

Alchemy 191

Chapter 191: Exam Starts

Alex was a little surprised. "I should have guessed. They do look similar, so I could have just known name by associating her with sister Zhou Mi," he thought.

He started wondering how good she might be at making pills or how far along she was at becoming an elder by now. He was also curious if she would be one of the people taking part in the annual competition. It was an obvious choice if he thought about it.

He talked with Kong Yuhan for a few more minutes as the rest of the elders came to the exam fields.

The elder from before started calling out names, sending the examinees to specific elders who were waiting for them. The names were at random from what Alex could tell and thus he had to wait a bit before he was called.

"Yu Ming!" the Elder said out loud. Alex walked up to the Elder. The Elder looked him up and down and said, "You're the sect leader's disciple huh? I heard you're quite good at taking pills. Good luck on your exam today." He then sent Alex to an Elder who was waiting for him near a fire pit.

Alex walked to the Elder and greeted him. The elder was on the younger side like he had just been transferred from the core disciples to the elders. The elder didn't speak much and directly told him to sit down and prepare.

"Have you chosen what pill you are going to make?" the Elder asked.

Alex didn't have to think as he had prepared for this moment. He chose the Bone Sealing pill. The Bone Sealing pill was a pill that blocked the cultivation base of anyone in the Bone Tempering realm of lower for a few hours, depending on the pill's harmony.

It was one of the pills he had only made a few times and was thus one of the few pills that fell under the criteria for his choice in the exam. The criteria being it wasn't registered to the sect, it was a recipe sold in the sect, and it was a recipe he had the ingredients for.

"Do you have your own ingredients and cauldron?" the elder asked. Alex was about to nod his head in affirmation but then realized that it was probably not a good idea to show his True Earth grade cauldron in front of everyone here. So he told the Elder that he only had the ingredients and not the cauldron.

The elder asked for him to take out the ingredients for checking. Alex happily complied and took out the ingredients. After seeing that Alex's ingredients had no tampering done to them, the Elder said, " Keep your storage bags aside please."

Alex was a little surprised at first, but then the Elder gave him a moderately big box that could fit about 10 storage bags in them. Alex put his bags in there and locked the box. He took the key with himself.

The elder took out a simple black cauldron, the same ones that were found in the Alchemy hall. This one had no lid either.

Alex had planned to not use Elemental Guidance and definitely not make pills whose resulting energy was metal so as to not stand out in the crowd. And now, he had to use a less than mediocre cauldron too.

'Oh god. If the pill splitting Qi activates, I might actually end up with pills below 20% harmony and just might fail,' he thought.

After the Elder handed him the cauldron and the ingredient, he said, "You have an hour to make the pill. Your time starts now." He then sat directly in front of him.

Alex stopped caring about the Elder and focused on the cauldron. He put the cauldron on the fire and let it heat up. As he was doing so, a small film-like substance started appearing around him and the fire pit. Not even the Elder was inside there.

Alex realized that this was a sound-blocking formation at work. 'I am really curious how these formations work,' he thought.

He then turned his focus back to the task at hand. The first thing he did, even before putting in the ingredients was clean the cauldron. Sending out a wave of Qi, he scraped off whatever bits of powder were left behind from previously made pills.

The Elder simply nodded when she saw this, approving of the choice.

Alex then waited for the cauldron to reach the proper temperature. The cauldron wasn't very good at transferring heat fast enough, so he would have to time it right. Thankfully, he remembered what the pill was supposed to look and feel like throughout the process of making it. So, he could base how close he was using that memory.

He could also use his spiritual sense to figure out the temperature of the cauldron. However, it wasn't as accurate as Flame Mastery Scripture.

When the cauldron was properly heated up, he put in the first ingredient, a tendon from a beaver-like beast. He waited until the tendon was heated enough and the energy started releasing into the air.

Due to having no lid, most of the energy flew away, while some of them stayed behind and got recollected into the powders. He then put in the second ingredient and moved it around inside the cauldron, turning it into powder and releasing its energy too.

The two energies mixed together in the powder forming a simple harmony of energy.

Compared to the first time he made the pills in the Alchemy hall, this was a much easier time. Thanks to his increased mental energy due to the spiritual sea being unlocked, he had a far better concentration and multi-tasking ability than a month ago.

He could also use spiritual sense to constantly check on the ingredients and energy, instead of just watching the powders move in the cauldron-like last time.

All in all, he was doing much better than the first time he had made a pill. Which, he started worrying might come around to become a problem for him.

Chapter 192: Failure

Alex continued making the Bone Sealing pill as per the recipe. While more than half of the energy had escaped, he didn't worry about it. The pills would have enough energy left for him to pass.

He continued putting in more and more ingredients as the Elder kept on watching. Finally, with the last ingredient, he was done putting in everything. It was now time for him to form the pill.

He slowly gathered the powder around to shape it into a sphere. It was beginning to form a clump of powder when suddenly, a different strand of Qi escaped from his body and went into the pills.

'No!' he thought, horrified. This was the last thing he wanted happening to him. He wasn't worried about the Elder seeing him split a pill into two. The cauldron was at a distance where the Elder couldn't see inside at all, but the problem was...

The powder clump separated into two equally sized clumps that started forming into pills. A vortex started on top of them sucking in as much energy as they could from their surrounding. However, most of it had already escaped and so the pills were left with none.

After a minute or two, the vortexes stopped forming and the pills were done.

Alex went into Focus mode. Time slowed down as his senses started to become a lot more acute. A little scared, Alex quickly put his hands into the cauldron, hiding the pills from the Elder. As he brought his hands back towards him, he looked at the pills.

[Bone Sealing Pill: 19%]

[Bone Sealing Pill: 17%]

'Sh*t,' he started distressing. He quickly shot the 17% pill down his sleeve and showed the 19% pill in his palm. The pill suddenly flew off as soon as he opened his arm, falling into the Elder's hand.

The Elder started testing the pill's Harmony level in the Pill tester and sighed. He shook his head as he saw the number 19 on the pill tester's glass body. Seeing that number was a little disappointing for him.

The Elder had heard quite a bit about the Sect Leader's disciple from the other Elders, especially the one in charge of registering pills for the core disciples.? 'Was he lying? Or was the disciple cheating at those

times?' the Elder wondered. His gaze turned a little harsh now that he knew that the disciple was not very talented at making pills.

However, nothing could be harsher than the way Alex was berating himself on the inside.

'You stupid idiot. You could've just used Elemental Guidance at the end and you would've been fine. Just a single percentage increase and you would've passed the exam. Goddammit! Why did the stupid pill splitting Qi had to get come out at this time.'

'I should have just used my cauldron and I could have fixed this. If only I had a lid, the harmony would go up by about 5% for sure.'

He started thinking about the different things that went wrong or the mistakes he made. However, nothing would now change the fact that he failed to make a 20% pill during the core disciples exam.

'Sigh. Half an hour went just like that,' he thought.

The Elder stood up at this point and walked a little closer towards him. He then spoke.

"Disciple Yu Ming, You have failed to make a pill with 20% harmony under an hour. Do you have anything to say," the Elder asked?

Alex sighed. He was about to shake his head when he suddenly caught up on something. "Um... Elder, Do I pass the exam as long as I can produce a 20% harmony pill in under an hour?" he asked.

"Why are you repeating what I just said and asking if that is true? Of course, it is," The Elder replied a little annoyed at Alex.

Alex however didn't mind it. His eyes were shining from the bit of information he had just received. "Elder, so I can make another pill, and if it turns out to have a harmony higher than 20%, I am fine, right?" he asked.

"Yes, but I will have to inspect your ingredients again and it's already over half an hour now," the elder said.

"No worries," Alex said and immediately opened the box to take out his storage bags. He looked into a few of them and took out the ingredients for the pill once more and handed it to the Elder.

The Elder spent some time checking the ingredients and handed it back to him. Alex looked at the time and only 20 minutes were left. He had to hurry up.

Alex was worried the Elder would waste more of his time if he brought out his cauldron at this point, so he decided to stay with the bad one for now.

Without hesitation, he put the first ingredient into the cauldron. The tendon started turning to powder and releasing energy. Alex slowly used Elemental Guidance to keep those energies inside the cauldron as much as possible.

After some time, he put in another piece of ingredient and used Elemental Guidance to keep its energy inside the cauldron too. As more and more ingredients were added into the mix, the harmony between the elements began to set.

Alex made sure everything was fine when he decided to start forming the pill.

'Oh god please don't release the pill splitting Qi,' he prayed. He then collected the powders in the cauldron to a clump and used Elemental Guidance to move whatever energy was left in the cauldron.

The little amount of energy passed through the powder, increasing the harmony ever so slightly. He could tell that the powders had absorbed a good amount of energy and that the pill would be high leveled now.

He was starting to get hopeful about his chances to pass at this point. He looked at the time and realized he only had less than 2 minutes to complete the task.

He proceeded to complete the task, but just then, the thing he least hoped for happened. The Pill Splitting Qi came out of his body once more.

Chapter 193: Calling out Names

'Oh no,' Alex thought as he felt the new strand of Qi come out of his body and enter the cauldron. The Qi immediately split the pill into two giving him horrifying thoughts about the result.

He wanted to control the Qi, but as usual, it was beyond his control. The separated clumps of powder suddenly started sucking in the energy from the cauldron, taking in the remaining energy he had managed to keep in there thanks to the Elemental Guidance.

Time was ticking down while the pills were still sucking in the energy.

Alex only had 10 seconds remaining on his time when the pills were formed. Without hesitation, he took one pill out of the cauldron and gave it to the Elder as he had no time to look at it himself.

As for the second pill, he couldn't think of how to covertly take it out now. He couldn't use his Qi manipulation or simply put his hands inside to grab it. There was only one thing he could do now.

Using an intense Qi manipulation, He crushed the pill inside the cauldron, scattering it everywhere. He then watched the Elder put his pill inside the pill tester. He hadn't touched the pill yet, so he didn't know if he had passed yet or not.

He watched with bated breath as the fog on the pill tester started to rise from the metallic plate. Slowly, the fog went up the glass beaker of the pill tester, soon reaching 10%.

But it didn't stop there, it kept on going up as more and more fog appeared on the beaker. At around 16%, the fog slowed down. Alex started worrying. It went up to 17%, which made him a little happy, but still worried.

'A little more, just a little more,' he wished worriedly. 18%, the fog went up once again.? And again it went up to 19%.

'Just one more, please,' Alex started praying. He could almost swear that he looked at the pill tester for an eternity before it went up.

20%.

A big smile appeared on Alex's face as he saw the number. He had passed. The pill tester didn't stop there however, it went up 4 times more and stopped at 24%.

He had safely passed the test by a huge margin. The Elder looked at the harmony level of the pill and nodded. He then turned around to Alex and said, "Congratulations, You've passed the exam. You are now a core disciple. Give me your nameplate."

Alex took out his nameplate and handed it to the Elder. "You can go and sit with your friends in the audience now," The Elder said and walked away. Having nothing else to do, Alex took his storage bags and walked back to the spectator's zone.

While walking back, he could hear the sigh of relief, the sigh of disappointment, the cry of sadness, the optimism, and a whole lot of other emotions on the voice of the numerous disciples that took the test.

He looked ahead to the spectator's zone and saw that Kong Yuhan was smiling happily while talking with Zhou Mi, who herself was smiling as well. The ever-frowning Zhou Mei was smiling too.

'It seems she passed,' Alex thought.

Alex went to a relatively isolated section of the spectator's zone and waited for the results. Only after a few minutes did the elders return back to the hall.

"Alright, we will now announce the disciples who have passed the exam," the Elder said.

"For the first list, we have 9 new inner sect disciples. I will call your name and you come on the stage. The list is based on who passed the earliest," the elder said. He then started calling out names. Every disciple he called would walk up to him, whereupon they would be handed 2 sets of new robes, a new guidebook, and their nameplate.

One by one, the new inner sect disciples were called to get their stuff. Once the disciples took their stuff, they walked back to the spectator zone. Kong Yuhan had at one point managed to find him and had made his way over to Alex.

"Brother Yu, how was your exam?" he asked.

"So-so, I would say. At least I passed," Alex replied.

"Well, passing an exam is always good," Kong Yuhan said.

One after another the disciples went up to the elder and returned back. Soon, the 9th name was called upon. The disciple walked a little ashamedly, hiding his face from the crowd as much as possible, and made his way up to the elder.

After taking his stuff back, he hurried his way back to the spectators.

"Now, let's move on to the new Core disciples. This time, we have a surprising 3 new core disciples," the elder said.

"Woah, 3 at once? That's a good amount. But, brother Yu, didn't you say you passed? Why was your name not called yet?" Kong Yuhan asked.

Alex was still waiting for his name so he simply said, "I did pass. It will come up soon probably."

Kong Yuhan was about to tell him he was wrong and that the names for inner sect disciples were done when the first name on the Core disciples list was named.

Hearing the name, a male disciple walked out of the group of people with his head held up high and a smug smile on his face.

"Tsk, it's not sister Mi who was first?" Kong Yuhan clicked his tongue as he said that.

Alex was a little surprised to hear him care about the order at which the names were called. "Is there an importance to the order of names being called? He asked.

"Not really, it's just that..." Kong Yuhan started to get a little embarrassed as he searched around for words to speak. "It's just that the new core disciples get their houses based on who came first. Since I was the only disciple to pass last time, the one who passes first this time is housed next to me, and... I really wanted it to be Sister Mi."

Chapter 194: Core Disciple

Alex was quite surprised by how open Kong Yuhan was being about his affection towards Zhou Mi. 'He must really like her,' he thought. The student who had gone up first returned back with an equally smug look as when he went up.

"Zhou Mi," the Elder spoke. Alex watched as Zhou Mei pat her sister on the back before sending her out. Zhou Mi walked straight to the elder and bowed. Kong Yuhan watched her with a smile on his face.

Zhou Mi wasn't smug like the first guy, only happy and had a cheerful smile as she returned back.

"Brother Yu, I will go find that disciple from earlier and ask him if he can change his house with mine, Okay?" Kong Yuhan said and was about to walk out when suddenly, he stopped mid-step and looked back with wide eyes.

The elder had just called the name 'Yu Ming' to come out. "Brother Yu?" Kong Yuhan said as he tried to inquire, but Alex just gave him a simple smile and walked out.

"Huh? An outer core disciple?" someone was surprised.

"Wait, did he take a core disciple exam?" another person said in shock.

"Not only that, he passed it too," another person was surprised.

Zhou Mi had just reached her sister when she looked back when she heard the name the Elder call out. "Brother Yu?" she also shouted in surprise. The shock and surprise didn't let go of Zhou Mei either.

"It's that guy from last time. He is a core disciple now?" she said in shock. She had been in the sect for a little over 5 years now but had never seen an Outer sect disciple jump straight to Core disciple. She kept looking at him in shock as he walked to the elder.

Alex reached the Elder and bowed a little. "You finished last minute I hear," the Elder said in a low voice. "Yes, Elder. Some problems came up as I was making the pills," Alex said.

"Well, it doesn't matter. Since you passed, you are now a Core disciple. Congratulations," the Elder said as he handed the items to Alex who quickly put them into his storage bag.

"You might live on the Sect Leader's mountain, but since you are a core disciple now, you also have a house at the core disciple's mountain. Check your new nameplate to locate your house," the Elder said.

"Thank you, Elder." He then bowed to the Elder once more and started walking back.

"The Tests are over. You are all dismissed," the Elder shouted. The student didn't leave however, they kept looking at Alex in shock. He walked back to the spectator zone since that was where the way out was.

Kong Yuhan was about to step out to question him when suddenly the hoard of disciples walked forward to question him first.

"Hey brother, you are called Yu Ming, right? When did you join the sect? I have never seen you before."

"Are you an Elder's son?"

"Did you cheat?"

"Did you come from another Alchemy school?"

"Brother, teach us how to go from Outer sect Disciple to core disciple too."

"Hey, Brother Yu, Do you have a girl you like?"

"I can be your girlfriend if you want. Just teach me a little Alchemy for free."

"Brother, my name is Huang Lei, I can be your aid if you ever want to make pills in the Alchemy hall."

"He is a core disciple now, he doesn't need an Aid."

"Hey, nothing wrong in just asking, right?"

"I guess so, Brother you want me as an aid as well?"

Alex was a little surprised when he was suddenly surrounded by all sides and asked multiple questions. "Ah, Ah," was the only words he had managed to get out. He couldn't even see Kong Yuhan anymore.

The pathway out was packed with the student and he didn't know what to do anymore. He looked at the time and it was about time to log out as well. 'Sh*t, I'm going to be late for school,' Alex thought.

He tried to push through, but the students were truly a lot. Without any choice, he reached into his storage bag and took out a pill, stunning everyone in there. He raised the pill high up and shouted, "This is a 17% harmony Bone Sealing pill. Whoever catches this can take it."

He then suddenly threw it up in the air. Numerous hands reached out to grab the pill, and only one managed to get it using their Qi. When the person grabbed it, the rest of the people looked back towards Alex, but he wasn't there anymore.

The disciples looked around for a bit but couldn't find him. He had walked out while they were distracted. So reluctantly, they left the Elder's hall and walked outside.

Kong Yuhan and Zhou Mi were quite surprised at his sudden disappearance too but thought he must've walked out fast when he threw the pill in the air.

"I can't believe brother Yu is a core disciple now," he said. His mind was still reeling by the fact that a disciple that knew nothing about Alchemy a month ago, was now a core disciple.

"Just how talented is he?" he wondered

"Me neither. I thought he was just a normal outer sect disciple. No wonder he was there in the Disciple Hall that day," Zhou Mi said remembering back 2 days ago when she met Alex on the staircase to the top floors.

"Alright let's go out," Kong Yuhan said as there was nothing more to do here and started walking out.

"Let's go, Sister," Zhou Mi said as she tried to pull her sister, but she wouldn't budge. Zhou Mi turned around and was a little surprised to see the face of utter shock on her sister's face.

"What's wrong, Sister?" Zhou Mi asked, but her sister wouldn't respond. Only after a while did she say 3 words out loud that formed an incomplete sentence.

"That man, He..." Zhou Mei said out loud and thought the rest by herself.

'That man, He definitely just used the Flickering Shadows Technique.'

Chapter 195: Zhou Mei's Confusion

'But how could he get his hands on the only immortal technique of the sect that costs over 50,000 contribution points, as an outer sect disciple?' Zhou Mei wondered with her eyes still wide open.

'Could the disciples be correct and he is actually a son of an elder?' she wondered. 'But even then getting your hands on the technique should be impossible, unless...' her eyes turned wide at her own speculations.

'Unless he is the sect master's own son. Besides, she is the only one that I know of that has fully learned the Flickering Shadows technique. Was she hiding him from us? Is he a secret love child with an outsider?'

Numerous thoughts ran across her mind trying to make sense of how an unknown Outer Sect disciple could become a core disciple directly, and how that person could have learned an immortal technique.

"Sister? Sister!" Zhou Mi called out trying to wake Zhou Mei out of her own thoughts.

"Yeah? What's wrong?" she asked.

"You seemed to be lost in your thought, Sister. What happened?" Zhou Mi asked.

Zhou Mei thought for a second and asked, "You people know him right?"

"Him?" Zhou Mi cocked her head to the side in confusion. Only after realizing who she was talking about did she say, "Oh you mean Brother Yu?"

"Yes, that disciple, the new Core formation disciple. You guys seem to know who he is. Do you know how he is close to the Sect Leader?" she asked.

"Close to the sect leader?" Zhou Mi was once again confused. "I have no idea sister, I have only met him once and that was during Brother Kong's ascension too. In fact, Brother Kong knows more about him," she said.

Zhou Mei turned her head towards Kong Yuhan and glared at him, waiting for him to answer. Kong Yuhan on the other hand started feeling uncomfortable under the intense gaze and said, "I've only met him a couple of times. Due to him helping me a few times I call him a brother. That's just to the extent of what I know about him," he said.

"Helped you a couple of times?" Zhou Mei got a little curious. "Explain."

Kong Yuhan proceeded to tell her how Alex had managed to help him by finding him the incredibly hard-to-find Dwarf Berry, being an Aid during the preparation of the Qi Improvement pill, and then helping him once more during the pill cauldron exploding accident.

"Explain more about the accident again," Zhou Mei asked.

Kong Yuhan proceeded to explain in more accuracy how Alex had managed to throw away the cauldron just before it had exploded during his ascension and how he also blocked the incoming shockwaves and protected him.

"You didn't realize what had happened to your cauldron yourself?" she asked with a look of disdain. Kong Yuhan knew that she hated him for liking her sister, but didn't say anything because of her sister, so he didn't say anything except shake his head.

Zhou Mei then turned to her sister and asked, "You were there too, right? You didn't do anything?"

Zhou Mi simply shook her head as well. "He moved and saved us before any of us even realized what had happened," she said.

Zhou Mei could only think of one thing after listening to the story, ' This person definitely used Elemental Guidance. Another technique that is only known by elders and high-level Core disciples. Just who is this person?' the curiosity was eating her up from the inside.

"Sister?" Zhou Mi had to wake her sister once more as she was lost in her own thoughts once more.

"Huh?" she was jolted awake again.

"Aren't we going to leave?" Zhou Mi asked.

Zhou Mei took her eyes off her sister and looked at the testing hall only to find out that nobody was inside anymore. Not even the elders.

"Right, let's leave." Zhou Mei started walking up front and the two followed behind her. The lecture was already done, so the lecture hall was empty as well. Instead of leaving towards the core disciple's mountain, however, Zhou Mei walked towards the place where the Sect Leader's mountain and the left alchemy garden met.

"Why are you going there, sister? Do you need something in the gardens?" Zhou Mi asked.

"No, I'm not going to the garden. I'm going to the Elder's quarters," she said and kept on walking.

"But why, sister?" Zhou Mi asked in confusion.

"Just go back to the Core disciple mountain, for now, I will come by later. I have something I need to ask my masters about," She left without waiting for a reply.

"Bu—" Zhou Mi was about to say something, but her sister was already far away.

"Sigh, she's always like this." Zhou Mi simply shook her head and looked at Kong Yuhan, who was looking at her too. Kong Yuhan gulped before he said, "Sister Zhou Mi, let us go back to the core disciple mountain and wait for your sister there. In the meantime, we can set up your new home as well," he said.

Now that they were alone, Zhou Mi got a little embarrassed as well and made a simple "mmm" sound to show affirmation. Kong Yuhan smiled and showed her the way to her new residence.

Alex, on the other hand, was already back at his home in the sect leader's mountain. He had employed both the Flickering Shadows Technique and the Veiled Light technique to escape from the crowd of people.

He was late for his university classes, so he took out the communication talisman and messaged his master. "I passed, master. I am currently tired due to cultivating all night and the exam, so I am going to rest. I will see you later for the talk about the forbidden fields."

He got a simple reply back saying, "Okay, and Congratulations." He smiled when he saw that.

Once he was inside the house, he walked into a random room, sat cross-legged, and logged out.

Chapter 196: Walking to the University

Alex logged out from the game at around half past 9 in the morning. Any longer and he would be very late for school.

"Oh no," he said as he hurriedly ran out of the room to go have his lunch before leaving for his classes. He didn't know how long exactly it would take him to reach his university, so he had to hurry up today.

He reached the kitchen and found Hannah halfway through finishing her meal.

"What took you so long? Were you asleep till now?" she asked.

"Uh no. I had a promotion exam in the game and was late because of it," he said.

"Oh, promotion exam? From what to what?" she asked.

"Uh, from an outer sect disciple to a Core Disciple one," he said.

"You passed it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Congrats. Now get plate yourself the dishes and hurry up," Hannah said as she continued her food. Alex put some food for himself and ate it as fast as he could. Hannah however still had a quarter of the food left.

"Why are you eating so slowly, sister?" he asked.

"Why should I eat fast? It's not like I have school or anything," she said.

"Huh?" Alex was surprised. "Your school days are over?" he asked.

"Nah. It's only from Tuesday to Friday. I have Saturday to Monday free," she said.

"Oh," Alex said in understanding and ate his food. Slowly he started getting anxious about how to go to the university now that he was alone. 'I don't even know the way. Do I have to use my phone?' he wondered.

'Sigh, whatever. I will just use the phone map.' He quickly finished the meal and wore a fresh pair of clothes for his university class. He put his new laptop into his backpack and opened up the map app on his phone and walked out.

He took an extra key of the apartment and put it in his bag. "I'm leaving," he said and walked out of the house. He got on the elevator and went all the way down. He then looked at his phone for which direction to leave in.

'Left from here,' he thought as he looked at the map.

He had just walked out of the building when he saw someone in front of him. There were 2 people there, but his eyes only saw a single person. It took him a second more to notice the other one.

"Emily? Sarah?" he was surprised.

"Good morning Alex," Sarah said with a smile.

"Go— Good Morning," Emily said in a shy voice with a blush on her face.

Alex reciprocated their greetings asked them what they were doing in front of the building he lived in.

"Oh, I was just on my way to take Emily here to school, but then your cousin messaged me asking if I would mind showing you the way if I had classes today, which I don't," Sarah said.

Alex waited for her to continue and she did.

"So, when I heard that, I instead decided to just let Emily go to the university with you. She needs company, and you need a guide. You two are perfect for each other," Sarah said with a smug smile. There seemed to be another meaning hidden behind her words.

Emily nudged her in the side with her elbow as she got even more embarrassed.

Sarah just laughed it off and said, "Alright, I'll leave you guys to it now, or you will be late. See you tomorrow. Have fun, Emily." Sarah returned back towards her home after waving them off.

Alex was a little stunned at what had just happened, but he still managed to gather his wits and ask Emily, "Shall we go now? Or else we will be late, I think."

Emily checked the time and meekly said, "We- We will still have over 10 minutes remaining on our time even if we walked right now. Either way, w-we should move."

They started walking to the university. Alex was quite unsure of what to do, so he tried to start a talk a few times, but each time Emily would stop the conversation with a simple answer and not keep the conversation flowing.

At first, Alex thought she was doing that on purpose, but then he saw her beet-red face and realized she was just as, if not more, nervous and anxious at being around him than him being around her.

The path to the university was quite convoluted with a lot of twists and turns.

"I would've probably been fine with the map, but I don't think I could've made it here this fast if not for you," Alex said out loud.

"Yo-You think so?" Emily asked.

"Yes, really. Thank you," Alex said.

Emily just smiled a little.

They finally reached university, and it took them about 20+ minutes of walking. "Although walking is fine and healthy, a vehicle would be much better," Alex said.

"Oh, w-why don't I ask Sarah to give you a ride on the days she does have classes?" Emily said.

"Will you? That will be helpful. I will start learning how to drive together with my sister as well," Alex said.

"I- Should I learn it as well?" she seemed to be considering the prospects. "Although, I'm not as rich as Sarah so I don't know if I can even buy a car. Not sure if my parents will get me on either," she said.

"You should be able to earn a few bucks from the game, right? Especially now that you are in the True Realm," Alex asked.

Emily hesitated for a moment, wondering if she should say it or not, but in the end, she did. "I am actually no longer in the True Realm," she said.

Alex was a little surprised to hear that. At first, he wondered why she would lie about the realm yesterday, but when he thought more about it, he was shocked.

"Wait, did you already reach Saint realm?" he asked with wide eyes.

Chapter 197: Reincarnation Problem

"Saint Realm? What? No," Emily said. She was a little exasperated from the absurd guess. "No, I- I actually just died in the game after I reached True realm. I am starting once more, but it's hard since like everyone, I don't have the same talents as my previous self. They are all mortal grade now," Emily said.

"Oh. That sounds quite unfortunate. Would you mind telling me how you died?" he asked.

"Um... I was out on a mission from the sect, a-and I was attacked by a monster who caught me by surprise. I was logged out before I even realized I had died," she said. "After that, the next time I joined, I was made to create a new character and sent elsewhere in the same continent, and that was about a week ago."

"Since I'm not as good as before, I can't earn much money from the game," she said.

"I see." He then thought of something and asked, "by the way, what time do your classes end?"

"Around 3 pm," Emily said.

"Oh, the same as me. Would you walk the way back with me as well? I would rather not walk back alone," Alex said.

"S-Sure. I can do that," Emily said timidly.

"Would you mind adding your number to my phone?" Alex took out his phone and asked.

"Of course not," Emily said and timidly took the phone from him and added her number onto his name. She then looked at the clock and said, "umm... My classes are this way. I should hurry up now."

"Oh, my classes are that way. Thank you for showing me the way today," Alex said.

"It was nothing. Don't worry about it. See you later," Emily said and walked towards her classes.

Alex was left standing there feeling something deep within him make him feel weird. "Am I?... no way." He walked to his class.

After the classes were over, he messaged Emily for a place to meet, and together they walked back home. Alex walked a little further to take her to her apartment and returned back to his own.

He got up the elevator to his apartment and entered.

"Oh, you're back already? What time is it?" Hannah was in the living room using her phone.

"It's half past 3. What are you doing sister?" he asked.

"Oh, just browsing the EC forums, looking through the responses to the interview yesterday. Hehe, look at this, so many people are calling me cute and pretty. I might just have to go become a model at this rate," Hannah said jokingly.

"Go change your clothes. I'll prepare some food," Hannah said.

"Alright, sister." Alex went to his room and freshened up. He walked to the kitchen to see Hannah shaking her head as if she had just read something very sad.

"What's the wrong sister?" he asked.

"It's this guy named Connor. You probably don't know him, but this guy came out a month ago as one of the strongest players at the time," Hannah said.

Alex remembered the person. He was the one with the interview from back when he was only a week into the game. "I saw his interview. What about him?" Alex asked.

"Oh, you did? It's just that people were constantly asking in the forums why this guy wasn't invited to the show or why he didn't want to show up, and he finally made a post on his own."

Alex was a little curious about this as well, so he asked, "What about him? Did he not want to come?"

"No, it seems he did. But it turns out, his character died while fighting a relatively stronger monster in the forest. He says, the monster wasn't necessarily stronger than him, but it was more poisonous and he got caught up in the poison."

"Tsk Tsk. Poor guy had to restart all over again, and also lost all of his amazing body and talent. He says he respawned as trash now. He is barely at Bone Tempering realm after 2 weeks of cultivating and constant usage of spirit stones. If this keeps up, he will end up using his entire fortune on the game."

Hannah kept on shaking her head.

"That's quite a coincidence," Alex said a little surprised by the news.

"Hmm... coincidence? How?" Hannah asked.

"Emily said that after her character died, she too got really bad talent and body. She is restarting her climb once again, but with mortal grade talent and body, it will probably take a long time," Alex said.

"Oh, that is actually not a coincidence at all," Hannah said, which confused Alex a lot.

"It's not?" he asked.

"Yeah, there have been many other people who have died and gone back to the game only to find that their new body was unbelievably worse than their first one. It's like the game is punishing them for dying or something," Hannah said.

"Woah, I'm glad I didn't die a month ago. I was damn near close to as well," Alex said.

"You were?" Hannah asked in surprise. "What happened?"

Alex proceeded to tell her about how he fought against the wolf to protect Pearl and his mother.

Hannah cringed when she heard that the wolf bit his skull and left him bloodied. "Ouch, that sounds like it hurt a lot. Well, at least you didn't die from it. And hey, you also got a beast companion from it. I wanted to get one as well, but the monster cubs take too long to grow up," Hannah said.

"Yeah, my cat is quite cute and very strong too," Alex said. They stopped talking and finished their food. Alex helped with the dishes and only returned to his room at around 4 pm.

He logged back into the game and checked his communication talisman, but there was no message. So he messaged his master to ask where she was and if she had the time to meet him. He got a message back.

"I'm in my home. You can come right now."

Chapter 198: Pill Swines

Alex reached his master's home a few minutes later. He walked into the room he previously had gone to and waited for his master. Ma Rong came soon enough.

"Congratulations on becoming a core disciple," she said.

"Thank you, master," he said with a big smile. He didn't know how being a core disciple would help him, but it should ease his master's problem a lot.

"Now that you are one, you should start dressing like it too," Ma Rong said.

"Huh? What do you— Oh," he looked down to clothes and made a goofy smile. "I just woke up from my sleep so I forgot to change," he said.

Ma Rong chuckled a little too. "Although, I heard you did quite badly at the exams," she said.

"Oh yeah, master. To not reveal our relationship yet, I decided to choose a normal cauldron without a lid, and I didn't realize how bad I was at making pills without my regular cauldron and lid. I also stupidly decided not to use Elemental Guidance the first time and it made the pills quite bad as well," he said.

Ma Rong nodded, "Well, at least you learned how to get a good harmony level even with a trash cauldron. Most other core disciples would simply fail at creating anything above 15% as well."

"However, now you should start learning how to make a pill better, and for that, you need to understand how pills are made," she said.

"How pills are made? Is there more to pill-making than what you've taught me?" he asked curiously.

"Hmm... my bad. I should probably say how pill recipes are made. What I mean is, you should start making your own pills," Ma Rong said.

Alex was surprised. "I should make my own pills? Is that even—"

"Possible?" Ma Rong cut him mid-sentence. "Yes, it is possible. But it is also highly unlikely you will succeed anytime soon. At least, even with your talent, I doubt you will be able to make one without reaching the latter realms of True realm," she said.

Alex got a little confused. "If making new pills are impossible for me until I get into the True realms then what is the point?" He asked.

"Experience," Ma Rong said. "Making pills from the recipe will only help you understand how to make pills, they will never teach you how the interaction between the energies end up affecting a human body when they eat the pill."

"You can tell that fire energy will overwhelm wood energy, but you can't tell what the resulting energy will do. Will it harm a person? Heal them? Increase their strength or speed? What about affecting one's Qi itself?"

"There are many aspects to the energies that you will have to learn and figure out by yourself. And you can only do that by making your own pills," Ma Rong said.

Alex couldn't see any flaw with that statement. Until now, he had made pills based on the recipe. He would easily learn the recipe without any problem and would mostly know what to do.

This, however, had dulled his instinct in pill-making. If only he started to make one by himself could he truly understand how everything worked. But there was one problem that he needed to think of a solution to first if he wanted to do that.

"Umm... Master, if I add in random ingredients willy nilly, won't I cause an explosion? That would at best harm my cauldron and at worst kill me," he said.

"Yes, I know," Ma Rong said. "Not only that, there is another worse problem too. Say you happened to make a pill, what do you do after that?" Ma Rong asked.

Alex thought for a second, couldn't come up with an answer that didn't include eating the pill himself or giving it to some other person. However, that would be completely immoral and dangerous as he wouldn't know what the function of the new pills would be.

"I honestly do not know master. I assume it has nothing to do with feeding other people?" he asked.

"There are evil alchemists out there who will do that, but not us. For normal alchemists there are two methods," Ma Rong said.

"The first one is to feed it to a domestic monster called a Pill Swine. Pill Swine's body composition is very close to a human body, however, they are very bad at cultivation and are slow to breakthrough. This makes them the perfect test subject to experiment on. It, however, can be considered immoral as well depending on your standing."

"The ethics of the method is highly debated as to whether it is good or not among the higher level cultivators who can afford to make their own pills," Ma Rong said.

Alex thought about it, but he couldn't think of why it would be immoral. 'We kill the animals on our farm all the time. If they were bred with an aim, I don't think it's immoral for humans to use them for that,' he thought.

"They don't seem any more different than the ones we rear for food, so I don't think it is unethical at all," Alex said.

"Well I disagree," Ma Rong said. "But, as I said, it's still a debate and nothing is fixed. Maybe I will come to appreciate them at some point," Ma Rong said.

"Are there Pill Swines in the sect?" he asked. "I don't think I have ever heard or seen them."

"That's not weird at all," Ma Rong said. "Pill Swines are only useful for high-level alchemists who can create new pills, so most alchemists won't even have a use for it. As such, we have elders rearing it behind the alchemy garden on the left."

"You can reach it from both here, if you fly down left from here, or if you just walk to the back of the core disciple's mountain. Since only Elders and Core disciples have any possible use for it, the sect keeps them at a place where they both can easily reach it."

Chapter 199: True Nullifying Pill

"I didn't know there were other locations in the sect," Alex said.

"There are. However, they only get revealed to you once you have been promoted. You could've learned about the Pill Swines' location if you had read the new maps," Ma Rong said.

"New map?" he wondered for a second what she meant. "Oh, the new guidebook. I should look at it later. Anyway, Master. What is the second method?" he asked.

"The second method is a bit more controversial since it has to do with using the pills on yourself," Ma Rong said.

Alex was both surprised and shocked when he heard this. This wasn't what he had expected. "Experimenting on oneself? Isn't that extremely dangerous, master?" he asked.

"Yes, it is. But you only do that in the last case scenario where you don't have Pill Swines or have zero clues about what your pill does. You read all the pill recipes, right? Then you must know the recipe to the True Nullifying Pill," she said.

"True Nullifying Pill?" he looked into his memories and found a pill with the same name. However, he had never bothered learning or making it since it was a True pill, and all he could make were common rank pills.

"It's a True Rank pill, master. Is it even useful for me?" he asked.

Ma Rong snickered and asked, "What? You think you can make proper new pills before you reach True realm?" she asked. "Besides, you will just use the Pill Swines most of the time due to the limitations of the True Nullifying pill," she said.

Alex recalled the information about the pill.

True Nullifying Pills. Nullifies the effect of any recently taken pills. The pill must be less than 5 minutes old to use and the pill taken recently must also be less than 5 minutes old.

"What's up with the time limitations on both pills for True Nullifying pill to work, Master? He asked.

"Well, the first one is just an assumption. We just assume that a normal pill takes effect immediately and is fully integrated into your system within 5 minutes. It can be more or less depending on the pill."

"The True Nullifying pill, however, is an extremely volatile pill that interacts with the energy on the environment itself and counteracts the energy on the environment to nullify it. In about 10 minutes, it can fully release all of its energy to nullify its surrounding. So it is suggested that we use it within 5 minutes to get more than half of its effect."

"You don't have to worry about it for now. Since you will need True Qi to even approach making this pill. Just focus on practicing normally for now," Ma Rong said.

Alex nodded his head. "What about the exploding problem then master?" he asked.

"Just get some random low-level cauldrons from the sect market. Since you have full authority in the sect, the elders in the sect market will accept Spirit Stones too for those cauldrons," Ma Rong said.

"I see. Thank you, master. I will do that," He said. "However, I will have to lay it off until after the competition."

"Why?" Ma Rong was a little taken aback. "You still have some time until— Oh, right. You still want to go there?" she asked.

"Yes, master. I really need those yellow jade rocks from the forbidden fields," Alex said.

Ma Rong sighed unable to deny it since she had already allowed him. "Alright. Go to the right alchemy garden tomorrow morning at 6, I will ask Lang Shun to take you to the fields."

"Thank you, Master," Alex said.

"Don't thank me. I'm sending you to your torture. There is nothing for me to be thanked for. Instead, take this time to prepare yourself. You might be fine the first day, but the following days will be the worst days of your life."

Alex got a little scared now. "I thought there was nothing in the forbidden fields. What you are saying is scaring me now, master," he said.

"You are correct.? It is a really weird place. We didn't know what to do with it at first when we settled down here decades ago, so the sect leader at that time decided to make it a makeshift prison of sorts. "

"There is nothing in the forbidden fields. This is also why it is the worst. The torture for the first few days is Boredom. However, after a week or two, the reason for torture slowly changes from boredom to hunger. There is barely any food, It's all open so nothing to keep you safe from the elements. And probably the worst of all,? there is no Qi."

"Not only is there no Qi, but you also lose all of yours the moment you reach the fields." Ma Rong said.

"Umm...Master. The other disciples were punished so they can't, however,? can't I just take my own food and water there?" he asked.

"Yes, you can. However, you can't use a storage bag. It would have to be a mortal bag, and food that won't get bad very fast," Ma Rong said. "I will ask Lang Shun to prepare some for you. You go and prepare for tomorrow," Ma Rong sent him back.

Alex walked out of his master's house and thought about the forbidden fields for a few seconds. There was one problem that he just couldn't tell master because she couldn't understand or relate to it at all.

"God, what am I going to do about logging out? Do I really just leave my body out in the open. Hopefully, I will be perfectly fine since there aren't any animals out there. I should be mostly fine given my body cultivation. I doubt not having Qi will affect my cultivation at all," He thought and walked back to his home

Instead of staying back at his home to prepare for tomorrow, or going to the sect market to buy some low-grade cauldrons, he decided to change his robes and go check out what the core disciple's mountain really looked like.

Chapter 200: Core Mountain

Alex gave the guidebook a general look-through. It didn't have anything that would pertain to him, other than the fact that he could be an elder if he ever made? 50 pills over 35% in harmony or a Heaven-grade pill.

It also marked the location of the Pill Swines, but he already knew where it was now.

The only new thing he really got to know was the general location of the forbidden fields. But the map was vague about it for some reason. It didn't mark any specific places.

'Is that because it's big?' he wondered.

He walked down to the base of the mountain and walked left to go to the core disciple's mountain.

Now that he was a core disciple, he felt like there were more eyes on him, looking at him with slight respect. Alex didn't let it get to his head, however, and walked directly to the core mountain.

Looking at his robes, the elders that stood guard didn't block him at all. Alex remembered the way to his house and walked along the pathway, keeping all locations in mind.

He looked at the houses along the way, however, none of it were inhabited.

"Hmm... is that what brother Kong told me? Everyone gets put into the houses in order of their entry to the core mountain. So right now, I must have the final inhabited house."

He walked along the way and finally reached his house. From the outside, it didn't look like anything fancy at all. It looked just like the hundreds of other homes lined by its side.

However, he wanted to check how it was on the inside. The door had a similar system to the one in the Alchemy hall, wherein he could place his nameplate on the door frame and it would open up.

He walked inside to check the interior, but it was hardly worth talking about compared to his home in the sect leader's mountain.

"At least it has an alchemy room too," he thought. He walked to the back of the house and saw that it also had a courtyard with a pool in it. Although both were much smaller when compared to his other house, they weren't that bad.

After checking it all, he decided that he liked his other home better and prepared to leave.

He took the nameplate out of the outside and walked out.

"You should be fine staying here now that all the furniture and stuff has been transported. Do you want me to wait here with you for your sister to come back?" a voice came from a house over.

"Yes, I will be fine. Although, I won't mind if you wait with me," A girl's voice came.

Alex didn't even have to look to see who it was.

"Brother Kong, it's good to see you again," he said as he walked out of the house. He then turned to Zhou Mi and said, "It's good to see you've settled in already Sister Zhou Mi."

"Ah, Brother Yu," they both shouted when they saw him.

"You are here finally. I was waiting for you. Congratulations on becoming a Core disciple, Brother Yu," Kong Yuhan said.

"I was quite surprised to see you become a core disciple too, Brother Yu. Congratulations," Zhou Mi said.

"Thank you," he simply said.

"How did you get so good at alchemy? Were you hiding your abilities when you met me?" Kong Yuhan asked.

"Uhh... I don't think it will be appropriate of me to reply that with anything. Sorry brother Kong," Alex said. He didn't want to lie and say that he was good from the very start, or tell the truth and reveal his talents here.

Kong found it a little weird that he wouldn't answer a simple question, but decided to think nothing about it.

"By the way, did you go back to take your stuff too?" Zhou Mi asked, trying to change the topic at hand.

"Uhh... no. I won't be staying here, I got a different place," Alex said.

"Where are you going, Brother Yu? It can't be that you are going to go back to the outer sect, right? Are you leaving the sect for another few weeks?" Kong asked.

"I... " before Alex could even answer anything, a voice came from behind him.

"He is going back to the Sect Leader's mountain. He has a place there after all."

Alex sighed. He had sensed her coming, but he didn't expect her to reveal such information.

"Isn't that correct? Sect leader's disciple?" Zhou Mei asked.

"Sect leader's... disciple?" Kong Yuhan was shocked. Zhou Mi gasped as well.

"Yes. He is the sect leader's first and only disciple. I had my suspicions after seeing his techniques today, so I went to my masters to ask them, but it seemed that they were already in the know. "

"In fact, most of the elders in the sect are in the know that he is the sect leader's disciple by now," Zhou Mei said.

Alex heard a bit of hatred and jealousy in her voice and was confused for a second if he had ever offended her to get such a response.

"Yes, that is me," Alex said. "Can I do something to help you?"

"Yes, in fact, you can. Stop using the fact that you are a sect leader's disciple as a reason for getting all the different techniques to learn. Some of us here had to struggle for years and still haven't been able to gather enough contribution points for the Flickering Shadows technique, and you've already learned it."

"You must've gotten it months ago and hid your identity from the public, didn't you? Why did you become a core disciple now? Was it to take part in the competition?"

"If so, you better forget about it. Disciples are chosen based on their Alchemy ability. A new core disciple like you can't match up to anyone."

Zhou Mei grabbed her sister and went inside her sister's house, leaving Alex and Kong speechless outside.