

Chapter 5 Challenge

Late one night, about a month later, a brilliant green glow appeared at the summit of a high mountain in the forest, looking from a distance like a star had descended onto the peak. To avoid drawing attention to the unusual phenomenon triggered by his training, Sebastian had ventured into the remote wilderness under the guise of gathering herbs.

To draw in more spiritual energy and to attune himself to the forces of wind and thunder, Sebastian climbed to the mountain's summit. There, the clouds overhead began to churn, winds howled, and lightning occasionally flashed within the thick clouds, striking down fiercely onto the peak, as if intent on splitting it apart.

This breathtaking phenomenon was the result of Sebastian's training in the Azure Dragon Technique. The raging winds and heavenly lightning had gathered after his relentless practice throughout the day, and as the lightning struck his body, it not only tempered him physically but also allowed him to absorb its immense power.

Such an extreme practice was nothing short of madness. After all, lightning is one of nature's most destructive forces, something even powerful warriors in the Primordial Realm would avoid directly confronting. Yet, the Azure Dragon Technique Sebastian trained in required him to endure and harness the power of heavenly lightning.

This intense spectacle continued into the dead of night before finally subsiding. Sebastian's pain-stricken expression gradually relaxed as well. His clothes were torn to shreds by the strikes, his body covered with smoking, charred wounds, but a rich green glow flickered over his injuries. It carried a potent wood element aura that began to heal him.

"What's a little pain? I have to get stronger!" Sebastian clenched his fists, shouting inwardly as he braved wave after wave of lightning, grinding his teeth to bear the agony, letting the lightning refine his body.

The sacred technique didn't just produce these effects; it also allowed his body to withstand the electric strikes, tempering his flesh and making it even stronger.

Days passed with Sebastian enduring what seemed like relentless strikes of lightning. By this point, he had completed the foundational body-forging phase.

When he opened his eyes, two bolts of lightning seemed to shoot out from his gaze, radiating an intense and daunting presence.

"A sacred technique truly is in a league of its own—not something an ordinary warrior's technique could ever match. In just a month, I've advanced to the Earthly Fifth Realm!"

Sebastian had now reached the Earthly Fifth Realm.

As he focused inward, he saw five vortices of true energy within his energy center, growing stronger with each passing day, allowing him greater control over his true energy—this was the True Energy Realm of the Earthly Fifth Realm.

At just 16, achieving the Earthly Fifth Realm was no small feat. He looked down at his hands, where red and green true energy swirled, one fire element, the other wood element. It was proof he had already begun to master the Azure Dragon Technique and the Vermillion Bird Technique.

Sebastian felt as though he had undergone a transformation—both his physical body and his true energy had become immensely powerful. After all, his true energy had been refined by sacred techniques, and his body was tempered by them as well.

Now Sebastian understood why it was called a sacred technique—it was a path to power that could elevate a person to near-divine strength.

"The spiritual energy here isn't enough," Melissa's voice resonated in his mind. "If you want to progress rapidly, you'll need elixirs. Since you can already release true energy flames, you should start learning alchemy."

Melissa and Hayley, both anxious for Sebastian to grow stronger, wanted him to regain his strength as quickly as possible, especially since their current powerless state filled them with unease.

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"Well, well, isn't it Mr. Sebastian? The Andersons' so-called 'Alchemy Genius' has issued a challenge, wanting to face off against you in alchemy and martial arts."

Just as Sebastian stepped through the gates of Stone Mansion, he was greeted by an arrogant-looking young man.

"A challenge? When did this happen?" Sebastian asked, surprised; after all, he had been away for nearly ten days.

The young man sneered, "Didn't know, did you? We all thought you'd gone into hiding out of fear! It was ten days ago. Unfortunately for you, that so-called 'Alchemy Genius' has taken a fancy to your fiancée. Tough luck for you, huh?"

Sebastian felt an urge to strike him but restrained himself, grinning instead. "Haddon, remember how I threw you down when you were little? You're not here just to watch me embarrass myself, are you?"

This young man, Haddon Stone, was the son of one of the many branch leaders of the Stones, a family with strong influence across Naverra. The branch leaders were powerful figures themselves, only gathering at Stone Mansion for important matters.

Haddon's face flushed with anger, but he held back, mocking, "Oh, I'm here to see you humiliated by the Alchemy Genius. I can't wait to watch you lose that 'heavenly beauty' of a fiancée."

With that, Haddon laughed loudly and walked off.

Sebastian snorted, then quickly made his way out to find his father. He'd heard on his way back that there was trouble within the Stones, which meant the branch leaders would be gathering.

Inside the study at Tigre Villa, Sebastian hurried in and asked urgently, "Dad, is it true that Grandpa stepped down from the patriarch position?"

Ronan's expression was solemn as he nodded. "It's true. Your grandfather has retired. He's likely headed off to visit the Warrior's Creed sects. The Stones' branch leaders will arrive soon to compete for the position."

With the Stones' patriarch stepping down, a new one would need to be chosen. This transition would inevitably bring turmoil; the Stones' patriarchal contests were known to be fierce, often resulting in injuries.

Becoming the patriarch of the Warrior's Creed family meant ultimate authority and vast resources—things worth fighting for, even at great risk.

Ronan intended to compete for the patriarch position, which would certainly pull Sebastian into the fray. Without the strength to back him up, it would be perilous.

In this world where strength commanded respect, the Stones' patriarchal position was never inherited. It was seized. Only by demonstrating overwhelming power could one earn the loyalty of the family.

Noticing Ronan's heavy expression, Sebastian cautiously asked, "Dad, will it be difficult?"

Ronan sighed and replied, "It will be. I'll face several contenders for the patriarch position, and there are two brothers among them that concern me the most ... But enough about that. I heard the Andersons' prodigy challenge you. Go and decline it."

Sebastian, however, hadn't thought of refusing since he first heard of the challenge. He was now a warrior of the Earthly Fifth Realm and possessed a sacred technique. Because he practiced Harmony of the Heavens, he could restrain his aura, so Ronan hadn't sensed Sebastian's remarkable progress.

"Dad, I can't let the Schumans or the Andersons look down on me! I'm taking this challenge!" Sebastian's eyes shone with determination, his spirit resolute. A surge of pure true energy emanated from him, causing Ronan's eyes to widen in surprise. He could sense how much stronger Sebastian had become.

Ronan could only guess what had happened during this time, but he chose not to press further. Seeing his son grow stronger brought him great pride.

Ronan clapped a large hand on Sebastian's shoulder, laughing heartily. "I support you. Make sure the Alchemy Genius knows there's someone better out there!"

Sebastian chuckled. "Thanks, Dad. Any chance you could lend me a little money?"

Though he had a powerful father, Sebastian himself was quite poor. Ronan, fearing Sebastian would turn spoiled, had always kept him on a modest allowance, making him perhaps the humblest grandson of a patriarch.

Ronan, although formidable, spent much of his wealth on his cultivation and on collecting elixirs for Sebastian. He was not one to indulge Sebastian's whims.

"Why?"

"I want to buy some spiritual herbs to grow," Sebastian murmured, his eyes darting mischievously.

Growing spiritual herbs required expertise and meticulous care. Generally, only alchemists, often gray-haired elders, tended to such delicate cultivation. Few young people ventured into it, lacking either experience or patience, as some spiritual herbs took years to mature.

It was the first time Ronan had seen a young person like Sebastian express an interest in spiritual herb cultivation. But noticing the gleam of confidence in Sebastian's eyes, he reluctantly pulled out a storage bag.

"If this is just some passing whim, I'll make sure you're punished. You won't want to sit down for a month." Ronan's voice turned menacing, giving Sebastian a chill.

"Three thousand Great Spirit Dollars! If you don't think you can at least double it, don't ask me for money again." Ronan handed over a specially crafted bill.

Sebastian grinned as he accepted it, saying, "Don't worry, Dad. I'm going to be the youngest alchemist in the Stones!"

Ronan was startled. He was well aware that Sebastian was no longer the boy without a Soul Vein. Secretly, he felt pleased; if Sebastian truly succeeded, the Stones would grow stronger, as the family hadn't produced an alchemist in years.

Ronan laughed heartily. "Then get to it! And if you don't show me some results, be prepared to face the consequences! I'll go handle the response to the Andersons."

With 3,000 GSD in hand, Sebastian rushed off with new resolve.