

Alchemy 381

Chapter 381: Back to Training

Alex was certainly not very good at using the sword as just a sword. He needed to use the various techniques, regardless of if they used Qi or not, to properly fight with a sword.

The one he used most of the time was Elusive Heavenly Sword. While it had 3 Qi-based attacks, its main purpose was that it was a style of sword fighting that mostly focused on the elusiveness of the fighter, rather than focusing on doing the most damage.

This certainly helped Alex a lot, but following simply this was also not a very good idea for him who wanted to learn Sword Intent.

So, he was going back to the basics once more. He logged out and looked online on how he could learn as a beginner in sword fighting.

The people online gave some instructions that Alex decided to follow.

To get used to the sword's weight, they had him simply try to hold the sword out straight in front of him without shaking it a lot. This not only helped in increasing the person's understanding of the sword, but it also helped him increase his wrist strength.

The wrist strength was something Alex didn't need to care about, but learning the weight was something that helped him a lot.

The second part that the internet suggested was to strike empty air in front of him. He would stand on one spot and swing directly in front of him.

He had to do that for hours and hours on end for days on end.

The final thing that the internet told him was to fight an imaginary opponent. Make someone in your mind, and fight them until you are sure you could.

This was like the famous shadow boxing, but for swords.

Once Alex was done doing these three things, he stopped for the day. It was around 8 pm when he decided to make his pills. He had a routine and he would stick to it.

Alex took out a few spirit stones and the fire furnace he had created. He dug a hole and started the fire. He then took out a black cauldron.

He was going to do test creations, so he couldn't use his normal cauldron.

While that was going on, he revised what he had learned so far.

'The direction of the motion of the ingredients inside the cauldron can, for some reason, play a huge role in how much energy a pill can hold.'

'The speed of the motion of the ingredients inside the cauldron can help in regulated heat transfer, so it plays a role in the speed of energy release. Also, same as the direction, it can also affect the amount of energy a pill can hold.'

'Finally, the temperature the ingredients are burned in also matters. Each ingredient burns at a certain temperature, so it is necessary one knew the exact burning temperature of every ingredient if they want to create a new pill,' he thought.

Normal alchemists that only followed recipes didn't have to worry about these things. However, if one wanted to create their own pill, they had to certainly learn this by heart.

That was why being an alchemist took such a long time. One had to go through and remember every scenario for every pill.

Or at least, that was what Alex thought. He still believed that there was a technique to forming pills that didn't require so much manual learning, but he would have to wait until he returned.

When he saw the cauldron was hot enough, he dropped the first ingredient. The first ingredient didn't really matter in how violently the energy was released from the cauldron. As long as there wasn't an explosion, they would be perfectly fine.

Still, Alex decided to follow through with the recipe he had made on his own.

As he did, he couldn't help but cringe at the many mistakes that were littered throughout the recipe. He could see many opportunities that could be improved a lot.

Since this was a test, he was going to have to do this multiple times. He remembered how the energy release rate was really good when he had done a single thing.

So he was going to follow exactly that. He restarted the process once again once the resulting pill was at 21% harmony.

Once the cauldron was hot enough again, he put in the first ingredient. The first ingredient turned to powder quickly and it was time for the 2nd ingredient.

When Alex remembered the different experiments he had done with this one, he chose from a small list of experiments that resulted in a rate of release of energy that didn't make it look like it would cause an explosion.

He did the 3rd and 4th. He was constantly changing things recipes with what he felt was proper. On the 5th one, he threw in the 5th ingredient.

However, by this time he could think of ways to use the 5th ingredient, he had already made the mistake of making too many changes without realizing what was going to happen again.

'Urghh, I forgot the energy isn't always what it seems,' he thought. While the cauldron only showed a single or two energy output, it was hard to remember by just looking and feeling that there were other energies mixed into the resulting energy.

The cauldrons showed signs of unstableness, so Alex didn't hesitate at all and threw the cauldron far away.

An explosion ran in the distance. Alex was relieved that he was able to make such a quick decision.

"Urghh... I need to make small changes, one at a time, rather than all at once," Alex said. So, he got down on the ground, put out more ingredients, and continued making pills.

Only this time, he made a single change with each pill's outcome. Unfortunately, they didn't have a huge enough change for any of the pills to be useful.

So, Alex added 2 changes per batch and continued experimenting with his recipe for the rest of the night.

Chapter 382: Composition and Structure

"Moving it clockwise had a definite better result. So, maybe I should try moving it clockwise at a slower pace but at a much lower temperature so that the rate of energy released is the same, but the powder accepts more energy in the end," Alex thought.

It was close to 5 am, and he was still testing out the different ways to improve the pill. By now, he had broken about 5 black cauldrons and finally, had managed to bring the harmony up to around 36%. Considering about 15-20% of the energy was usually lost during the process with the black cauldrons, it meant that the pill was still rejecting about 34% of the energy away.

That was too much of a waste. Even when the pill-splitting Qi appeared, he could only read a little above 30% harmony on both pills.

"Aside from that, I should increase the third ingredient's movement speed, while increasing the temperature," he thought.

One thing that he didn't need to worry about now, that he wished he realized quite early, was the rate of energy release. With how stable the energy inside the final product was, all he had to do was tweak the process such that the energy was released at the same rate, but the pill was different enough to have a change in the energy acceptance rate.

He looked into his storage bag a signed. He had a lot of ingredients when he began testing these things a week or so ago, but now it was down to less than a dozen.

In about 10 more batches, he would have no ingredients left for the pill he was making and would have to move on with a different pill altogether.

"Alright, let's forget about that for now and focus on this one pill. I will make it the best," Alex promised himself.

He started making the pill once more. Had he known that he didn't need to make so many changes that included energy change, he might have had a better result by now, but he had to fail once before he learned from it.

He cleaned the cauldron and tried once more. He had nothing to tell him if he was anything good or bad right now. All he could do was wait for the pill to be formed and he could finally see how accepting of the energy they were.

He made sure not to make a single mistake along the way and when he finally completed the pill, he was a little disappointed. The changes he had made actually made the pill worse.

Alex was a little disappointed. He contemplated what mistakes he made, but there was nothing to think about. He had nothing to compare his new pill with.

'I will just have to grind through it,' he thought and continued. He cleaned the cauldron, made a few new adjustments to the recipe, and continued.

He followed the recipe perfectly, and yet he once again made a worse pill.

"Okay, I can't continue like this. What the hell am I doing wrong?"

He was close to ripping away his hair. He took the pill out and checked. "Did I burn it somewhere I couldn't see? Are some ingredients not turning to powder? Am I really making any mistake?" he wondered and looked at the pill.

He tried to see any abnormalities with the pills, but he was too novice in the grand scheme of Alchemy to know what he was doing.

In the end, he couldn't see anything wrong. He was about to put back the pill when he remembered something. The gesture he was making right now, taking a pill up to his face to check it, was something he had seen another person do as well.

'Didn't the royal alchemist do the same thing?' he thought. He remembered back to the day when they had met him. The man had taken his pill and looked at it in just the same way.

Except... he hadn't. 'He couldn't see anything so he had to eat another pill right?' Alex thought. He remembered seeing the Royal Alchemist's eyes go wide after eating that one pill.

'Could it be that pill amplified his visions and allowed him to see something?' Alex wondered. Then, he thought back to the remark he had made.

'He talked about my temperature controls, my cauldron, and my ingredients. However, he also talked about something else,' Alex thought.

'Structure and Composition of the powder and pill.'

Alex's mind raced as he tried to make sense of those words. 'Structure? Composition? Am I supposed to know these things by now?' he wondered.

There was nothing in his lessons from his master regarding this. As for the different books in the libraries... he checked again.

"Oh, there is something," he was surprised when he did indeed find a little information. It didn't tell him anything at all, but somewhat vaguely explained what the Structure and Composition of a pill meant.

"I see... " he thought when he finished reading it all. He felt like he comprehended a new aspect of the alchemy process that he just didn't know about before today.

"So, composition refers to the ratio at which the powders from the different ingredients are mixed. The Royal Alchemist seemed to care about it, so if I manage to make pills that will use all the powder in a cauldron, or at least the proper ratio of it, then I'm guaranteed to have a much higher level of pill huh?" he thought.

It would take a long time, but if he could learn enough to tweak the ratio around, then presumably, he wouldn't even need to use all the powder to make a perfect pill, just the right amount.

"Structure on the other hand looks to be much more important. Isn't it basically telling me that the shape of the individual powder impacts how much energy I can store in it?" he wondered.

Structure referred to the shape of the minute individual particles of the powders.

"So... the direction in which the ingredient moves and the speed at which it moves must determine the structure of the powder that is formed, and that powder determines whether it can hold the resulting energy of the pill or not."

"So, if I want to make my pill better, then I will have to make sure that their powder ratio is the best, and that the structure of the powder is also the most accepting of the energy."

Chapter 383: Shapes

"Can I even check the structure on my own?" Alex wondered for a second.

"Let's try with my spiritual sense," he thought. He brought out his spiritual sense and started looking at the pill on his hand.

Normally, he would just look at the pill and forget about it, but now, he had to check it properly. So, he focused on it with his spiritual sense.

Suddenly, it was as if a new world had been opened in front of his eyes. He could see every single small detail that he couldn't otherwise on a daily alchemy procedure.

He had never focused on a pill to see how it looked. He always had just assumed the powder to be nothing more than just decorative after all.

And to be fair, it was indeed decorative. The powder itself did nothing; it was the energy within the pill that created the various effect.

However, if the powder housed the energy just as Alex had just now learned, he would now have to start focusing on it as well.

Alex felt his spiritual sense quickly diminishing when he started checking the materials on a microscopic level.

The pill on his hands looked very weird when zoomed in through his spiritual sense. Normally, the pill had a slightly pinkish hue to it. This was the color the pill took after almost every iteration.

That was just the color the ingredients burned to.

However, under zoom, he could see that the pill was not pink at all. It was actually multicolored. Some were yellow, some were green, some were blue, and some were even black. But the majority of the powder was just red and white, leading to the pink color.

Alex ignored the color for now and checked the shapes of the powder particles. There were various shapes that he just couldn't describe properly. They were also all clumped together so it was quite hard to see the shapes.

So, Alex crushed the pill and put it on top of a metal plate. Finally, with the height of the 'pill' reducing to such a low amount, he could see the shapes with much more ease.

"Oh, so different," he thought. The powders were all mostly in different shapes. Some were spherical in shape, some were crystalline with cubic or rhomboid shapes, some were cylindrical, and some were even helix shapes.

Alex was surprised by how many types of shapes he could see. He quickly stopped focusing on his spiritual sense.

"Arghh... that's not a very fun feeling," he thought. It felt like the headache he got on days he didn't get much sleep.

He thought about what he saw just now and fell into thought. The shapes were all different and not something he could really tell if they were good or bad.

"Oh, wait a second," he thought and quickly rummaged through his storage bag. He came across a pill bottle that wasn't filled with pills, but rather just powder.

Every time he had tested with these ingredients, he had thrown away most of the powders but ended up keeping some into the pill bottle.

He gently dumped the content of the bottle in a straight line from the left to right. Starting from the left was the powder he made most recently, and at the right was the powder he had made the earliest.

He remembered every single instance of powder he made, all the changes he had made, all the test criteria he had set for them, so when he checked from left to right, he knew exactly what he had to do to get that result.

He forced his spiritual sense to check these powders again and started looking through the different patterns the powders had formed into.

"Those are just minute spheres. That was when I use 500 degrees with clockwise rotation for 3 whole turns at 2 seconds per turn."

"Those are just tinier spheres, but these ones are clumped together in groups. If I remember correctly, that was when I set the temperature to 350 degrees, with clockwise rotation at 4 seconds per rotation for 2 and a half rotations."

"Those are..."

He went through all of them. He quickly realized that temperature also played an aspect in the shape of the pills, albeit indirectly.

What truly affected the shapes were the speed at which the ingredient was moved in while it turned to powder and the direction it was moving in.

Depending on the temperature, some of the ingredients were in motion for a lot longer than other ones. These affected the shape as well.

Alex took out another pill bottle and dumped its content as well. This powder belonged to a different ingredient, so Alex checked this one as well.

While the shapes of the powder weren't the same as the ones for the other powder at similar test criteria, they followed a similar direction in terms of the shape.

Just to be sure, he took another one out and laid it on the metal. He checked it too and found out that the shapes indeed follow a pattern.

Depending on the time it took for the ingredient to fully turn to powder, the shape of the powder was different.

If the ingredient turned to powder very fast, it would end up being small flakes. If it moved for longer, it would start to clump together and form a cubic shape. Then it would deform to become a rhomboid shape, which it was moved for a much longer time, would slowly lose their shapes to become irregular individual blobs.

It didn't end there, however. If the ingredient was in the cauldron for longer, it would turn to thick, cylindrical in shape, that would elongate and it went on and start turning to a helix shape, which would then clump on itself to form small spheres that were attached to itself.

Finally, if it went for much longer, the spheres would separate and end up as individual spheres that moved around separately. By that time, there would be no more energy remaining in the ingredient no matter what ingredient it was.

Chapter 384: Meridian Tempering 1st Realm

Alex left for breakfast at around 7 am after learning about the shapes and structures of the powder for nearly 2 hours. During that time, he realized a few more things.

First thing was that the direction in which the ingredients were moved affected the powders in a way that created some threading-like pattern on the powder particles, threading that was similar to a screw or the inside of a nut bolt.

When moved clockwise, the threading would be protruded like that of a screw, and when moved counterclockwise, it would become sunken like that of a nut. The threading was so small that it nearly cost Alex half of his spiritual sense to focus on that small of a level.

When he just checked the powder particles on their own, the threading was actually practically invisible aside from giving a slight bit of texture to the powder.

Once he was done with those, he started making different pills to understand how the structure and composition helped with the different pills in what way.

Before he knew it, 2 hours had passed away and he had barely learned a thing.

"What's wrong? Are you nervous about something?" Emily asked at the dinner table.

"Oi Alex, you better not be regretting asking Emily out now," Sarah teased from the side.

"What? Oh, sorry. It's nothing. It's just some things inside of the game that got me thinking mindlessly," Alex said.

"You better not be thinking about that conspiracy again. Honestly, I thought you got it out of your system," Hannah said.

"Huh? No— "

"What's this about?" Sarah cut off Alex.

Hannah explained what Alex had done with the helmet a few days ago, without missing a single piece of information.

Alex cringed a little when he heard what he had done out loud. "That's not it," he said.

"That's not what I am thinking about. It's related to alchemy," he explained.

"Oh, then that's good. You shouldn't think like those conspiracy theorists. So, what's there is an alchemy to make you think this hard?" Hannah asked. "Isn't it just putting ingredients in a pot and cooking it until a pill comes out?"

"Uhh... it's way more complex. I wouldn't expect you to understand my problems," Alex said.

"Why not search the internet then? They have everything," Hannah said.

"I've tried. There's nothing. No blog post or video. Not even the forum has a single post about anything above basic level alchemy," Alex said.

"Hmm... if there is no post about anything...then why don't you post one yourself?" Emily asked. "You can ask people what you have problems with."

"I... had never thought of that. You're right, we can do that. Huh... I'll go make a post right now," Alex said and quickly finished his meal.

He went to his room and opened the forum on his laptop. He searched for information about what he wanted once more and couldn't find anything at all.

"Sigh! Alright, let's make a new post," he thought and clicked on the 'create a new post' button. The website led him to the login page. He needed an account to interact with the posts aside from just reading them.

"Uhh... sure," he thought and created a new account. He filled up everything that was needed and logged in. He opened a new post and started typing.

<Need help with Alchemy>

<Hello. I am an alchemist in EC and I was hoping for someone to help me if they knew anything about the Structure and Composition concept of the pills. Please comment or message me directly if you have any advanced knowledge about these concepts. Thank you.>

"Alright, that should do it," he said and clicked 'Post'. As such, his first-ever post on the internet went online. His post was now visible and so he waited for a little for people to come.

But very soon after he decided not to wait for long. He closed his laptop and logged back into the game.

Once he got back into the game, he frowned when he remembered that he had so many pills and ingredients to sort through and understand in his head.

"Ugh... I will do that later."

He called Pearl back and started training once more. Pearl was getting better at attacking and dodging as well due to the constant fighting. After 2 or 3 hours of constant training, he finally let Pearl take some rest.

Pearl went back into the fog to do who knew what. Alex on the other hand took out his sword and trained again. For now, he was focusing on getting to know the weight of the sword and the balance of it.

Then he would try swinging it so that he could make the most efficient attacks every time. He wanted to weed out any unnecessary motions during his sword fight.

As for the shadow battle, he didn't believe himself to be good enough in the ways of swords to fight anyone he thought was good enough, his primary opponent of choice obviously being Du Yuhan.

"Ahh..." he stretched and stopped practicing at around 2 pm in the afternoon. He took out a 1st Meridian Realm beast's core and ate it.

He defeated the fight with the beast very quickly and was given notifications that he had gotten quite a few Qi. He smiled and opened the status page once more.

"Ah yes. I have enough," he thought and pushed 'Breakthrough'.

Suddenly, all the extra Qi inside of him was used up and he broke through from the 9th realm of Organ Tempering realm to the 1st realm of Meridian Tempering.

The system notifications arrived, congratulating him on breaking through.

<Congratulations on breaking through to 'Meridian Tempering: 1st Realm'>

<Detecting...>

"Huh?" Alex was surprised a little. "What is it trying to detect?" he wondered. The notification didn't sound for a few more seconds, and then...

<Extreme Metal Affinity Detected>

'Extreme Metal affinity?... the blood essence from Pearl's mother?' he wondered. That was what had given him an advantage in Metal energy.

<Promoting...>

<Successfully Promoted>

<Congratulations. You now have a Supreme Metal Spiritual Root>

Chapter 385: Immortal

Alex felt something change within him.

"... Eh?" Alex was dumbfounded for a few seconds. Then, he read the notifications once more. As he read, his eyes widened when he realized what it meant.

"Wait wait wait wait wait... did I just get a Superior Metal Spiritual root? Wait, no... it says Supreme. What's that? Is it better than Superior?"

He didn't know what was going on. Only his metal root was suddenly upgraded, instead of all of them.

"Wait, did my spiritual roots change and I no longer have all 7 energy roots?" he thought and quickly opened his status page again to check. Thankfully, his spiritual root hadn't changed.

"Phew, thank god," he said. Just then, another piece of notification popped up.

<Detecting...>

"What? What the hell is detecting this time?" he cried out loud.

<Discovered: Supreme Metal Spiritual Root>

"Huh? But it should have already discov— " another Notification arrived at the same time.

<You have discovered a hidden function of [Alchemy God's Knowledge]>

Alex's eyes went wide. "Is it going to level up?" he thought with hope in his eyes.

<You can now command all free Metal energy as you wish>

His technique didn't level up, but he wasn't disappointed at all. If what he understood from this statement just now was true, then...

"Woah, isn't my alchemy going to be better?" he thought.

He waited for more notifications to appear, but nothing did. So, he took out his cauldron and decided to try what he could.

He took out ingredients for a single pill. That pill was the same pill he made for the 3rd-day competition when he created a 60% harmony pill.

That pill alone had created chaos in the crowd when he revealed it, and even the Royal Alchemist himself had praised him later on.

Now, he was going to make the same pill, but with much greater knowledge and control of the Alchemy process.

He started simply by heating up his Golden Jade Cauldron. Once it was ready, he put in the first ingredient. He followed the recipe, but also at the same time absorbed all that was happening in the cauldron.

He tried to understand why the alchemist who created this recipe made the instruction this exact one. Did he also have many failures before he was successful with this one?

Alex couldn't help but think that. 'Focus,' he told himself and made the pill.

The process was surprisingly very simple for him now that he had practiced these things so intensely. When all the ingredients were put in and the final resulting energy was metal, he started to use Elemental Guidance to pass that metal energy into the powder that was formed into a pill.

He didn't worry about the composition or structure of the pill at the moment and only focused on the energy aspect.

He guided the metal energy to the pill, and surprisingly it followed what he wanted it to do.

"Eh?" he thought. Usually, the normal energies could be at most showed the way to the pill. Whether they went there or not was another matter.

As for metal energy, he could guide them. He could show them to the pill, and whether they entered the pill or not was another matter.

However, right now, he could fully control what the pill did. He felt like he could grasp metal energy right in his hand.

'Is this what commanding metal energy means? I can make it go to the pill?' he wondered.

No pill-splitting Qi appeared, and he freely forced all the remaining energy into the pill. Once he was done, he waited for a little bit because he expected something to happen.

As expected, the pill rejected some of the metal energy due to the irregularities in the powder's structure and composition at some level.

"Well, I tried my best," he thought and took the pill out of the cauldron. The pill had absorbed quite a lot of energy, so he was very excited to see how much he had made.

He held the pill in his hand and the information popped up.

[Bronze Tiger Pill - 82%]

[Bronze Tiger Pill - 82%]

Alex had to read the pill's information twice to realize that he wasn't hallucinating.

"No way! 82%?" he freaked out when he saw that. "Woohoo... I made such a high-grade pill," he said in absolute joy.

He looked at it again and said, "Damn, it really is 82%. Is that still Heaven Grade? No, it should be up at Immortal Grade right?"

Higher-level pill harmony rarely got talked about so he wasn't sure about where the rest of the ranking lay. But he was sure that he learned somewhere that 75% was where Immortal rank started.

"I made an immortal rank pill," even as he said it, he couldn't believe it.

"Let's try once more," he thought and took out the same ingredients. Then once again, he made the pill.

This time, it came out better at 84%. Alex couldn't stop his happiness from overflowing. He jumped around screaming with joy.

After he calmed down, he made a few more pills that had metal energy as the final resulting pill.

Each of those pills he made came out to be above? 80% in harmony level. The only problem he encountered was the energy leaving the cauldron, the age of the ingredients, and the not-perfect structure and composition of the powder in the pill.

Aside from that, everything was perfect.

He decided to check his Iron Fist Punch, Smiting Blade, and Penta Blade Technique. Those were the techniques that used metal energy.

While he already had a boost in damage, he wanted to see if there was an improvement in the damage. He tested all 3 and was a little disappointed.

"I guess I already did as much damage as I could. Meridian Realm just revealed it, nothing else. Whatever, I'm still happy," Alex thought.

"My driving lessons continue from tomorrow right? What do I do now?" he thought. There was really just one answer and he knew it.

So, he sat down and started contemplating the different aspects of the pill.

Chapter 386: Success?

"Arghh... so much thinking, and I feel like I've made barely any progress," Alex thought.

It was 11 pm and Alex had decided to stop thinking about the structures and the composition of the pills. The information was way too overwhelming for him.

And in the end, he had yet to figure out how any of the shapes had to do with absorbing energy. Was a certain shape supposed to only absorb a certain amount of energy? Was a certain shape supposed to only absorb a specific kind of energy? Was the threading-like shape from the clockwise and counterclockwise motion supposed to affect the type of energy or the amount?

There were so many questions that he just couldn't answer in a short period of time. At least, not by himself. He decided to start cultivating.

He sat down and called Pearl to start cultivating. Pearl came as asked and got onto his lap and started shining a little as he started cultivating.

Numerous cuts appeared on Alex's body, but none of those hurt him anymore. He was about to close off his eyes and start cultivating when he remembered something that he had been meaning to do ever since he thought of entering the Meridian Realm.

So, he reached into his storage bag and brought out a Spirit Cleansing Lily.

"Now that I've broken through to the Meridian realm, maybe I can use it again. I'm pretty sure my spiritual sea did increase after I fought with Zexi. Which would mean that there is a possibility of it increasing further," he thought.

"Yes, I must try this," he thought. He was pretty hopeful. Even if normal people had limitations, he had a great body and talent, as well as a fascinating spiritual root that he didn't understand completely yet.

So, he hoped to get lucky.

He held the flower in his palm and started cultivating. In less than a minute, the trance took over him, and he fell asleep.

He opened his eyes early in the morning. He looked at the time and saw that it was 7 am. He was used to waking up at around this time nowadays. He wasn't complaining though; he had breakfast to eat with the ladies every day.

"Oh right, the flower," he remembered and looked at his hand. He was hoping for it to be gone, but expecting it to still be there.

"Huh?" he thought as he saw his hands. They were empty; the flower was gone.

"Wait, it works? Haha, it works!" he shouted out in joy. He accidentally woke up the cultivating Pearl and the cuts all over his body stopped.

He sent out his spiritual sense, but it barely extended to around 22 meters without exertion. That was his natural limit after his fight with Zexi.

"Oh right, stupid me. The spiritual distance won't increase. Only the spiritual quantity will," he thought and sent his spiritual sense into his spiritual sea.

"Huh?" he said in confusion. The size of the spiritual sea was unchanged.

"Wait, what's going on?" he thought. His flower was gone, yet the spiritual sea hadn't increased at all.

'Was that a defective flower?' he wondered. But it couldn't be. He clearly remembered picking up the right flower for all of the lilies. If not, the flowerbed would have turned to ruin.

"Ok, I know I did not make a mistake. Then what is go—"

Suddenly, a foreign spiritual sense washed over his body and he heard a single thing in his mind.

"Meow."

Alex looked to the side in shock. Pearl was looking at him and meowing, but the meow was something that was being sent to his mind.

"D- Did you just use spiritual sense?" Alex asked.

"Meow," Pearl really meowed this time, and the feeling of confusion was passed along to Alex. Alex didn't know what to do. Pearl didn't even know what spiritual sense was.

"Um... oh right," he said and brought out another flower. "Did you cultivate with this?" he asked.

"Meow," Pearl said.

Alex's eyes turned wider. He couldn't keep his voice under control and shouted, "YOU ATE THIS?"

Pearl got a little scared. It went into a defensive position.

"Wait, no buddy. I'm not mad. I was just surprised. Come here," he called Pearl and caressed him. Pearl stopped feeling defensive and opened up more.

"So, did you really eat that flower?" he asked.

"Meow," Pearl said as he nodded.

'Damn, eating can help him gain spiritual sense? Does it work the same for me?' Alex wondered. He had 2 more flowers left, but he was too afraid to use them like that.

"Uhh... I guess I will let pearl use them," he thought. He decided to wait until he found some more of these flowers.

Thankfully, they weren't as rare as they appeared. He was certain that if he ventured the southern forest a little more, he would surely find quite a few of these flowers.

Alex decided to teach Pearl a little about spiritual sense and spiritual sea. He wasn't really sure if he would understand anything or not, but he tried nonetheless.

'Now that he has a spiritual sense, he should be able to communicate with me in human terms right? He doesn't have to keep meowing,' he thought. He remembered back to the time when his mother spoke to him.

If Pearl could do the same then it would help him a lot. After teaching him a little about spiritual sense, he took out an Organ Tempering 1st Realm beast's core and fed it to him.

This was the first time he didn't have to worry about the battle in the spiritual realm.

"Eh?" Alex was surprised that the fight didn't even take place as Pearl never went to sleep.

'Did he get lucky?' Alex wondered. It felt like Pearl didn't have to fight any spiritual avatar of the beasts and had lucked out like he sometimes did. It was either that or Pearl was simply too strong in the spiritual sea.

"Alright, keep practicing and... cultivate if you want. I will see you later tonight," Alex said and logged out.

Chapter 387: Spicy Gourd

Alex had breakfast with the ladies and returned back to his room. Instead of going to the game again, he decided to go online and search for a few different things.

He wondered if he was just not searching hard enough, and there might have been other people with similar experiences as him that came to the same conclusion as him.

So, he looked up keywords such as 'Helmet' and 'formation' together. There were indeed many people that had a similar theory as him.

"Ooh, there's something. Finally," he thought and opened the video. The video had barely any views and is explained in detail how people 'assumed' the helmet functioned.

The helmet's infrastructure was proprietary, so people didn't have a blueprint on what was what, and had to go off of how they thought it worked. So, the assumption was all Alex could get right now.

Unfortunately, the video didn't touch on what he wanted, and the formation part was just him mentioning it looked like one. Disappointed, Alex opened another one.

This one definitely talked more about the formation, and even assumed that it was one. He didn't assume it for real-life however, he just assumed that this was a formation for something important in the game.

The person in the video said that they had tried the design with many different metals, but they could never activate it in the game, let alone know what it did.

So in conclusion, they needed to find the metal or metal combination that was needed for the formation to be made over to work it.

Alex thought that was true. The person would indeed need a formation plate that could make the carvings function.

"Aw man, I can't wait to leave that formation in 2 weeks so I can learn what the hell that formation is for," Alex thought.

He checked a few more of such videos and posts, one of which led him to the forum. He was about to close out of the forum when he saw a red dot on his profile.

"Hm... what's that?" he wondered and clicked it. It led him to his profile, where he could see his latest interactions.

"Oh, right. I forgot I had made a post yesterday," he thought and opened the post. There were a bunch of comments on his post and quite a few upvotes.

He checked through the comments and frowned a little. All of them either showed amazement at the fact that he was an alchemist or disdain in the fact that he was still making Common rank pills. There were also people trying to show off their maximum pill harmony in the comments too. Alex ignored that.

He tried searching for the ones he needed, but all he could find was confusion as to what Structure and Composition were. Not a single one of them, however, seemed to know anything about the topic. That was really weird.

He felt disappointed and tried to close the forum once more, and once more he stopped because there was still a red dot on his profile.

"Huh?" he thought and opened it. On the messages section, there was a red dot as well. He clicked it and it led him to the messages he had received.

A member that went by the name of Spicy_Gourd had messaged him and the message said,

-Spicy_Gourd: Who are you? Where are you in the game?-

Alex was a little surprised that someone asked him something like that so suddenly. He messaged back.

-White_Wolf: I'm from the Crimson Empire, in the Western Continent. -

He didn't answer the first question as that was not something he was okay with sharing with a random stranger. He was about to close the laptop when he got a message back.

-Spicy_Gourd: Then how do you know about Structure and Composition? No one is supposed to know about it.-

Alex was even more confused now. 'What does he mean no one is supposed to know?' Alex wondered.

-White_Wolf: I learned it from a book in a library.-

-Spicy_Gourd: There are books that teach you about that? Is the Crimson Empire advanced in Alchemy?-

-White_Wolf: I wouldn't know. I don't know the alchemy level in the other continents. -

-Spicy_Gourd: What's the highest pill you've seen?"-

Alex thought through his memories, most of which he couldn't 'access' since he was not in the game right now. So, he had to go off of what he remembered.

-White_Wolf: It's a 48% harmony True Pill made by my sect's leader. She is considered one of the best alchemists in the empire. Not the greatest though.-

Alex waited for a while and only got a response after a few minutes.

-Spicy_Gourd: What? That's so bad. What about a Saint Rank pill?-

-White_Wolf: We have barely any Saint realm cultivators, and most of those are hidden experts. So, we don't have any that can make Saint rank pills even if there was a recipe. The most I've heard someone can make is a pseudo-Saint Rank pill-

-Spicy_Gourd: Damn, you must live in some backwater empire. How do you not even have Saint Realm experts?-

Alex was feeling weird now. 'I knew there were saint realm experts everywhere else, but are they really so readily available?' Alex wondered.

-White_Wolf: We don't have a connection to other parts of the continent, so the empire has stagnated.-

-Spicy_Gourd: whatever. Anyway, I don't really know much about Structure and Composition yet. I'm still learning about it. I'll try to let you know if I learn anything. Let me know if you find anything else.-

Alex said okay to his offer and closed the conversation. He came out of the conversation not learning about Alchemy, but a bit about the world. Adding onto that, he had another question now.

"How does this empire have knowledge about something that is apparently so rare that the outer world doesn't even know about it, but at the same time is one of the least developed societies in EC?" he wondered.

He had an answer to the 2nd question, but the first one still puzzled him. He decided to forget about it and got ready to go to his classes.

Chapter 388: License

It had been 3 weeks since Alex started learning how to drive a car and today was the day he proved it wasn't for waste.

Hannah was also getting her driving license today, so she was taking the test as well.

An instructor got into their car and made them drive onto a populated road that the testers manufactured themselves. It was supposed to mimic similar scenarios as those that would be found in an actual road on a daily basis.

Both Hannah and Alex showed excellent skills and successfully passed the test.

They came out with a big smile.

"Wow, you guys did it? Congratulations," Sarah said. "It took me twice to get my license."

"Yeah, this was much easier than I thought," Hannah said.

"I didn't have such an easy time though," Alex said with a slight chuckle.

"Well, that's only because you didn't spend as many days as me during the lessons. The fact that you passed is already good enough," Hannah said.

"Alright, let's go back home," Sarah said.

"Hey, let me drive," Hannah said, but Sarah didn't agree. It was a highway back home, and she didn't want to let a newbie endanger her. She would get her chance once they were back around their home.

"So, we go back home straight right?" Sarah said.

"No, let's go to a dealership. I want to buy a car right now," Hannah said.

"What? Today?" Sarah exclaimed. She knew the hassle of buying a car and didn't want to go through it again.

"It'll be fine. I brought all the necessary documents with me. It will be quick," she said.

"Fine," Sarah gave up and took them to a dealership.

Alex didn't want to buy a car just yet so he skipped out on it for today. Hannah on the other hand was very excited. After 2 hours of searching, selecting, and buying, she bought a car worth around 70 thousand dollars.

Once all the documents were ready, she drove it back to the house herself. Alex was a little scared while Hannah was driving but she was good enough to drive on the busy road.

While on the road, Hannah's phone started ringing.

"Hey, can you get that for me?" Hannah said.

Alex took the phone from her purse's pocket and looked who it was and answered it.

"Hey Aunt Liz," he spoke to the other person on the phone.

"Oh hey, Alex. Where's your sister?"

Hannah's mother spoke from the other side.

"Oh, she's driving the car right now," Alex said.

"Huh? Your tests haven't ended yet?" she asked.

"Oh, we're done already. Sister just bought a new car and is now driving it back home," Alex said.

"What? That reckless girl. I'll set her straight when she comes back home," his aunt started getting a little angry.

"I can hear you, Mom. Stop getting angry. I told you I can afford it now; you don't have to worry about the money," Hannah said.

"So you passed the test?" she asked.

"Of course. Why else would I buy one? Anyway, is that why you called? I need to focus back on the road," Hannah said.

"Sigh, I will speak with Alex, you drive," she said. "Oh yeah, Alex, do you have some free time within the next week or two?" she asked.

"Free time? Umm... I usually have Fridays through Sundays free. I don't have classes those days," Alex said.

"Oh, perfect. I haven't gone back home in a long time and was missing it. So, I made plans for going there this weekend, can you come by with Hannah around that time?" she asked.

"Next week, huh? Yeah, I can manage that," Alex said.

"Perfect. I will let big brother know. Alright, have fun you two. Bye." She ended the call after hearing both of them say their goodbyes.

"Going to the countryside huh? It has been a while, to say the least. I guess it will be fun," Hannah said.

They soon reached home. Sarah was behind them at all times, making sure they didn't get into an accident or anything. When she saw the car enter the parking lot and safely park there, she finally sighed in relief.

They went up the elevator to their apartment. As soon as they opened the door, an amazing smell hit their faces, immediately changing their faces to delight.

"Oh, you guys are back. How did the test go?" Emily walked out of the kitchen and asked. She had started feeling guilty about not paying anything, so she had started working on the household chores instead to make up for it.

"We both passed," Alex said with a smile.

"Ah, congratulations. I knew you guys could do it. I prepared some dishes for the celebration. Go and get changed, I will get them ready," Emily said and went back to the kitchen.

All 3 of them went back to their rooms and freshened up before coming back to the kitchen. Emily's meals were delicious and everyone complimented her on her cooking. Alex hadn't eaten such a hearty meal in quite a while and happily ate it all.

By the time Alex was done with the meal, it was 1 pm on a Friday. He had plans to go on a date with Emily tomorrow, so he decided to go back into the game for today and practice as he always did.

As soon as he logged in, he saw Pearl in front of him. "How have you been, buddy? You bored?" he asked.

"Meow," Pearl meowed in affirmation, but at the same time, Alex also heard a child's voice in his head. "Yes." After giving all 3 of those Spirit Cleansing lilies to Pearl, he had greatly increased his spiritual sense and was now starting to learn minor words.

Alex was surprised, but not as much since he had heard his mother speak as well.

"You ready for a fight?" he asked. Pearl's ears perked up and answered "yes" in his mind again. Without any hesitation, they started fighting once again.

Chapter 389: Mapleleaf City

It hadn't taken Alex very long to realize that understanding the composition and structure of pills was not an endeavor he could take on alone. He absolutely needed help from his master.

So, he started focusing his time on other things such as finding new pill recipes using energy alone. Most people would take ages to do this, but thanks to his Spiritual sense, Alex could easily recognize the strength and type of the energy and thus quite easily predict what would happen with the energy.

Still, the energy got harder and harder to predict as more and more energy was added on and he definitely broke quite a few cauldrons.

That didn't stop him from progressing in his journey as an alchemist very fast. By the time he would leave this formation, he would easily become a Common Heaven grade alchemist.

Alex fought with Pearl who was now in the 7th realm of the Organ tempering realm. That also meant that Alex himself was in the Organ Tempering realm as a body cultivator.

Once Pearl's cultivation realm increased, the pain that he had almost forgotten from the body cultivation also returned. The only reason that the pain had been manageable was that his body was in the same realm as Pearl. Once that changed, the intensity of the pain changed along with that.

His own cultivation had also increased by quite a lot in nearly 2 weeks after entering the Meridian realm. He had already reached the 5th realm of Meridian Tempering realm.

The only reason he wasn't higher than that was that he was completely out of monster cores to eat, and normal pills didn't give him a lot of Qi.

Still, after a few more days of making pills and eating them, he would likely enter the 6th realm of Meridian Tempering. At that point, he would be as strong as an expert in the 1st Realm of Mind Tempering.

The one thing that disappointed Alex more than it should have was that his training in sword did not give him the same amount of improvement as he would've wished for it too.

The training was good and all, but he needed actual opponents if he wanted to improve at using swords. As such he needed to wait until the formations opened for him to see visible improvement in swords now.

That wasn't to say that he was at it. In fact, he was most likely better than a lot of cultivators that used swords. However, when comparing that to actual cultivators that had lived their lives by their weapon and now had intent and Qi, he fell short.

"I need to go away for a few days, take care of yourself, okay buddy?" Alex said.

"Meow," Pearl said as the word 'understand' sounded inside Alex's head. Pearl was getting close at using the correct words, he just needed a little more training.

"Goodbye," Alex said and logged out.

He got out of his capsule and went to the kitchen early in the morning to eat. As usual, the girls were there already and they started eating their meal.

Once done, Alex and Hannah went back to their rooms to get ready. Today was the day Alex was going back to his home for the first time in over 3 months.

He quickly got ready and walked out with a bag. Hannah too got down from her room with a suitcase.

"Take care of the house while we're gone. We'll bring you back something from the farm on Sunday," Hannah said and waved.

"See you later," Alex said and turned around.

"Wait," Emily said and walked up to Alex before giving him a kiss on the cheeks. "Now you can go."

"Hey, where's mine?" Hannah asked with a voice that sounded like she was extremely wronged.

"Take me out on a few dates and I will maybe consider giving you one too," Emily said.

Hannah chuckled and waved before walking out of the apartment. Alex followed her and went down to the parking lot.

"Can't we just take the train?" Alex asked.

"Of course not. What's the point of having a license and a car if you're not going to drive?" Hannah said. "It's just a 4 hours ride, it'll be fine."

Alex sighed and loaded up the bags before getting in the passenger seat. Hannah pulled the car out of the parking lot and joined the road.

Hannah drove through the Oakleaf city until they were out of it and into the more suburban area. While they were out of the city, the land they were on was still called Oakleaf City.

After the warring phase, the people wanted to name places based on something that wouldn't align to any side, so they had started naming them off of what tree was found most in what area.

The land that had the Oak trees the most was called Oakleaf city. The main city that was made inside there was also called the same.

In less than an hour, they would cross the border of the city full of Oaks, and enter the city full of Maples, the Mapleleaf city, Alex's home city.

Hannah had entered the highway and was speeding through at a comfortable rate. After an hour and a half, they reached the outside of Mapleleaf city's main city which was also called Mapleleaf City.

They needed to take the outer highway to go past it as going through the inner busy roads would take them forever.

Hannah stopped at a charging station where she charged her car for 15 minutes or so until it was full again. This would give her enough juice for the next 8 hours of driving.

This time, Alex took the wheel and drove past Maple leaf city for the next two hours.

"Oh, we are here," he said and looked around. He was inside a city that was quite urban but not as much as the other cities. He drove based on the way he remembered now and made his way to a train station.

He safely parked in the shade and walked into the train station with Hannah.

Chapter 390: Home

Hannah and Alex had to wait for nearly 20 minutes before the train arrived. Quite a few people walked out of the train, but it wasn't to the same level as the ones in the big city.

Within the first few passengers, Hannah saw her parents and waved at them.

"Oh look, the kids are here already," a man in his late 40s said as he dragged a suitcase behind him. He had a clean-shaven face that showed wrinkles on his skin. His hair was short and mixed with white hair. However, the way he was suited in coat and pants made him look like he was a rich person from a rich household.

A woman that looked like she was in her early 30s walked out from behind him. She had beautiful skin and luscious golden hair that she had dyed herself to look better. She was wearing a large pair of sunglasses, and when she took them off, one could see that she had features that matched both Hannah and Alex.

"Hey!" she waved back at Hannah as soon as she saw her waving her hands. "Oh my god, Alex! Look at you, you're so big. Aww, come here and give aunt a hug," she said when she saw him.

Alex smiled and hugged his aunt. "You don't look like you've aged a day, Aunt Liz," Alex replied before greeting his Uncle-in-law.

"Oh, who taught you to speak such sweet nothings. Although it is true that I still have such young looks. My friends always ask me how a woman in her mid-40s could possibly look this young, and I don't know what to say to them, it's in the genes I guess," the aunt said with laughter in her voice.

The uncle was used to his wife is obsessed with her mysteriously young looks and shook his head. "So, when did you guys get here? And where is brother-in-law?" he asked as he checked around.

"Oh, Alex already called him this morning to tell him not to come to pick you guys up. We will be driving you guys there," Hannah said.

"What?" her mother got angry all of a sudden, "you brought your car?" she asked.

"Of course we did. What else am I supposed to do with a car?" Hannah said.

"You've only been driving for a week. It's dangerous," she exclaimed.

"I know, I was careful. Anyway, let's go. You don't plan on standing around here forever, do you?" Hannah said.

Her father said nothing and just shook his head.

They all walked to the car. When the parents saw the car their daughter had bought, even they were shocked. "Not even your father uses that sort of car," the mother said in shock.

"How much did you spend?" the father asked.

When they heard the number, they thought their heart skipped a beat. "Is that all of your money?" the father asked.

Hannah smiled and said, "you can't make me reveal my income right now."

The father chuckled a little and put his suitcase in the back. "Alright kids, get on the back seat, I'm driving from here."

Hannah wanted to drive, but her father wouldn't let her. So, in the end, Alex and Hannah got in the back seat, while her father and mother sat in the front.

They drove out of the small city they were in about an hour and entered a much smaller town. Even past that town, they drove for half an hour before the road turned into a dirt road.

They were finally starting to see the tall trees in the distance clearly. The edge of the map was approaching.

"Ooh, it's cold here. Thank god I put in some winter clothes," Hannah's mother said.

Alex was feeling excited seeing the trees, the empty lands, and the dirt road; home was close.

The number of houses reduced to almost zero as they went further along. Finally, after crossing a house, they could see another house a few hundred meters down the line.

"We're here," Hannah's father said and pulled up on an old-looking, 2 stories tall Farmhouse surrounded by open pasture and what looked to be a large stable behind them.

Hannah's mom took a deep breath of the fresh air and said, "Ahh, this smell is so nostalgic."

As the group of 4 took out their suitcases and walked towards the house, a woman walked out of it.

The woman was in her 40s and was a little bit on the chubbier end. As soon as she walked out, she gave a big smile as she saw the bunch.

"Sister Helen!"

"Liz!"

The two women hugged each other. Alex and Hannah walked to the front and Helen didn't miss the chance to hug them both.

"Aw, my sweet child, you must've missed your home so much. It's okay now, you're back," Helen said to Alex. She then turned to Hannah and said, "Look at you, you look just like your mother; so beautiful. You've really grown in the 3 years I haven't seen you," Helen said.

"You look great too, Aunt Helen," Hannah said.

"Now now, no need to lie to this old woman. I have a mirror and I see what I look like every day," Helen said with a smile.

"Sister-in-law, where his brother-in-law?" Hannah's father asked.

"He's curre— "

"Oh! Liz, Rob, you made it. Huh? Oh, the kids are here too," a man's voice came from the side. He was wearing a dirty shirt and pants with high rubber boots and was carrying a massive log on his shoulders.

He had a face that closely resembled Alex, the only difference was that he had a rough beard and hair that was uncut for many months.

He looked to be in his early 50s, but his body gave the illusion that he was a bodybuilder in his mid-30s. He dusted off his hands and welcomed his brother-in-law.

Helen then took them all inside to rest and soon called them to eat the meal that she had prepared.