind decided to switch to something else. Whether it was because he was hating his defeat, or because the pain reminded him of the event, the final scenes of his fight with the monkey ran past his head.

Unconsciously, Alex took another bite of the mango, and the vision seemed as real as if it was happening right at the moment.

He watched the tiny blue ball of fire slowly open up, expanding itself... no that was wrong. It was a shrunken ball of fire, so it was returning to its original size.

At least, that was what Alex thought at the moment. However, his next moments of thoughts were plagued by his panic and skill employment.

He didn't see what happened to the fire next.

He took another bite of the fruit as he mulled on why that tiny ball of fire had done so much damage. He thought he understood it while he replayed the event in his mind, but that didn't really work once he didn't have it in front of him.

Also, the main part of the attack, the part where the blue fire actually attacks him was missing from his memory. Without it, Alex doubted he would never understand why.

'Why am I so fascinated by this?' he wondered t himself while taking another bite of the mango. The mango slid directly into his stomach, turning into cool energy that flowed up to his brain.

His thinking churned again. Even though he couldn't understand why the attack did as much damage as it did, he still wanted to learn about the first half of the attack where the ball of fire was small.

That felt like a sneaky little attack on him. A fireball that looked innocent but suddenly turned large in front of the enemy could take them by surprise.

So, Alex thought about it while eating the remaining mango. He felt like he was getting somewhere with his thought process when he tried to take another bite of the mango, and nothing entered his mouth.

When he looked at it, there was only a pit remaining in his hands. Then he wondered, could he perhaps grow it?

He had no idea, but he could try it sometimes after leaving this place. So, he kept the pit in his storage ring and continued thinking about the fireball.

Without the mango, it was hard, but Alex still struggled to understand what was done and how it was done.

He felt like he was on the verge of understanding, but then his thoughts would go astray. When he felt like he was in a zone, his pains would bring him out of it.

This happened so often that he decided to not care about learning anything for now and concentrated on healing himself.

About a week later, he finally left the cave once more. He had been fully healed, his body ready to go fight back and kill the monkey.

However, Alex didn't want that. He only wanted two things for now. To steal a mango, and get attacked by the monkey so he could understand how that happened.

So, he went towards it.

Half an hour later, Alex returned back to the cave, without any fruit. He had been attacked not soon after the fighting started.

After a week of healing, he went back once again. An hour later, he returned back again.

This time, he had nearly lost an arm, but hadn't. Also, he had managed to snatch two mangos.

He hoped this was enough to do what he wanted. Alex focused a week on healing and then ate the fruit.

Once again, as if diving into a cool pool, formless energy went up to his mind, getting him fully awake.

Once Alex was awake and alert, he started thinking about the attack. This time, he had been ready, so he saw what happened when the monkey attacked him.

Alex was positively happy to realize that the small ball of fire had indeed been condensed before leaving the monkey's tail.

When Alex took the hit, the small fire got big, as if unfolding to its original size, and then, as if suddenly heating the air around it to a million-degree, the air was what expanded around the fire, before the fire even arrived.

Alex hadn't realized that while he was learning this, he had fallen into a trance, forgetting to eat his mango at all.

'The ball of fire unfolding is just to hide the amount of fire the monkey put into the attack. It has no other purpose at all,' Alex understood.

'The true damage arrives when the fire is suddenly increased in temperature to a very high degree, causing air itself to act as an attack.'

'When temperature changes, air expands. When air expands, it hits everything around it. Not just the air either, the sound waves and the flying debris do a lot of damage too.'

'Explosion... is the rapid destruction of everything around it. I see.'

As such, for the next 2 days, Alex remained in a trance of Enlightenment. When he woke up, his eyes shined with understanding.

He hadn't known it yet, but he had done something that most people would need to reach the Saint realm to even hope to do.

He had learned one of the many worldly Daos. The Dao of Explosion.

Chapter 624: A Tongue of Fire

A large, yellow snake slid on the ground, ready to pounce at its target, oblivious that its target was simply acting unaware of its arrival.

The snake was at True Disciple 4th realm, not bad for a beast that was so far away from the mountain range, and in the grassland.

Once it was ready, the snake suddenly jumped and bit its target. However, when it did, its target disappeared into a bunch of golden light.

Out of the tall grasses, the real target emerged. Revealing itself to not be a target, but the prey all along.

The snake slammed its tail at its target, but Pearl was ready for it. His body shined with golden light, and when the tail hit him, it did practically nothing.

At the same time, Pearl's claws extended forward, his paw starting to shine with golden lights as well.

The snake opened its mouth, sending a ball of fire toward Pearl, but Pearl simply ignored it. The fireball directly hit him, but Pearl emerged from it mostly unhurt.

The snake got scared when it saw that and tried to dig its way down the earth, but Pearl wouldn't let it.

Along the way, Pearl roared with a loud voice that could be heard from miles over, and at the same time, the snake's vision dimmed as it forgot what it was about to do.

The mental attack from Pearl was not very weak either. It was only weaker than Alex's.

Pearl finally reached the beast and hit it with his shining paw. The snake was sent sliding across the grass, all bloody, with a massive chunk of its body missing.

Pearl then followed it, not wanting to let it go anywhere, and once again attacked it near the same location.

The snake tried to fight back, using skills related to fire, earth, and in between, but nothing stopped Pearl.

He quickly killed the snake, and finally slumped on the ground to rest.

Shen Jing flew high in the air, watching the fight between Pearl and the snake with pure awe in his eyes.

A cat that hadn't even reached the peak of its potential was easily handling a snake that was 2 realms above it.

He didn't remember if he could do that when he was young or not, and couldn't help but compare himself to Pearl.

"Even if I had all of those skills, I still wouldn't have been able to fight that snake and win so easily," Shen Jing thought. Pearl's body was definitely better than normal, and his talent at fighting was not something to scoff at either.

However, he frowned. While skills and talents could get you so far, he didn't see him reaching very high with his cultivation base. The natural limitations of an unevolved beast would soon show themselves.

Unless the potential in Pearl was tapped, he would die being mediocre forever.

'While he does have those skills, they are quite basic,' Shen Jing thought. 'I should teach the little guy somethi—'

He stopped. An aura flared from deep within the mountains. Shen Jing could feel the Dao around the world gather at a certain location in the mountain.

"Dao Enlightenment? Is a Saint beast breaking through?" he thought. "Not bad, it must be a lucky one to have understood a Dao. These beasts usually don't have the intelligence for it."

While thinking that, Shen Jing sent his senses to the far lands of the mountain ranges, trying to see what was trying to breakthrough. He followed the traces of the natural worldly laws and quickly found a cave inside a mountain.

And in there, he found Alex.

Shen Jing's smile dropped, replaced with awe. He watched Alex open his eyes and look at himself for the new understanding he had just gained.

'Did that kid... just learn a Dao?' Shen Jing felt it unfathomable even as he said that. Dao... was not something someone could learn randomly.

He saw Alex look at the mango in his hand, and while that mango should have certainly helped him focus and concentrate on what he was trying to learn, there was no way it was what directly helped him learn the thing.

If a person had the ability to learn something, he would need nothing to learn it. If he didn't, all the heavenly treasures and divine elixirs wouldn't be able to help him comprehend it.

"And that kid somehow learned it, huh?" Shen Jing thought. "How long has it been since I have heard of someone understanding a Dao before reaching the Saint realm?"

"I had done it too, but I was in the True King realm at the time, while this kid is only just starting the path of the True Realm. How many more will he learn before he breaks through to the saint realm?" he wondered.

His eyes went wide as he thought, "how many more will he then learn before..." Shen Jing didn't even want to think about the possibilities.

Shen Jing shook his head. "It could also be that he only learns this one. Best not to think about it much longer," he thought.

Then, another thought came to him. Something that should have been the first, but the shock had derailed his thought process.

'What Dao did he learn though?' he wondered. Worldly laws always descended together, and without an expert with an understanding of the many different Daos, it was impossible to discern which one someone was learning.

'True Disciple realm... will he even be able to handle the power of his own Dao?' he wondered. Dao added strength to one's use of that Dao. Which would normally be impossible for someone.

At the same time, it also cost the person using said Dao a lot of Qi.

However, that was not what Shen Jing was worried about. He was worried about the fact that the strength of Dao attacks was sometimes so strong that low leveled cultivators wouldn't be able to survive their own attacks.

"Well, I hope he didn't learn some offensive Dao. Once he is done with his training, I will teach him about Dao," Shen Jing thought. "For now, he should go and find his cauldron already. Sigh, I even went through the hassle of getting it so close to him, but he never went there."

Shen Jing shook his head and looked back towards Pearl. "Right, back to teaching this kid again," he chuckled a bit himself and remembered a technique from his mind.

"Yes, that should suit him," he thought and flew down towards Pearl who had eaten the Yellow snake's core and had started cultivating.

If he successfully broke through, he would be a True Disciple 3rd realm now.

* * * * *

Alex felt weirdly... relaxed at the moment. His mind felt serene as his understanding of explosions made him feel like he had learned something that no one else taught him.

No, he did learn something no one else taught him. His mother would have been proud if she heard that her son was now learning things on his own without her having to teach him.

His mother... he missed his mother. And his father. And... and someone else. His memories were vague. Was that a silhouette of a girl? Why was he missing a girl?

He wondered if his clone actually made a girlfriend back in his homeworld. "No way, who would want to be together with a farm boy like me?" he wondered and stopped thinking about it all.

"Right, now that I have learned a bit about explosions, I should try it out," he thought. He was about to compress fire Qi onto his hand and do what the BlueFlame monkey did, but for some reason, he felt that unnecessary.

At least, it was unnecessary to create explosions.

"Right, not inside the cave," he remembered in time and walked out of it. Once he was outside, he put his hand forward and a tongue of fire bloomed in front of him.

For some reason... he knew what to do next. He sent the fire a little ahead of him, and thought, 'Explode.'

Within a fraction of a second, he felt Qi being driven out of his body at a tremendous rate. At the same time, fire Qi in the surrounding was being pulled towards the tongue of fire.

That was something Alex had never seen happening before.

A fraction of a second later, it exploded.

A massive boom rang from the surroundings as Alex himself had been pushed back from where he stood and crashed into the mountain with a heavy slam.

He fell to the ground and tried to bring himself up as he gasped for breaths. He wheezed, trying to breathe as the pain in his body was tremendous.

He wasn't hurt like when the monkey had burned him, but this explosion, the destruction it carried was almost as terrifying.

And it had been him who had tried to make the explosion happen.

A minute later, Alex was finally able to stand up. His body was still in pain, but he was able to ignore that to a certain extent.

He looked at his surroundings and realized that trees in a 10-meter radius had been uprooted.

Alex couldn't help but be surprised when he realized that this amount of destruction had been done with just a tongue of fire.

Had he made a bigger fire, or perhaps used the compressed fire as that monkey did, the damage would have been a lot higher than he could imagine.

'But if I do that, I will certainly be dead for sure,' Alex thought. As of yet, he wasn't strong enough for his own skill.

Chapter 625: Continuous Training

Alex went back to the cave and sat down inside, trying to think about what he had just learned.

A tongue of fire exploding had caused about True Lord 3rd or 4th realm equivalent damage to him.

A single tongue of fire.

Alex found that a little unbelievable, but he had been the one to do it, so he had to believe.

Next, he thought about what had happened with the tongue of fire. When he wanted it to explode, his body had involuntarily surrendered Qi to it.

At the same time, Qi from the atmosphere had gathered into the fire, as if the world was following Alex's orders. His wish seemed to be their command.

Only Fire Qi had gathered onto the flame, but that was all that was needed. Then, as per his understanding of the explosion, the flame had reached a very high temperature, creating destruction of such a scale around him.

Unrooting trees or turning them to smithereens within the 10 meters range, and destroying a lot up to 20 meters distance. That was a lot of damage.

Alex looked at himself and saw that he wasn't really burned at all. In fact, the single piece of cloth he now wrapped around his waist had visibly taken no fire damage.

The trees were the same as well. Not a single one of them had burned, unlike when he was hit by the monkey's exploding fireballs.

Alex nodded his head as he understood why. Explosions... only used fire to start themselves. The real damage came from the destructive force of the air around it.

Surely there could be fire in the explosion too, but a tongue of flame wasn't enough for it.

For that, he would have to make more fire before exploding them. However, that destruction would certainly kill him if the massive Qi being pulled from within himself didn't do it first.

'Let's think about that,' he thought. Qi had been involuntarily drawn from him, and a fraction of a second later, the fire had exploded.

There were a few things he wanted to know. How much Qi did it take? Did it have to be his Qi? Did the speed matter?

There were other questions that he cared about too like the size of the fire, the shape of fire, and the damage it did.

So, for the next two days, he did nothing but simply practice that.

By now, Alex understood how much fire he could use to explode. Even if a lot of fire was burning, he could choose to explode just part of it as well.

The distance, however, needed to be short. Beyond a certain range, it was as if the connection he had with the fire that was forged by the world itself was destroyed.

While he could freely control the fire, he couldn't explode it beyond a certain range. For now, that range was somewhere between 4 and 5 meters.

That meant, Alex had to be extra careful how much fire he wanted to explode without hurting himself. This also meant, that as long as his body wasn't hurt, he could create an explosion that consumed all the Qi in his body. That damage would be massive.

Other than that, Alex understood that the speed of his Qi also mattered as well as the quantity of how much Qi was taken by the explosion.

The faster he released his Qi to the fire, the faster it would gather Qi from the world and explode. Delaying or stopping the transfer of his Qi only did the same to the explosion.

Alex thanked Shen Jing for helping him widen his Meridians. By now, it had completely become twice as big and was even becoming a bit larger at times, although that hurt Alex quite a bit.

However, he didn't doubt that he could expand it more if he cultivated his body with Pearl which also included tempering meridians.

After understanding all of that, Alex went out to train. Every day, he would go into the forest, marking every tree he came across on the way to show a way back to the cave.

He forgot about the BlueFlame monkey for now. It was too strong for him, and he would only likely kill himself if he kept on going for it.

So, he fought other monsters, weaker ones, and trained his explosion skills. At the same time, he also practiced his other skills.

He hadn't been able to practice the spiritual sword for a while, so that was something he decided to learn later on.

He wasn't worried about running out of time at all. After all, if he did what Shen Jing said and reached True Lord 1st realm with his cultivation base, going normally, it would take him another 15 months for sure.

That was almost double the time he had been in this world. It would be certainly enough to practice everything.

Days passed by in a flash, and soon months passed by as well.

3 months later, Alex was surveying a gazelle beast drinking water from a river he had come across on his path around the mountain.

This location was about a few kilometers away from his cave, but that didn't bother him.

Since he knew the way back, he simply had to fly there and he would reach there within a few minutes.

His spiritual sense reached 120 meters ahead of him without any forced extension. By now, Alex had realized that just as absorbing a monster core gave him Qi, absorbing their spiritual body in his mind also gave him some increase in his spiritual strength.

It was only because common beasts didn't have good spiritual strength for him to steal, so he had never realized that. However, after the Mind Tempering realm, they sufficiently gave him 2 to 3 meters of spiritual sense for everything he ate those beasts.

Unfortunately, he couldn't keep on eating the same strength of beasts, or the return would be diminishing. He needed to continuously find better and better beasts to consume.

Today, Alex wasn't here for that. He was here for a simple fight.

The gazelle sensed something and tried to run away, but a massive crocodile jumped out of the river and ate it whole.

The dark purple-skinned crocodile had the size of a school bus and strength in True Lord 4th realm. That was perfect for Alex's training.

He walked out of the trees, not intending to hide from the crocodile at all.

The Crystalscale Crocodile saw him and got curious at first, but once it saw his strength, only disdain could be seen in its eyes.

'Intelligence? It must have a good enough mind to stop my heaven's impact then,' Alex thought and tried it out.

The Crocodile's eyes suddenly rolled upwards and its giant head slammed onto the ground. However, a moment later, it stood up and shook its head again.

As expected, it had some level of mental defense. 'I should really get one after I leave this place,' he thought and flared his True Disciple 8th realm cultivation base, letting the beast know he was on his way.

Alex dashed forward, leaving sand flying behind him. The sword in his hand gleamed golden, something that he supposed was visible currently as well.

Alex couldn't tell what time of the day was with his spiritual sense alone as the light was not something he could see through it. However, stuff like heat to his senses and the number of shadows from his teleportation techniques always told him what time of the day it was.

The Crystalscale Crocodile opened its jaw, the inside red with the dead gazelle, trying to devour Alex whole.

'Idiot!' Alex thought and stopped his attack. The beast still wasn't taking him seriously, giving away its vulnerable parts for Alex to attack.

Unlike the outside, the inside of the crocodile had no scales. So, if Alex had attacked just now, he could've killed the Crocodile in one hit.

However, that wasn't what he was here for at all. He didn't want to kill it; he wanted a challenge, to push himself to grow stronger.

He wanted an experience that he couldn't get otherwise. How was he to get that if the crocodile easily let him kill it?

Alex created a tongue of fire, floating it a bit ahead of him, and exploded it instantly. The damage the fire produced just now was equivalent to True Masters 8th realm.

It was well within the range of what his body could handle.

The crocodile wasn't damaged either, but it finally understood that Alex wasn't someone it could so easily ignore.

Chapter 626: Gold and Green

The purple crocodile's scales glowed brightly as the textures on them changed. The crocodile was using Qi to harden its scales, so Alex could notice it with his sense.

He smiled and dashed forwards once again.

The crocodile, this time fully aware of Alex's strength, decided to use its tail to attack him. Its hardened tail had scales growing in all directions like thorns on a flower stalk.

Alex realized that this could be deadly and immediately poured all his metal Qi into his sword and slashed at the tail.

The tail and the sword clashed, and as expected, Alex was thrown back into the sand.

Alex quickly stood up from the flying sand everywhere and noticed something. The scales on the tail of the crocodile, which was growing in all directions, were now all facing him, and they started shaking a little.

Alex frowned. He could guess what was going to happen. Just as the tail's scales started shooting out like bullets, he dashed to the side, dodging the volley of scales.

The crocodile pulled its tail back. Its scales would take a bit to grow back before it could use again.

Alex then dashed back at the crocodile again. The crocodile's mouth opened up as if wanting to eat him.

'Did this beast not understand already that I—' just as Alex was thinking that, he saw a giant illusory crocodile, made up of entirely blue color appeared on top of the crocodile.

The illusory crocodile's lower jaw was missing, and its upper jaw was now coming down, slamming onto him.

This was the attack of a True lord 4th realm beast. Alex couldn't underestimate it at all.

A wall of 5 colors appeared in front of him that contained the five elements. This was a technique that could stop a lot of the incoming attacks.

At the same time, he strengthened his body with the Jade Skin technique as marbled texture appeared all over his body.

Then, finally, his hand glowed with yellow light and he sent out a palm strike to stop as much of the damage as he could.

Then, the crocodile's upper jaw slammed on him. A cloud of sand blew into the wind, causing a giant sound that reached far into the forest and deep into the river.

The crocodile harrumphed, thinking it had won. However, not very long after, when the sand settled down, he saw Alex still standing there, with no damage to him at all.

When the remaining power of the illusory crocodile hit him, it felt like he was hit by a truck. With a True Lord 1st realm level body, he could handle a truck.

Alex ran after the crocodile again, with his sword glowing green this time.

The Crystalscale Crocodile was a beast with Water and Earth elements to it. To even negate some of the effects of both of those elements, Alex needed to use an appropriate technique of his own.

Since he had to use a sword for the additional damage of the Sword Intent, Alex could only rely on sword techniques. While he had sword techniques for all 5 elements, the only ones that were strong were the Elusive Heavenly Sword with its Wood Element, the Penta Sword technique as well as the Smiting blade with the Metal Element.

The Metal element could weaken the Earth element, but it did nothing against the water element, instead of acting just like a non-Elemental attack against it.

Meanwhile, Wood Element could both weaken the Water Element and control the Earth element, so he decided to use that instead.

As he reached the crocodile, Alex appeared right underneath its jaw and slammed his sword into it, releasing the green slash at point-blank range.

The crocodile was sent flying upwards into the air. Seeing the school-bus-sized crocodile flying was quite a sight.

The crocodile slammed into the water, making a giant wave in the river. The beast that was close by quickly ran away.

Alex saw this and smiled. Then, he got his sword ready once again. That attack just now would have hurt the crocodile quite a bit, but it would have done nothing to harm it at all.

It only worked to make it angry.

The crocodile swam out of the river in a surprising speed and looked at Alex with disdain in its eyes, then it slammed its legs.

Alex wondered what was happening when suddenly, his feet started sinking into the ground. He tried to pull it out, but his feet wouldn't accept that. Instead, the more he moved, the more he was getting pulled under.

'Dammit! The crocodile used a quicksand technique,' he thought. Then, he looked up and saw the crocodile preparing to do something.

He could feel Qi being gathered in front of its mouth. It was going to attack something soon.

Alex saw a blue ball of water spiral in front of it, and then, it let it loose. A massive stream of water shot out of the crocodile's mouth towards Alex who was still stuck to the ground.

Then, the stream hit him... and Alex's body tore into a thousand pieces.

The crocodile was surprised at how easy it was, and he saw the pieces fall to the ground. Then, the pieces vanished in a bunch of yellow light.

BAM!

Something struck him underbelly with so much strength that the crocodile was once again sent out flying. However, Alex didn't stop this time.

He hit the crocodile again in mid-air, throwing it further away. The crocodile tried to turn itself in mid-air, but Alex kept hitting it and sending it further and further down the river.

When Alex was about to hit it again, the crocodile this time enforced its scale in time and managed to swing its tail around.

Alex tried to block it, but that was not all he needed to do. The crystals on the tail's end were already turning towards him.

He would die if he let that hit.

Suddenly, a tongue of fire appeared in front of him, while he enforced himself with his Jade Skin technique, then he thought of a single word.

'Explode!'

A massive boom rang in between him and the crocodile, sending the crocodile slamming down into the water, while he was sent flying away and landed in the river as well a good 100 meters down the line.

Alex's body hurt a bit, but that was the price of survival. 'The crocodile is coming for me,' he thought and prepared to fight when he saw something not far from him that shocked him beyond belief.

Deep in the river, about 70 meters away from him in the opposite direction of the crocodile was a golden ball of light. This was something that shouldn't have existed in nature and was definitely man-made.

However, that was not what had shocked him at all. No, the thing that shocked him more was what was within this ball of golden light.

Floating within the ball of golden light was something made up of mostly green and gold. Alex smiled when he saw this, and his eyes gleamed with joy.

"My Cauldron!" he shouted in happiness. He had finally found the Golden Jade Cauldron.

He wanted to go get it, but he didn't yet have enough space to keep his cauldron in his ring. Not unless he wanted to throw away the stuff that he had gathered until now.

So, he was forced to leave it be just for now. 'I'll get it back soon,' he thought and turned around to the approaching angry crocodile. 'Right after I kill it.'

Alex stepped on the surface of the water, and it solidified underneath him as if he were stepping on stone. Then, he shot off, leaving a massive explosion of water.

The crocodile saw this and jumped up to attack him. Alex's sword shined with a green light which he sent flying before even arriving close to the crocodile.

He knew it wouldn't damage it at all. He just wanted to distract it a little. The crocodile slammed the green slash with its tail, only to realize that it did no damage.

When Alex arrived, it wasn't ready to attack with its tail again. So, it instead roared, sending columns of water flying out of the river to disrupt Alex.

Alex, however, only said a single sentence. "I'm sorry, but I don't have time to keep playing." Then, he disappeared.

When he reappeared, he was right below the crocodile, its underside fully vulnerable to him with no scales.

Alex swung his hand, but there was no sword in it. He had already stored the sword.

Instead, a sword formed on its own made up of misty white color with a slight hue of yellow. A sword only he could see.

The sword lagged just a bit as his hand swung, but not enough to make a difference. Then, it stuck the crocodile's body.

The illusory sword passed through the crocodile's stomach, and the crocodile fell into the water.

The crocodile felt nothing wrong with itself at all, so it suddenly turned around towards Alex and tried to send out a water blast.

A column of water shot out from its mouth but it was very weak. The damage it did was almost negligible to Ning.

Ning smiled. "I told you, I am done playing."

Then, 3 Heaven's Impact hit the crocodile one after another. With its scales not working properly, it couldn't block the damage at all.

Alex got close to the unconscious crocodile and opened its mouth. He then created a tongue of fire and sent it inside the crocodile's mouth and closed it.

As it did, he spoke a single word again.

"Explode!"

Chapter 627: Alchemy Training

Alex pulled the cauldron out of the water and looked at it with a happy expression. He felt like hugging it, but he didn't do so.

He had already taken care of the Crystalscale Crocodile's core and would use it sometime later when his cultivation base reached a close enough level.

He had also taken some of the crocodile's crystal scales and had hoped of making some mental defense artifacts with them.

Alex didn't have to open the cauldron to see that everything inside was as it should be.

A fire formation, A barrier formation, 3 healing pills, and 20 True spirit stones. All right there inside with no damage.

'That golden light... it must have been Shen Jing who put it here, right?' he thought. That was the only thing that made sense.

Then, Alex took the cauldron and went up the river to the location where he fought the crocodile first. Then, he found his way back to the cave.

At first, Alex was a little worried that he wouldn't be able to take the cauldron into the cave given that it wouldn't fit in his storage ring at all.

However, when he did try to, he could somehow teleport inside with his cauldron in hand.

'That does make sense since it is an item I refined. If I can teleport with the sword, I should be able to teleport with the cauldron,' he thought.

Alex sat down when he reached the inner cave and rested for a few moments before he started cultivating. He ignored the cauldron for now as he wanted to be at his peak before he tried anything.

He cultivated for a full day before his lost Qi had returned to him. At the same time, he tried to calm the Yang aura that was desperately trying to get out of him.

After he was done with that, he opened his eyes and got ready to practice some alchemy.

Alex dug out a little piece of land, using the True spirit stone to run the fire formation plate. With a single spirit stone, Alex was sure the fire would burn for almost 5 days nonstop.

With 20, he could practice for 100 days. That was more than enough to gain some insight into what he was going to practice, or so he hoped.

During the last 3 months, Alex had gathered a lot of ingredients. They were still dwarfed by the number of ingredients he used to hold in his storage bags back in Crimson Empire, but this one was quite great as well since almost all of the ingredients he had acquired were for True pills.

Alex had found many ingredients but ignored most that he couldn't make pills with.

He could try to make new pills as he did back in the barrier after he had killed Zexi, but that was not his intention at the moment.

At the moment, he was just trying to practice making pills with structure and composition in mind.

When his cauldron was hot, he put the first ingredient into it. Alex had a recipe to follow, and he did, turning the first ingredient into powder not long after.

Then, he stopped. Instead of putting in the next ingredient, Alex took the powder out and set it aside. He made sure to not leave a single speck behind in the cauldron.

Then, he did the same thing for the 2nd ingredient. He put it in, did what the recipe told him to do, and pulled it out.

He did the same for the third, the fourth, all the way to the last ingredient.

Doing so obviously removed all energy into the air, but Alex didn't care for that at the moment. He was more so focused on the powder as that was where structure and composition came in.

Once all the ingredients were powdered, he pulled up a single speck of all the ingredients and put it in his hand.

Then, Alex took a deep breath and enhanced the vision in his mind. Is it looking through a microscope, the specks of powder magnified in his spiritual sense to the point that he could see what they all looked like?

Somehow, Alex didn't feel as much strain as the last time he had done it when his mental strength was nearly 6 times as weak as now. Well, that was to be expected.

Once he saw the shapes of the powder, he tried to fit them together. The powder shapes acted like puzzle pieces that came together to form a larger puzzle piece.

Unfortunately for Alex, he didn't know if these puzzle pieces were working puzzle pieces or not.

His brilliant mind worked to look through the specks of powder, trying to find an orientation in which they would all fall together with no gap inside.

Alas, he couldn't find any. No matter the changes he made, the highest he could go in his estimation was 80%.

80% sounded incredible, and it was, but only on paper. In reality, there were a lot of aspects to pill-making that would bring this down quite a bunch.

The ones he knew of were the age of an ingredient before it was taken, time passed after it was taken, mistakes while following the recipe, grade of a cauldron, and of course, the ability of the alchemist himself.

These things would surely bring the harmony down by a lot. So, Alex needed to increase the theoretical potential to as high as possible so that even when he made those mistakes, he still ended up with a high-grade pill.

Alex thought of changing the recipe a little. Alex wondered what he could change and saw that if he used the portion of the 4th ingredient twice, he could cover quite a large gap in the structure, which could surely increase the potential by about another 5-8%.

Alex took another speck of the 4th ingredient and tried. As expected, it fell into place, giving him quite a bit of joy.

"Hah, if I just use twice the amount of the 4th ingredient, I can do it," he thought, but then stopped and frowned.

"No, that won't do," he thought. Having a little less energy in an ingredient, or a little more didn't really affect a pill-making process to a high level.

At best, they would just cause the pill to lose a bit of harmony by not having all the combined energy having a place to inhabit.

However, if Alex really did double an ingredient, the increased amount of energy from that one ingredient would change the structure of the entire pill, making the later incoming ingredients interact differently with the massive energy of the 4th ingredient.

So, increasing the ingredient amount was not the way to go, unless he wanted to end up with an entirely different pill instead.

What Alex really needed to do, was change the structure of the powder by changing the speed, rotation, and temperature with which he interacted with the energy.

And that was something he had no idea about and couldn't figure out by thinking. For that, he needed to sit down and burn those ingredients to see how the powder came out.

Alex spent half a day on a single ingredient, trying to form every type of shape he could while keeping the same rate of release of the energy.

Then, he moved on to the next one. He spent 2 consecutive days learning with just 4 ingredients. Then when the mental fatigue hit, he stopped cultivating.

After going back and forth between practice and cultivation, Alex finally managed to make almost every single shape of every single ingredient for his pill.

Then he closed his eyes and sank his thought into his memories. From all the different memories, he searched for the shapes that would fit together the best.

Because he had spent the last week preparing, it didn't take him very long to find a solution to the puzzle.

He quickly compiled a recipe based on that combination and finally, for the first time in nearly 5 months, proceeded to make a pill.

The pill he was going to make, the one he had been practicing was called the Disciple's Ascension pill. Unlike its grand name, it was just a pill that helped the True Disciple realm cultivator have a higher chance during breakthrough to the True Master realm.

It was one of the easiest pills to make, not because the process was easy, but rather because of how readily available the ingredients were. They were True rank ingredients but grew like a weed in most places where humans didn't step in.

If cared for, these ingredients would grow even more easily. In a forest as dense as these lands, there were more than enough ingredients here to occupy Alex's time for almost a decade.

After a decade, there would be enough growth to occupy another decade.

Alex prepared the cauldron and recalled the recipe one more time to be sure, and started making the pill.

Alex put the first ingredient in and put all of his focus on the task at hand. Since he had made so many powders of the same ingredient, he didn't want his muscle memory taking over and ruining this attempt.

Once he was focused, the process became easy. He took out the 2nd ingredient as well and tried that as well. That too was converted into powder rather easily.

The 3rd, 4th, 5th, all the way to the last ingredient, it all easily turned into powder with the shape he wanted.

With that, the easy part was over, and next came the hard part.

Now, Alex had to conjoin each individual speck of powder into a group like puzzle pieces.

Chapter 628: Tries and Failure

Alex focused on his spiritual sense, using it to magnify into the powder in the cauldron, but there were too many to focus on.

He couldn't possibly join all of those powders right now. At least, not with the level of spiritual sense he had right now.

He could focus on multiple of these at once, so he decided to start with that. No matter how impossible it looked, he had to try.

So, he started doing it. He went around the cauldron, trying to find the individual specks of powder and brought them together. He moved them, twisted them, slid them into places, and finally managed to make a clump of the powders that perfectly fitted together.

His eyes beamed with joy, but then immediately dulled as he saw the other many individual specks he had to get to.

He sighed and got onto it. He split his concentration, putting all of his focus into the cauldron, and started fitting the other pieces together.

Once he had done the first one, the rest became easy. However, when he was just 10% of the way through, his physical body twitched and he immediately pulled his senses back.

That was when he realized that the aura inside the cauldron was extremely turbulent and was moments away from bursting open.

Alex immediately opened the lid and used Elemental Guidance to move the energy out of the cauldron.

The energy soon dissipated in the air, and the threat was subdued.

Then, he sighed again.

'I can't lose focus of the energy while making the powder,' he thought.

He cleared the cauldron and tried again.

This time, once he was done until the point before he had to form the pill, he split half his attention of the energy, moving it around, stopping it from going out of control.

While the other half of the attention formed the powder. The speed was half as slow. But, it was working.

The energy wasn't going turbulent and he was halfway done with making the po—

Alex noticed something. When he looked for more specks, amongst the colorful specks of powder, he started seeing black specks.

When he focused on it, he realized that they were burnt powder. When Alex looked over the entirety of the cauldron, he noticed that a lot of the powders had been burned.

He sighed. Another failure.

Alex tried again and again, and each time he failed.

When he turned off the fire to not burn the powder, the powders wouldn't stick together anymore to form the pill.

When he tried to hurry up, he would make mistakes.

When he tried to slow down, the energy would start breaking down with the constant heat put into them.

When he was done with the last pieces of the powder, he noticed that many of the fire pieces had fallen into individual pieces.

When he tried and tried and tried for days on end, after nearly 3 weeks, he finally managed to make a pill with no mistakes made at all.

Its harmony came out to be 60%.

60%. 3 weeks of effort, so many ingredients wasted to get a 60%. 60% was amazing, but that was not what he wished after such long period of effort.

When he wondered why that had happened, he intensely started searching for the answer.

He recalled the recipe, there was no mistake.

He recalled the structure and composition, he had done the best he could.

He checked for the gap, there were some in the pill itself as not everything had fit tightly snug together, but that was clearly not responsible for merely 60%.

Alex thought of the abstract concept of symmetry the Royal Alchemist had told him about, but it shouldn't have been as important.

Then, the only problem could have been that Alex let the powders and energy remain in the cauldron for too long and they lost their potency.

Alex leaned backward, slamming his back onto the ground.

"I give up!" he said out loud. "I don't want to do this." After having tried the same thing over and over for the last week or so, he felt like he would rather take the BlueFlame Monkey's exploding flower to the face than do this.

As he lay on the ground, a thought came to him. 'Shit!' he thought. He was getting motivated again for no goddamn reason.

'I really do love Alchemy, don't I?' he thought.

He breathed in and out for a while and got back up to make the pill again. This time, he wanted to try something he hadn't tried in the last 3 weeks yet.

This time, he wanted to try nothing.

Every single time, he had ruined the ingredients trying to do something and failed. He now wanted to see how the recipe fared when he did nothing.

He followed the recipe with 0 mistakes, and when it came to the pill making turn, he moved the powder randomly, clumping it into a ball and letting the energy pass through it to collect as much as it could.

When the pill floated into his hand, Alex wanted to cry.

66%.

For something he had done randomly, he got 66%. But for something he had tried for 3 weeks straight, he got 60%.

Alex concentrated on the newly formed pill and noticed that about 70% of the pill had automatically done what he had been trying to do for the last 3 weeks.

The gap and symmetry were quite bad in the new pill as well, so he knew that had never been the problem.

'So I really need to finish it fast, huh?' he thought.

He tried it once again to see if this one had been a fluke and came out with 67% harmony instead. No, that could not have been a fluke.

Alex started thinking. He needed to do something that would capitalize on the positives of both of these different methods of following the same pill.

He needed the 100% puzzle completion aspect of the manual pill-making process, while he needed the speed of the random pill-making process.

If he combined these two, he had no doubt he could reach the Immortal grade with his pill.

'How do I do that though?' he thought. How in this godforsaken mountain range was he supposed to find a way to make perfect symmetrical, 100% energy-absorbing pills as quick as possib—

Alex jumped onto his feet. That couldn't be it, could it? He had a thought come to him, but he wasn't sure if he was being stupid or extremely intelligent at the moment.

He quickly calmed himself and thought if there was any way it would work at all.

"I won't know if I don't try," he thought and brought out another set of ingredients.

With the cauldron hot, he put the ingredients into the cauldron one by one until he reached the moment when the ingredients had turned into powder, and he simply needed to form the pill.

Alex didn't enhance his senses to join the individual specks together, nor did he randomly start moving the powder together for another pill.

Instead, he looked into himself and thought, 'come!'.

Qi stirred in his naval region and started moving automatically through his meridians. With how large his meridians were at the moment, they took no time until they reached his arms.

Then, out of both his right hand and his stump, the Qi moved out on its own until it reached the cauldron.

Alex didn't need to guide the Qi or make sure it didn't do anything it didn't need to. The Qi worked like it had a brain of its own.

It went into the cauldron, moved the powders together, brought it to a single clump, and then as if a knife had cut through that clump, it broke into two halves.

The Qi separated as well, moving into the two smaller clumps of powder and starting doing its magic.

Alex couldn't tell how they did it, but they quickly formed the two halves into normal-sized pills with a lot of gaps in them, and a vortex formed above them that sucked in all the energy of the cauldron.

In less than a moment, the pills were done.

Alex pulled out the two-pill and looked at the two with absolute surprise.

46% and 46%.

Alex's jaw dropped and there was only one thought in his mind.

"I need to learn this technique."

Chapter 629: Intent

Alex was excited when he decided to see how the Pill Splitting Qi worked. So, he made more pills, using it each time to split the pill into 2 and see the result.

2 weeks later, his excitement turned to disappointment. He couldn't be more disappointed at the fact that he couldn't extrapolate any information from the technique at all.

He had focused on the skill from the movement of Qi, to the formation of pills, and yet, he understood nothing.

In fact, halfway through the process, he could already see the problem with himself.

He didn't know how techniques worked at all. How did they function? How did moving your Qi in certain ways through your body do something when it came outside?

Those skill books he read all talked about the path through the meridians the Qi should move in, the requirements for that technique, and what the technique did.

Sometimes, they also talked about how one could improve on the technique as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the technique.

However, never did they talk about HOW the technique worked at all. How did moving your Qi through your body in certain ways produce a unique result at all?

Did it even actually produce a result? Alex decided to try it out.

He remade the pill all over again, and instead of using the technique this time, he instead just manually did the entire thing himself.

From the moment the Qi in his body stirred to the moment they arrived and left his hands, it was all done by him, manually. However, when the Qi appeared outside of his body, it simply dissipated into the air.

'What?' he thought with surprise. 'But I followed the way perfectly,' he thought.

He quickly had the real pill splitting Qi come out and make the two pills, each with 44% harmony.

Then, he started thinking once again about what had just happened or rather didn't happen.

'Did I make a mistake anywhere?' he thought and reviewed what he did, but he saw that he made no mistakes. That or, he made mistakes he couldn't see.

Once again, he had to wonder what was going on.

"Hmm..." he started thinking, but he wasn't making progress. So, he decided to go and get some of those mangoes that helped him focus and understand more.

After all, they had helped him understand how explosions worked. So, he hoped they helped him understand how this thing worked as well.

Alex returned 2 hours later, all bloody and battered. This time, he had thought he would win, but the BlueFlame monkey's explosion was still very strong. Way stronger than his explosion.

And worst of all, the monkey could explode it at a distance from itself, causing the damage to mostly falling on Alex.

'Is my understanding incomplete perhaps?' he thought. Maybe there was more to explosions than he thought.

'Later,' he thought and tried to forget about the explosions, but the thought still lingered in his mind.

He cultivated for a few days, bringing himself back to the top condition before proceeding with his meditation.

He made one more pill, trying to do the exact same thing he did earlier, and failed.

Once he fully understood his failure, he took a bite of the mango. The cool energy from the mango flowed to his brain and washed it like a cold splash of water to the face on a hot, sunny day.

Alex's mind was alert and awake, and he put all the focus on the problem and started thinking about it.

He immediately understood another problem with what he was trying to do as well that he hadn't even thought of because he hadn't reached that part of the problem yet.

The Pill Splitting Qi was essentially 3 minor techniques, fused together. So, the Qi path he followed would have no use whatsoever.

Alex realized, that he needed to learn 2 of the 3 minor techniques, which to be more accurate were equal to 2 of the 5 minor techniques.

He needed to learn the technique that formed the pill. This was the most important one right now to him.

The other thing he needed to learn was the technique to create the vortex that pulled in the Qi.

Alex could forget about the vortex for now as Elemental Guidance did the same thing it did, just worse. However, he really did need to learn the technique to form the pill.

It was not just forming the pill either. It was forming the pill with almost no gap in between the individual specks when they stuck together and had perfect symmetry in between them.

After checking the two pills that formed from the pills, he had learned that despite having a lot of gaps, having perfect symmetry made the pills devour as much energy as they could.

As he thought about it, his thoughts went towards the moment when he failed to even use the pill splitting Qi manually. That was what he had sat down to learn in the first place.

As he thought about it, he frowned a little. He quickly compared the Qi that was released from his hands when he let his body do the work, compared to when he manually cycled the Qi.

They were obviously the same. So what was different?

As Alex took another bite of the mango, he was reminded of the explosion he suffered to get this fruit.

The explosion was bad, but he tried to shake the thought away for now. As he did, he was reminded of his own understanding of explosion, and how with a single thought, he could make a tongue of fire explode.

A single thought.

A thought.

Alex immediately stopped cultivating as he activated the fire Formation again and heated his cauldron. Then, he proceeded to turn the ingredients into powder.

He had done this part so many times, that he thought he could do it with a complete lack of vision inside the cauldron.

He wasn't going to be stupid right now.

Once all the ingredients were powdered, with a thought, he pulled out the Qi from his naval area.

As the Qi passed through his meridians, with him consciously moving them, he thought about why he was doing it in the first place.

He thought of splitting the Qi, forming the pill, and finally collecting the energy in the cauldron down to the pills.

As his Qi escaped his hands, exactly what he had thought of happened. The powders were split into two portions, each portion formed into balls, and a vortex appeared to collect the energy.

He successfully made the two pills.

Then, he the pills another 2 times. The first time, he moved the Qi around his body through the same route, however, with only intended to form the pill, and not split or collect energy.

He failed.

Then, he tried it a second time, this time moving the Qi in a different route, one he created himself, intending to only form the pill once again.

He failed this time as well.

Alex then stopped making pills altogether and went outside the cave. He thought he was learning something, so he decided to try what he was thinking with the other techniques he knew of.

The Iron Fist Punch technique was the first one he tried with. He moved the Qi through his body, which his body did on its own as it had become muscle memory at this point.

When it reached his hands, he let it out in the shape of a fist. The technique struck down a tree in the distance.

Alex took a deep breath and moved the Qi once more. This time, only moving it around and not focusing on the attack itself. When the Qi came out of his body, it dissipated as if nothing.

Next, he tried a different route but wanted to throw a fist. The energy he released did take the shape of a fist, but it dissipated not long after.

Alex tried the same thing with several of his other techniques, and finally realized something.

"You need both the proper path for the Qi and the proper intent of the action to use a technique," he said to himself and went back into the cave, not thinking about it any longer.

Out in the distance, Shen Jing looked towards Alex's location with a horrified look on his face. The worldly laws had stirred for a moment, catching his attention, before calming down again.

'That kid,' he thought with nothing but shock on his face. 'He was so close to learning another Dao.'

Chapter 630: True Master

After realizing that there was no way for him to extrapolate just one aspect of a technique without having any knowledge of how techniques functioned in the first place, Alex removed any thoughts of creating the pill-forming technique while he was here.

Alex also thus gave up on trying to create the perfect pill. Until he had the pill forming technique ready, he would have to give up on increasing his pill-making ability.

That wasn't to say he had made no improvements at all. Just being able to make pills with more than 60% harmony was already good enough for the little training he had done.

Also, it was only hard to learn about structure and composition the first few times. Once he got a hang of it, he could improve the pill without even thinking about it.

Alex couldn't wait for that time when he could simply look at an ingredient and tell what he needed to do to get the best variation of the recipe.

For now, however, he had to simply grind at it. A few more months passed with less time focused on cultivation and more focused on simply alchemy.

As such, he didn't advance on his cultivation base and was stuck at the 9th True Disciple realm... until today.

The final of Alex's spirit stones stopped working and now he was left with 20 dull stones with no Qi in it. He sighed.

'Well, there was no point in bringing a barrier formation with me,' he thought. Without spirit stones, the formation would be useless.

Or so Alex thought until he put his Qi into the formation just to check and a ball of fire lit up suddenly.

He then used his Qi again, and a barrier appeared around him with the 2nd formation. They, however, disappeared the moment he let go of his Qi.

Alex looked surprised. 'Did they always work like that?' he thought. That... should not have been possible, or so he thought.

If simple Qi could activate a formation then it would be news in the Crimson Empire. And no, not a single bit of information about formations he had learned in there had ever mentioned formations working on their own.

'That's weird,' he thought but was just happy that he could use them if he ever needed them.

Then, he put everything he owned into his storage ring, which had about 10-meter squares of space by now. It was enough to store his cauldron, pills, ingredients, and entire corpses of at least 2 beasts.

Alex smiled and closed his eyes. With a thought, the Qi in his body started moving, following a familiar path they took every single day.

After a circulation or two, Alex felt a loud drum-like sound in his head like an exaggerated heartbeat.

With that, he broke through to the True Master realm.

'How long has it been since I broke through to the True realm? How long did it take me to go up a single minor realm?' he thought to himself, but it was impossible to tell.

He had first broken through to the True realm in the Beasts' realm which he stayed in for a month or so due to not having any cultivation method to breakthrough.

After that, it had taken him a few weeks before reaching 3rd realm. Then, he reached the 4th realm after coming to this mountain. In fact, he had broken through from the 4th True Disciple realm to the 1st True Master realm all right in this dark cave.

Day and night were the same to Alex who's vision was just a haze of gold and a sense that could see no light or shade.

Still, based on the somewhat reliable perception of time he had in his body, he could tell that he had spent nearly least three-fourths of a year in this place.

Most of the time for the last few months, he had spent on nothing but Alchemy, putting less focus on his martial training.

'This cave has given me safety and a place to stay, but it has also made me have no not fight at all,' he thought.

'It's time I leave this place. I cannot grow if I don't face danger,' he thought and walked out of the cave.

Once he was out, he took out his sword from his ring and walked in a certain direction.

While he was ready to leave this place, there was still one more place he needed to visit.

* * * * *

The sound of two beasts fighting rang through the air, or so it sounded. When looked at, it was clearly a young body fighting the monkey.

The BlueFlame monkey swiped its tail at Alex from far away, sending a spinning wheel of fire flying towards him.

Alex dodged the flying wheel of fire, not daring to fight it directly. He couldn't be sure if the explosive ability of this monkey was something it learned to like him from the many mangoes it might have eaten, or it was just that, an ability it inherited from its bloodline.

Alex hoped it was the latter, but he had to fight assuming it was the former. If he assumed that any fire anywhere would explode at any second, it made him that more alert.

Alex sent a flying water slash, that should do nothing to the monkey, but he hoped it would distract it. It did not.

The monkey came crashing down on Alex, but at the last second, rotated while in midair and punched to its right side.

An invisible Alex showed up with his sword striking the monkey. The Alex that was on the ground vanished into motes of light, revealing that it was a fake.

'Dammit! This monkey has seen all of my techniques already,' Alex thought. Then, the monkey swiped its tail again, the tail releasing a small blue ball of fire that flew towards Alex.

Every single cell in Alex's body screamed at him to dodge. Alex trusted his instincts with all of his heart.

As the small ball of fire unfolded, Alex vanished. The space where he had been shaking with the strength of many bombs. Alex was meant to have appeared behind a tree, but somehow he appeared a little left to it.

He took part of the explosion's hit, but it was far enough that it didn't hurt him. He quickly moved to the side, and let the uprooted tree beside him fall to the ground.

Alex checked at the monkey and saw that it was breathing a little heavily.

'Of course,' Alex thought. 'Such a strong technique should have taken a lot out of it.'

He decided to go force a bit more of it out of the monkey. Alex dashed from behind the fallen tree, surprising the monkey who didn't expect Alex at all.

The previous times it had fought him, he would always leave after taking the explosion to the chest. But now, he had come to fight back.

The monkey panicked a little. Blue flames erupted from its body, like armor made up of pure fire.

Alex struck its body with his sword, but he could barely force it in at all. He sent out Heaven's Impact, but as expected, the fiery body soaked up the mental attack, leaving not much for the monkey to handle.

Alex frowned. If Heaven's impact didn't go through, then his Spiritual sword wouldn't either.

He needed to make an opening to have his spiritual sense enter the monkey's body. That was the only way for him to win.

Alex's cultivation base flared and he put all of it into his movement technique. Alex then burst into speed that the monkey hadn't seen before.

A hit to the back. A slice to the neck. A cut to the tail. A Heaven's impact on the mind.

Alex slipped and slid through the monkey's surroundings, attacking it from various angles, which the monkey couldn't see.

From time to time, he would slow down and let the monkey 'catch his off-guard', in which case it would throw out an explosive fireball, that Alex could dodge with his teleportation skill.

Alex appeared to the side of the tree, or high in the air behind it. Sometimes, he would even appear in front of it.

Sometimes, the range wouldn't work as well as it should. Alex frowned at the teleportation technique that refused to work properly, but he couldn't worry about it now.

The monkey was starting to heave loudly, with nearly all of its Qi disappearing with the explosive balls of fire.

The armor on its body dimmed a lot. Alex jumped back at the monkey and started cutting it again, but no matter how hard he tried, his blades couldn't penetrate at all.

He wasn't breaking through the armor to cut its body. He needed a better sword intent. He needed Sword Qi.

It wouldn't come to him right now.

A Heaven's Impact flew at the tired monkey, and a hole opened in its armor.

Alex's eyes shined. He put his sword back into his ring and an illusory, misty white sword which only he could see appeared on his hand.

He rushed at the monkey, sending 3 more Heaven's impacts at it. The three impacts opened a big enough hole in the monkey's armor, and Alex put his sword through its back.

He then slid it down and cut it through the tail.

The monkey felt nothing happening aside from its vision going in and out for a few moments. Then, it turned around to see Alex standing behind it.

It moved its tail to send out a ball of fire that started unfolding in front of Alex, but Alex showed no fear towards that.

He simply grabbed the fire with his empty hand and snuffed it out.