

Chapter 211 - 209: Difference - Wager

Yun Daotian was the first to regain his sense, and he sneered. "You hide your face? Are you scared of something?" While the crushing pressure from these two powerhouses had disturbed his mind, nearly causing him to urinate himself, he still walked forward and placed a brave front. While he wasn't confident in his battle strength, in the world of alchemy, he had immense confidence in himself.

"Yes. I'm scared that you'll slither to your knees and beg for lessons." Wei Wuyin didn't even shift his mask to 'glance' at Yun Daotian.

"Ooooo!" This development allowed the hearts of the crowd to slowly regain their liveliness, once more stimulated by the upcoming event. While spectating a battle between peak experts would be invigorating, that would only be so if they could keep their lives while watching it. Just the auras of these experts suppressed millions with ease, and they hadn't even used any spells or arts yet. That was frightening.

The scathing words of Wei Wuyin and the rowdy response of the crowd caused him to stiffen. "You!"

Wei Wuyin shrugged, "Patriarch An, shall we begin?" He wanted to swiftly handle this matter.

An Ge frowned slightly, turning towards An Biru with a questioning look that said: "Is this the expert you met?"

An Biru noticed this gaze and hurriedly analyzed Wei Wuyin's existence to confirm. Besides his mask, his other physical features matched. So, she nodded with a little hesitation. This caused An Ge to frown deeper, inspecting Wei Wuyin once more. Was this the Elder-level figure from the Myriad Monarch Sect?

After all, they were the only force that could rear pegasi. It was their signature mount, and no other force used them. While that didn't include those experts that could purchase them, they were few and far between. You'll need to be an expert at the Third Stage of the Astral Core Realm, dominating a region of a planet for a long time before being able to obtain one or an Alchemic King.

In fact, Sky Nobles, the lowest ranking disciple that obtained pegasus by default, required a cultivation base at that level. Its rarity and scarcity could easily be seen from just this.

Chen Xiaowei said, "An All-Alchemic Clash is an open-challenge. There's no need to hide your identity. My Chen Clan isn't so lowly that we'll seek revenge if we lose." These words were obviously trying to push Wei Wuyin to reveal his identity. Whether her words were true or not, who knows?

Wei Wuyin didn't bother with her nonsense. "I'm acting as the representing alchemist for the An Clan. I'm here to participate, not be criticized for my choices. Shall we start or is this a forfeit?"

Chen Xiaowei's corner of her upper-left lip twitched slightly. However, a sense of unease emerged in her heart. Her plans that had been carefully calculated all this time felt threatened. It took a lot to bait this imbecile into this challenge, and she even had to risk herself in the gamble. Her systematic and meticulous recruitment of all the An Clan's elite alchemists while inserting spies to ensure they didn't find a replacement...

If this all crumbled because of a last-minute arrival, wouldn't she be the incompetent one?

"I believe he's right. Are we starting or will you surrender, Chen Xiaowei." An Ge noticed the minute changes and hesitation in her eyes and pounced. How could he not see that Wei Wuyin brought about an unexpected variable into her plans. He was already betting everything on this person. Might as well just go all out!

Chen Xiaowei frowned. She turned to Yun Daotian who seemed to be faintly fuming, but he assured her with a confident nod. Amongst Lord Alchemists, he might not be the best, but he was well-rounded! He didn't fear others in an All-Alchemic Clash!

"Fine," Chen Xiaowei said with regained form. She took her posse and left the stage. Staying was meaningless. It was best to push the clash and start it immediately lest more developments came about.

An Ge similarly left with his mighty display, finding an edge of the platform to watch the clash. Unlike normal alchemy, All-Alchemic Clashes were publicly held and the techniques, methods, and skills of an alchemist were fully revealed. This was why many loved these clashes, as they were in full-view and could be seen as a learning experience.

Yun Daotian and Wei Wuyin were soon standing on the stage alone. Yun Daotian's forked tongue left his lips as he smirked, "How about we have our little wager of our own?" A sense of absolute confidence flowed within his eyes. It seemed to say he was invincible!

Wei Wuyin stilled. Wager? He frowned beneath his mask, unsure how to respond. What could he obtain from this Yun Daotian? A measly Lord Alchemist?

Yun Daotian felt that Wei Wuyin was tempted or scared. Either way, he provoked further: "Oh? Are you also hiding your spine as well?"

Wei Wuyin felt this was quite childish. However, he was a naturally prideful man so he nodded. "What do you want to wager?"

'Hehe, he fell for it!' Yun Daotian felt as if he just lured the rat to his trap. With a smug smile, he said: "Sixth-Grade Essence Pills. A. Thousand. Total." He emphasized his wager amount causing those nearby to gasp. A thousand sixth-grade Essence Pills were worth ten million essence stones or a single astral stone!

Wei Wuyin sighed. "How about we do this instead: The loser gouges out their own eyes. A lesson for not being able to see." His brutal bet caused a wave of silence to descend. Even Yun Daotian froze, his smile becoming awkward. Wasn't that the same as asking to blind oneself?

Wei Wuyin calmly followed with, "If you're willing to accept and win, I'll even become your slave. What do you think?"

"..." Yun Daotian couldn't respond. No, he didn't dare to. His heart was that once filled with confidence now felt unbearable unease. A sensation of inferiority emerged in the depths of his heart. He just stood there, mute and frozen.

"No? Then, let's get on with this match. I don't wager kiddy stakes." After throwing this out there, Wei Wuyin found himself the location marked for his area. It was a large circle. With a wave of his hand, a table appeared, and atop this table was his Nine Element Eclipse Cauldron.

When the crowd saw this cauldron, a few recognized it immediately! While they might not be able to know its exact name, the runes and aura it emanated was clearly an indicator of one fact: It was an Astral-rank tool! The mere price of such a tool might exceed the total wealth of the entire Chen and An Clan combined...

Chen Xiaowei, Yun Daotian, An Ge, and the audience who recognized this cauldron knew that...this new arrival wasn't ordinary. In fact, he was likely a true expert!

Chapter 212 - 210: Difference - Alchemy

"Since the An Clan's the challenged party in this clash, then I select first, correct?" The initial phase of an All-Alchemic Clash was the selection of alchemical products. Each alchemist will choose two types of products, and then they would be obligated to provide a recipe for this product if it wasn't already known. The materials for this product would be provided by the alchemist who selected it, and they must be able to provide at least three portions of materials to their opponent.

Yun Daotian's expression was slightly unsightly. However, considering they were under the watchful eyes of millions, with numerous prestigious and revered characters, he nodded with a tinge of reluctance.

Those who selected first would have the advantage, picking their most skilled product type. This advantage was only given to the challenged party.

"I'll choose: Pill." Wei Wuyin made his first selection and it was the most commonly picked product. Pills were useful in advancing one's cultivation or producing changes to one's body, oftentimes in an explosive or fusing manner. For example, Essence Pills contained refined essence of heaven and earth with agreeable materials, condensing and enhancing its quality, as well as its ease of assimilation. The Astral Dipper Fountain Pill was a similar pill, that allowed to swiftly assimilate high-level essence to generate new astral force or Qi Essences.

Yun Daotian sighed in relief. This mysterious alchemist didn't flip the script and went with the typical move of selections. "I'll choose: Pellet."

This caused an intrigued uproar amongst the crowd. Pellets were refined products that contained energies or substances weaponized and made compatible with spiritual energy for ease of control. It was an alchemist's tool for defense and offense. Of course, this was its most basic usage. It was rumored that said high-level pellets could be used to accelerate time and act as temporary suns.

Wei Wuyin smiled behind his mask and said, "Elixir."

This left Yun Daotian to forcefully have to pick as his last and only option. With the selections now done, they had to pick their recipes. According to the rules, they can choose any recipe of any grade in an All-Alchemic Clash. Typically, alchemists chose the most difficult pill of their specialization so they could have a better chance of obtaining victory in that category. After all, the goal was to win 3-0 or 3-1. If you lose in your selected product, your chances of victory dwindled considerably.

While the one who selects first generally had an advantage in type, the second could choose which recipe they would concoct first. This advantage balanced out things a little.

Yun Daotian regained his posture, the bearing of an elite Lord Alchemist came out in full force. With a straightened back and uplifted chin, he declared: "Sixth-Grade, High-Tier Noxious Umbra Venom Pellet."

"Gasps!" A series of cold inhales echoed. The Noxious Umbra Venom Pellet used the toxin of the Umbra Source Flower that contained shadow energies and venom of the Noxious Hell Python. They were highly volatile materials, especially the venom, and it could cause a poisonous backlash. Those who sought to concoct this pill were at risk of poisoning themselves to death.

However, Yun Daotian was a beastman from the Noxious Hell Python lineage. While he might not have the purest bloodline, his ancestor was still one. If he failed to concoct this pill, he'd suffer minimal backlash due to his innate poison resistance.

How calculating and cruel!

While the crowd was fuming at Yun Daotian's tactics, Wei Wuyin was entirely undisturbed by the declaration. He didn't have an innate resistance to poison, but he had little doubt in handling and completing this pellet with zero error.

Yun Daotian withdrew a spatial ring and sent it over. Within the ring were three sets of full materials to concoct a Noxious Umbra Venom Pill. If at this point Wei Wuyin suspected an issue, he could declare such and have it analyzed. But there's no way Yun Daotian would sabotage his chances, so none of these materials were tampered with.

Yun Daotian found his location and proceeded to bring out a black cauldron that emitted a nauseous scent. It seemed to have been used to repeatedly concoct poison-based products. But its inherent level was merely at the Qi-Tier Cauldron at the ninth-rank. While this was impressive, it was severely lacking when compared to the Nine Element Eclipse Cauldron.

An Ge and Chen Xiaowei on the sidelines were anxious. Neither of them was certain of victory or defeat, and while the reasons for this were different, their hearts raced all the same.

Wei Wuyin quietly looked over the recipe and felt it was rather simple. There were only thirty-two materials required for the pellet, and while they had different portions, the concoction method wasn't very complex. Usually, ordinary seventh-grade products required at least one hundred and many of those materials were far, far more volatile to handle.

After a brief simulation in his mind, he started to work.

The Dao of Alchemy was divided into seven traits: Extraction, Growth, Containment, Refinement, Creation, Transformation, and Fusion. Each of these traits embodied various phases in every concoction process. This was regardless if it was Pills, Pellets, Paste, or Elixirs, or from the first to ninth-grade, they all required these phases.

Wei Wuyin's first phase of concoction was extraction. With calm movements of his hands, he withdrew material after material and briefly integrated his alchemic force within each one. His actions were so swift and discreet that no one could accurately determine his cultivation level or the level of his energies. This was deliberately done.

From each material, specks of the purest essence and innate energies from each material were taken and sent into the cauldron. These essences were incredibly varied, and the Umbra Source Flower contained shadow essence, wood essence, and toxic essence. While the term 'essence' was broadly used, each essence had its own specific differentiation and characteristic.

For example, his Absolute Zero Ice Essence could not be considered the same as Cryolife Ice Essence or Everfrost Ice Essence.

There were specific methods on how to extract each essence to their fullest and with the utmost care. For example, extracting the Absolute Zero Ice Essence from the stone that contained it would be inherently dangerous. Unlike cultivators that absorb it and refine it directly with their bodies, meridians, and Natal/Astral Souls internally, alchemists do so externally, but the danger was even more apparent.

A single misstep and the essence could go berserk, affecting the world or even yourself. After extracting all the essences within thirty-two materials, the next step was growth. The basic level of essences was often too low to handle any further processing, so it needed to be nurtured to a sufficient amount. Furthermore, each essence had a ratio at which it needed to be to safely interact with other essences without disastrous results.

A recipe denoted these ratios of strength, so doing so wasn't a blind guess. These recipes were determined by centuries and millennia of testing, and they followed basic rules. For example, if he wanted to concoct an Absolute Zero Blizzard Pellet, the Absolute Zero Ice Essence required the highest degree of nurturing.

Alchemic Qi and Alchemic Force could do so.

When Wei Wuyin had entered the Eden Earth Sect, this trait of the Alchemic Dao was used by herbal boys to nurture herbs and plants. With a strand of his alchemic force, his piercing Celestial Eyes, and unfathomable level of mental awareness, it took a mere breath to nurture the essences to their correct ratios.

After, he moved on to the third phase: Containment. The purpose of the cauldron wasn't just to support alchemical energies or the process, but contain the essences into a single melting pot. This part was both simple and immensely difficult. Keeping a perfect ratio was of the utmost importance. These essence ratios allowed for the perfect cohesive bonding to prevent any sort of volatile reaction from occurring, and many alchemists fail at this point due to it. They lacked a keen sense of balance which inevitably causes the product to fail or reach a much lower quality.

Wei Wuyin's containment was perfect, keeping each portion in their specific area under a set arrangement while maintaining their unity within the cauldron. The next step was refinement, and this wasn't the type of refinement that required life force, but alchemic qi or alchemic force. It removed the inherent impurities and allowed for an easier merging process.

With a thought, he started to formulate handseals with incredible swiftness and precision, executing a refinement method. He integrated a wisp of spirituality within as the various essences were melded together with his alchemic force as the cohesive. The process turned essence into energy. It was incomparably quick and simple, like creating dough, and it soon became a mass of black energies within the cauldron the size of a baby's fist.

On the outside, the runes and formations on his cauldron started to light up as various pure elemental and spiritual energies integrated within to support the refinement process. This would innately improve the rate of refinement to another level, one of the many benefits of an Astral-tier Cauldron.

The next phase was creation. This was where the product was determined to be a pill, pellet, paste, or elixir. It was to create its state of existence, but this couldn't be determined willingly, allowing any compiled mass to become any type of product. To determine that relied heavily on the refinement process itself. Pellets, specifically, refined essence into energies during that step while adding spiritual adaptability to it. Elixirs, Pills, and Pastes did not do the same, so attempting to create them after executing a Pellet Refined Mass of Essence to Energy Method was ill-advised.

After clenching his fists slightly, the black mass of energy became a perfectly spherical object the size of a marble. But this only created its form, and it lacked the qualities of a pellet as well as its completed state. The last two steps, Transformation and Fusion, were handled simultaneously by Wei Wuyin. Normally, these steps were deliberately taken with the most extreme degree of caution possible, but he didn't need such precautions. With a few handseals, the various energies started to rapidly start changing on a fundamental level, under the direction of his alchemic force.

Within a blink of an eye, the energies transformed and fused into a new type of melded energy: Noxious Umbra Energy. He combined this new energy with his alchemic force until it completely became a solid marble that faintly emanated dark, toxic, and spiritual auras. This was the last process of the Alchemic Dao and was specifically designed for pellets. It was called the Solidification Step. While pills, paste, and elixirs have their own last step. For example, elixirs were called the Liquidize Step.

With a swipe of his hand, the pellet was completed.

While this process was being completed, Yun Daotian was still performing the first phase: extraction. He struggled to extract essences from each material, attempting to not waste it with poor methods. It was like surgically removing a heart, and this process typically required sufficient patience and skill. In truth, this first step often gated many alchemists as their control or strength was insufficient to extract certain essences properly.

Wei Wuyin sighed in his heart as he reached into his cauldron and touched the newly concocted pellet. Its surface was gleaming with faint black light and miasma-like gas was circulating like a planetary ring. "A peak-quality pellet." In the end, concocting with alchemic force was a thousand times easier than with alchemic qi.

It was unbeknownst to the crowd that Wei Wuyin had succeeded. He quietly waited, closing his eyes and recalling the experience of concocting with alchemic force and their inherent differences. It was quite stellar to dissect this difference, and it only fueled his belief that he could now concoct ninth-grade products.

Three hours later, Yun Daotian failed his first concoction at the Containment Phase. He had measured the ratios wrong, growing some a little too much and others too little, causing the toxic essences within to overpower the others, turning the entire batch into a horrible mess of poison. The backlash of this was resisted by his bloodline, so besides his complexion turning a shade paler, he held on.

However, he was unperturbed by this failure, even expecting it. After all, he was merely re-familiarizing himself with everything once more. He would get serious during the second concoction!

Just as he calmed himself down with an internal pep talk, and about to restart the process, Wei Wuyin's cauldron lit up in black light. The black light shot into the air like a pillar, and it emitted the aura of Noxious Umbra Energy. This phenomenon was what usually accompanied a successful concoction of a sixth-grade pellet, a byproduct of the fusion process.

Wei Wuyin lifted his faceless mask towards Yun Daotian. He said, "Finished."

Chapter 213 - 211: Difference - Devastating

"Impossible!" Yun Daotian shrieked out, completely losing his prestigious demeanor of an elite Lord Alchemist. He was thoroughly shocked and unwilling to believe this, examining the pillar of black with an intense focus to perceive any flaw. However, Wei Wuyin thoroughly shattered his forming delusions as he withdrew a marble-like object and allowed it to float.

Its aura was definitely of Noxious Umbra Energy! Furthermore, it was the highest quality he had ever seen. Even he hadn't concocted a Noxious Umbra Venom Pellet like this before! A resounding gulp and he felt his knees tremble.

Normally, he wouldn't be so broken in defeat, but this was an All-Alchemic Clash! Losing in a category that you chose generally meant your loss! If he lost in his selected type of specialty, how could he hope to compete in Wei Wuyin's own choices?!

There was no reason to run up and verify the pellet. The phenomena and aura were sufficient to prove it was real. Furthermore, he could sense Wei Wuyin's aura within, so it was definitely refined by him!

Chen Xiaowei turned three shades paler, his eyes widening as she realized the direction of this clash. Just from how Wei Wuyin succeeded in a few hours revealed that he wasn't a Lord Alchemist, but likely a King Alchemist!

While she couldn't feel his astral force, she felt a sense of danger, so he was definitely at the Astral Core Realm! How did that imbecile obtain the support of an Alchemic King?! Her shock-filled eyes shifted to An Ge who wasn't any different. His eyes were bulging with disbelief and it seemed he was coming to the same conclusion as she did!

"What dogshit luck, you idiotic bastard!" She shrieked, and this wasn't in her heart or via transmission, but loudly and directly towards An Ge. She even pointed at him with her long, painted nails and her eyes flared.

A wager was a two-sided bet, so if she lost, there was definitely something she'd lose. To bet for fifty-percent of his territory, she not only bet the previous territories she had won, but twenty-percent of her Chen Clan's territory and herself! Her eyes were flaring with fervent rage!

Her precious peach! And it was to this idiot! Argh!

An Ge was brought back to reality from that screech and saw Chen Xiaowei's hellish glare. A warm, unfathomably comfortable sensation permeated his heart and soul. It was so goddamn refreshing.

He had the smuggest smile, completely throwing away his prestigious bearing as he said via transmission, "Be sure to wash that pretty peach of yours. I'll enjoy it quite thoroughly." His subsequent laughter was grating to her ears, like a claw to a blackboard.

While they underwent their rather risqué exchange filled with a desire to either rip the other to pieces or rip the other clothes off, Yun Daotian realized the situation he was in. His heart was filled with bitterness as he had come across someone he couldn't help to defeat.

Then, he did the unexpected.

"I forfeit." His declaration was amplified by his qi, reaching the entire square, but Chen Xiaowei didn't interfere or comment. This entire clash became a waste of fucking time. She could only blame the heavens for this horrific outcome. Thinking about An Ge between her legs, over her body, or the smug smile he'll have, she wanted to vomit out a lung and an ovary.

With a cold humph, she lifted her palm and it flashed with spiritual force.

Woosh!

An eagle beast with a wingspan of nearly fifty meters descended from the skies and landed before the Chen Clan. Before anyone could react, Chen Xiaowei leaped onto it, and it flew away. She even left her clan members as they awkwardly gawked at Chen Xiaowei's hasty departure. In a matter of seconds, she was a mere dot in the distance.

What they didn't know was that her Spirit Oath had activated, and she didn't want An Ge to rub it in.

An Ge was similarly startled. She left her clan members behind and departed like a runaway bride.

Wei Wuyin's eyes flashed as he vanished from the crowd. When everyone was looking at Chen Xiaowei's departure, Wei Wuyin had left like a shadow, and only a few experts noticed his departure. Those that did were thoroughly shocked and looked at Chen Xiaowei's eagle.

On Chen Xiaowei's eagle, she was fuming as she muttered all sorts of curses condemning An Ge's entire familial lineage from the very beginning of creation. Just as she was about to continue, her eyes turned and saw an unearthly handsome man beside her, standing and looking at the distance. His silver eyes stared forward and he had a quiet smile.

His bearing, aura, and presence were impeccable.

"..." She blinked.

"AH!" She screamed a scream reminiscent of a frightened mortal woman as her astral force flared in defense, creating a protective, skin-tight ward. This was quite embarrassing, and if others saw her react like this, her entire reputation would drop to an all-time low. However, she didn't act recklessly despite her abrupt fear.

If someone, anyone, could get in such a close distance without her noticing, they were either a ghost or someone far, far stronger than she was. After a few milliseconds to collect herself, she noticed his form of attire was the same as the alchemist that caused her humiliating and utter defeat, shattering all her carefully tailored plans in the matter of moments.

There wasn't even any suspense as he devastated Yun Daotian in his own recipe, and quite thoroughly so. With a low voice, she asked: "What do you want?"

Wei Wuyin turned towards her, revealing his full face and silver eyes in full. This caused her eyes to nearly pop out of her skull as this visage was very familiar to the rumors spreading as of late. These rumors told of a young, talented alchemist that turned many things topsy turvy.

The Prince of Everlore!

"You're..." As her mouth was about to release words of revelation, her mind realized why she lost. Wei Wuyin! A King Alchemist! While unofficial, he was definitely the most talented non-Alchemic Soul alchemist there was since the King of Everlore. She gulped slightly.

"When I accepted to participate in this clash, I expected...something else. Anyhow, I'd like to extend my apologies." Wei Wuyin calmly spoke with earnest and honest emotions. He could tell that Chen Xiaowei was incredibly intelligent, sufficient enough to entrap someone and push the An Clan into a checkmate. Unfortunately for her, he flipped the board.

Regardless, he had a form of respect for those who possessed intelligence and the ability to utilize that intelligence to their benefit. He felt much more favorability towards Chen Xiaowei than An Ge, who could be said to be a brute with a law book. While he understood the rules of the world, he could never apply it to his favor, merely relying on personal power to push through.

Seeing Wei Wuyin apologize, Chen Xiaowei was at a loss. But, she didn't dare to accept that casually. "You don't need to apologize, Heavenly King Wei."

Wei Wuyin glanced at her and smiled. "I'll compensate you for your losses. However, I have a favor to ask of you. Is that okay?"

Back in the square, within one of the VIP buildings, there was a group of crimson-colored, luxuriously dressed men and women who were animatedly discussing events. Three of them, two men and one woman had the character for 'Xue' embroidered on their robes.

The young woman was the breathtaking beauty that took Wei Wuyin's breath away. She was seated with her legs folded, her hazel eyes and delicate eyebrows were slightly furrowed. But she wore a veil, so no one could see her facial features.

A young, strapping man with thick eyebrows and a chiseled, square-jawed chin was directly beside her. His eyes were bright as he watched Wei Wuyin vanish. "Where did that alchemist go?" His cultivation was merely at the Eighth Stage of the Qi Condensation, and he had seventy-four Qi Essences, striving for an exceptionally high Mortal State.

The other young man was thinner, his sunken eyes looked slightly deprived, lacking energy and good intentions, but there were faint similarities between the three. They each had caramel-colored skin, but the facial differences were enough to determine that they didn't all originate from the same parents. "Did he leave?"

"He followed the Chen Clan's Matriarch," an elderly man with a hunched back and closed eyes answered. Despite his fragile-looking body, no one here dared to underestimate him as his aura was deep and unfathomable.

The thin young man asked the old man, "Who was he?" This question was on everyone's mind. They had never seen someone concoct a sixth-grade pellet in a few hours before. Even top-tier Lord Alchemists might take several weeks to complete the process, that was if they didn't fail.

He couldn't be one of the three Emperor Alchemists of the Myriad Monarch Astral Territory, right?

"..." The old man remained silent. He thought it would be best to keep his speculation to himself, and it was unlikely these three would ever truly meet such a figure in their lifetimes. However, someone wasn't silent.

"He was likely Wei Wuyin, a Heavenly King of the Myriad Monarch Sect." A soft, incredibly gentle and calming voice resounded. Despite its nature, it caused everyone to turn their eyes to the exceptional beauty who spoke.

"Wei Wuyin!? Are you certain?" The young man with chiseled features, Xue Han, asked with disbelief. Who was Wei Wuyin? What was a Heavenly King?! This name and that title was literally heaven-reaching! Could it really be him?

Xue Yu, the young man with sunken eyes, echoed Xue Han's words. If this was true...his eyes that seemed to lack energy became vigorous. This was his chance!

"..." The old man sighed in his heart as the other members within their room were already sending out transmission messages. This was quite bothersome...

Chapter 214 - 212: Another Blessed?

Xue Yu's sunken eyes were brightly lit while Xue Han was in deep thought. This information was highly valuable and shocking. It was already rare for an Alchemic King to arrive on a continent, let alone one with such prestigious reputation and acclaimed talent. If they could form relations with him, even the smallest tie, wouldn't their futures be completely set?

This thought wasn't limited to just them, but it was infectious in all of them. The difficulties in cultivation were often alleviated or entirely abolished with the support of alchemical products. Those who had no talent could ascend the Astral Core Realm, joining the five million experts of the starfield! How grand was this thought? Even these lofty princes and princesses didn't have a hundred percent chance of reaching the Astral Core Realm.

Furthermore, the greater the alchemist, the easier it was for them to reconstruct your innate talent or support you into higher phases of cultivation. The King of Everlore was renowned for essentially providing the keys for the current five hegemonies of the Tri-Vision Starfield! And this was during the golden era where experts at the Astral Core Realm were far more numerous!

"Fei'er, what do you think?" Xue Yu questioned this sister of his. The tone at which he spoke was gentle and filled with caution. It was as if he was somewhat afraid to offend her, seeking approval to speak further on this matter.

Fei'er, or Xue Yifei, was silent. Her hazel eyes behind her veil were rippling endlessly with thoughts and calculations. Her lack of comment caused the rest of the room to fall into an incomparably tense silence. Even the old man could only breathe lightly, yet in his heart, he was a little frustrated.

If Xue Yifei wasn't just beautiful, then he wouldn't have any issue having such reverence and respect in his heart for her, but...she was...just beautiful. To put it simply, her birthright was all-time low by royalty standards. Born from a maidservant and a one-night-stand at that. Moreover, not only was her talent incomparably average even when compared to Xue Han or Xue Yu, she wasn't very skilled in the Dao of Design, Forging, or Alchemy.

While the only exceptional quality of hers was a decent level of deductive reasoning and slightly greater intelligence, it wasn't noteworthy because she lacked the resources, status, and talent to fully nurture and apply it. Her entire facade of esteem and prestige was entirely based on a single person—A man.

Earlier this year, this man had caused immense chaos on the Bloodforge Continent and slaughtered numerous individuals. With his abilities, he killed an Astral Core Realm cultivator while at the Qi Condensation Realm. And, he had recently ascended to the Astral Core Realm.

Their relationship was unordinary and he was very, very sensitive, easily driven to anger, and quite murderous. The reason everyone gave her such respect was fear of offending that sole figure that will likely dominate a portion of the Myriad Monarch Astral Territory in the future. If it wasn't for him, she would've long since been married off for the betterment of the country or been the plaything of one of her siblings. While it was a bleak reality, it was the reality she was born to.

In the end, after a long moment of silence, Xue Yifei abruptly stood up and looked towards the old man. She said, "I would like to go for a walk." While this sounded casual, it felt more like an order that could not be denied.

The old man smilingly nodded. With a flash of bright light, the two vanished from the room leaving the others in a slight daze. Xue Yu paused for a moment before he clenched his teeth slightly, grinding them against each other. *'That bitch is trying to be the first to make a move! Screw this wench!'*

He cursed in his heart before he left with his own protectors. While they were severely lacking in comparison to the old man, they were still experts at the Ninth Stage of the Qi Condensation Realm. With two at his beck and call, they soared away in the direction Chen Xiaowei took off.

Xue Han didn't follow the other two. When he left, he sought to return to the capital.

In the Blood Titan City, Manor of the Chen Clan.

Wei Wuyin was situated in a rather luxurious courtyard designed for respected guests. After having a little conversation with Chen Xiaowei, they had settled on compensation and his little favor. It was minor really: allow him to stay in the Chen Clan for a period of time. He needed a place to stay. It was that simple.

Of course, she didn't reject his request. In fact, she was ecstatic.

As they flew towards the Chen Manor, he discovered that she was rather easy to have a conversation with. Despite his current reputation and status, she was capable of comfortably holding a conversation with him. There were some too scared to even breathe loudly in his presence or women that sought his favor and bed, but she was rather neutral and friendly.

He liked this. So, he decided to reward her a little bit more when deciding the appropriate compensation. In truth, Wei Wuyin fully intended to claim the Bloodforge Continent as one of his territories in the immediate future. Initially, he planned to plant his own Bloodforge King, but it might be better to select a native. The Chen Clan didn't seem too bad, well, Chen Xiaowei didn't seem too bad.

Keeping her candidacy in mind, he couldn't help but recall that breathtakingly gorgeous woman that sat with those other officials. According to Chen Xiaowei, she was likely Xue Yifei, and news of her had been rather rampant lately. Originally, she was a lowly princess born from a maidservant, and her status and talent were widely considered as being lower than expected standards. This was until she reached adulthood and became a nation-topping beauty. Then, all sorts of events happened around her.

For example, there was a young man, an absolute genius of a cultivator, who caused extreme mayhem and slaughter for a period of time. There was even a manhunt for him by a recently destroyed superpower that exceeded even the Chen Clan.

This superpower belonged to the outside of the Xue Country, but its leader was a Second Stage Astral Core Realm expert. Supposedly, a year ago, this expert and his subordinates were all brutally killed in a grand battle against that man. He was called Yuan Longshi, and Xue Yifei had an unordinary relationship with him. This caused her status and perceived importance to skyrocket as he'd been very vocal about supporting her after fully establishing his name, power, and reputation on the continent.

Others called him the Demonic Dragon.

He was of a demon lineage and a human, and said to have gained the legacy of a True Dragon. Regardless of the truth, his combat abilities spoke for themselves as he had achievements that exceeded Long Chen and Wei Wuyin's. When he was at the Seventh Stage of the Qi Condensation Realm, he had killed an Astral Core Realm cultivator!

While they've both killed Astral Core Realm experts while at the Qi Condensation Realm, they both used external support and means.

This intrigued Wei Wuyin as he realized he likely found another Blessed, because according to his exploits, he had survived way too much to just be a little lucky. While low-valued Blessed might make minor impacts like he had before, high-valued Blessed's actions were truly too hard to ignore. Even Long Chen's past was like an epic tale out of a fantasy novel, let alone this guy.

'I had to work my ass off, fight off countless deadly schemes, and strive for scraps, while they were...' He truly felt a hint of grievance against the Heavenly Daos when he thought about it. The indignant feeling lasted for a brief moment before it was suppressed. This type of mentality was an abyss that he didn't wish to delve into. He inspected his Bloodline of Sin tattoo.

Karmic Luck Value: 563.2

First Calamity: Survived - 7/7.

Second Calamity: Suppressed - 36 Years.

His karmic luck value was immense, yet he hadn't experienced a deduction since that 0.1 incident that seemingly pulled him towards the Bloodforge Continent. Was it because he didn't have a specific need for anything? When he was attempting to form his Elemental Qi, he met fortune after fortune that helped him attain it.

He found this somewhat strange. What conditions must be met before the Heavenly Daos make arrangements? While slightly pondering this, he lifted his eyes to observe the outside world. With his Celestial Eyes, he saw that breathtaking figure once more, guarded by an old man within an Inn of the Blood Titan City.

Xue Yifei was staying there, seemingly patiently waiting for something or verifying his presence within the manor. It seemed his first goal had been achieved. With a bright smile, he decided to cultivate for a period.

Now that he was in the Astral Core Realm, he should improve his four Astral Cores. Their current size was merely half a millimeter and while this was impressive for a cultivator who recently ascended, it wasn't satisfying to him in the slightest. The Astral Core size reflected the levels of quality and quantity of the 'World Sea' within, which was his refined astral force that originated from his mental, physical, essence, and spiritual energies.

Bringing out his cauldron, he started to make preparations. Using the Thirty-Three Heavenly Concoction Method, he withdrew thirty-three portions of materials to produce Astral Sea Pills. These were seventh-grade, peak-tier pills. Their primary effect was to expand the Astral Core, while their secondary effect could improve the durability and resilience of one's meridians.

Generally, each product had two effects. Its primary effect, which wouldn't increase after reaching low-quality, and its secondary effect, which would improve in high and peak-quality.

According to the recipe's description, a single pill can expand the Astral Core by a tenth of a millimeter. This was essentially increasing Wei Wuyin's current reserves and power by 10 to 20%. While the effectiveness wasn't permanently consistent—the more your Astral Soul consumed, the less benefits it would provide—Wei Wuyin fully intended to treat these pills like candy.

He started concocting.

Chapter 215 - 213: The Benefits Of Alchemy

The Tri-Vision Starfield, the Myriad Monarch Astral Territory, the Bloodforge Continent, there was one thing that these places all had in common: they didn't lack resources. The truth of the cultivation world was that resources produced faster than could be used, and this was regardless of reckless waste by cultivators. Despite this, there were two types of resources, those that could be classified as gentle and easy to absorb for cultivation and those volatile and difficult to absorb resources that required long-term processing to be effective.

The majority of resources fit the second type. While the higher one's talent and, depending on the cultivation method, some resources of the second type shifted to the first type, providing immediate benefits on what could and couldn't be used, it didn't solve the issue for the majority.

This was where Alchemists came into the picture. They were capable of extracting essence, materials, and energies from resources, then processing them with other materials allowing them to become 'gentle' in the form of pills, elixirs, pellets, and pastes while simultaneously enhancing their effectiveness and effects.

Some unique materials, when meticulously combined, can do abnormal things such as enhance Astral Core size or allow one to experience enlightenment. These things were byproducts of quirky reactions between different essence, materials, or energies in various exact ratios. This miraculously phenomenal ability allowed Alchemists to expedite others' cultivation as well as enhance their innate talent.

The main issues that alchemists came across with concoction were its immense difficulty in succeeding a concoction, exceptionally long refinement times, and the exceptionally high requirement on skill. Furthermore, the alchemical energies converted by the combination of an external method and four essential energies was a thousand times less effective than pure alchemical energies produced directly by the Natal or Astral Soul. However, taking that route was cutting off hundreds of potential years on their lifespans as well as forcing them to have no cultivation strength.

It brought a soul-rending woe into the hearts of countless cultivators. No one was willing to become a product dispenser for others, their life and death no longer theirs. It was too much of a sacrifice.

Fortunately, Wei Wuyin didn't have this problem or any of the common alchemist issues.

In a matter of twelve hours, Wei Wuyin had already concocted three thousand Astral Sea Pills, and each was peak-quality. Most of these pills were devoured by his Astral Souls. They externalized for a brief moment and directly consumed and refined them.

At the moment, Ori, King, and Kratos had left their half a millimeter size in the dust as they were each three millimeters in size. This might seem little when compared to three thousand pills, but this could be flatly described as a multiplicative increase in astral force by 600%. Just this alone would be miraculous, but the quality of his astral force had similarly evolved.

He could be considered dozens of times stronger! The rapid increase in strength caused him to truly freeze. In the Qi Condensation, besides Qi Essence and energy purity, there was no true way to differentiate between foundations. However, in the Astral Core Realm, it was so clear-cut. This was the first time he truly felt the benefits of Alchemy.

He felt his meridians be infused continuously with warm forces that slowly solidified and strengthened them. With this, his body could contain and release far greater power without worrying about damaging his body.

He didn't hesitate to find an eighth-grade recipe that was suited for those at the Astral Core Realm's early-phases. He found an elixir recipe called the World Spirit Refinement Elixir. It was only a high-tier elixir, and it could increase an Astral Soul's spiritual aura, strength, senses, energies, and durability. The last reinforced the Astral Soul, allowing it to withstand more damage before shattering.

He inspected his ring and discovered that he could create about three hundred portions if he concocted them without a single failure. He had numerous sets of materials and essences within his three-layered ring, as well as hundreds of storage rings linked to his sky palace's vault. There, he had countless sets of materials stored and preserved over the last four years. He hated being unprepared the most, and since the cost of materials and essence was so disgustingly dirt-low when comparing a completed alchemical product, he essentially had a wide variety of everything, enough to make two or three mountains.

To put it into perspective, the Astral Sea Pill was valued at about twenty Astral Stones. This was about two billion essence stones, but the materials used to create it was less than ten thousand essence stones. This meant a two hundred thousand sets of materials were equivalent to a single Astral Sea Pill, and this was the lowest-quality too. The disparity was so monstrously ridiculous that Wei Wuyin nearly fainted.

After a brief moment of consideration, he decided to concoct the elixir. After a day, he set aside the pills and elixirs for Eden as he observed the three other Astral Souls digested the elixirs. Their unique forms were solidifying, causing them to glimmer with fascinating and mysterious light from time to time.

He frowned slightly as he watched their growth. He could feel the quality of his astral force simultaneously rise as well. Considering spiritual energies was one of the pieces of refined Astral Force, it made sense. However, this quality was due to its components rather than the Astral Core's refinement quality. They were two different means of enhancement.

'If it's like this, then enhancing my physical, mental, and elemental energies will further enhance my astral force, right? Perhaps enhancing any of my innate energies will be beneficial.' He finally realized that there were several avenues to cultivate Astral Force quality. With renewed interest, he started to concoct all sorts of pills, elixirs, and paste.

Three days came and went. Eden had finally taken a break to consume its portions of pills and elixirs, reaching a similar degree of advancement as its siblings. As for Wei Wuyin, he was asleep. He wasn't mentally tired or exhausted but simply felt like passing the time in his dreams. While he could concoct products without Eden, converting his other sources of astral force into Alchemic Force, he didn't feel like wasting materials, so he slept.

During this time, a ruckus was forming outside the Chen Manor, and it wasn't because of him, but because of the prince and princesses of the Xue Country. Specifically, it was Xue Yifei and Xue Yu. Their presence couldn't go unnoticed as they arrived, causing various forces to become enlivened and enthralled.

A few renowned figures even invited them to other areas as guests to establish better relations. However, they seemed intent on staying within the Chen Clan's territory. This created even more speculation, especially considering the Chen Clan had just suffered a disastrous loss just a few days ago. Their overall reputation had reached an all-time low, and it truly made one understand that all the plans in the world can go to shit due to a single unexpected variable. That mysterious alchemist arrived, dominated, and left like the wind.

It was truly quite a soul-stirring and life-learning tale. Many elites and experts visited the An Clan in hopes of meeting this mysterious alchemist, but left empty-handed and rejected. After all, the

mysterious alchemist was said to not be within the An Clan nor could anyone verify the claim because his identity was unknown.

While a few could make educated guesses, there wasn't any certainty in these assumptions.

Xue Yu was surrounded by his guardians, sitting at the top floor of a restaurant as he watched the seething masses below. As a prince, he was somewhat of a celebrity and countless wished to form connections or good impressions on him. Regardless of his cultivation base, whether it could ever enter the world of true experts, he still had sufficient authority and current backing to warrant such treatments.

They, however, were like puny insects rummaging below to him. He sneered, taking a sip of his wine as he watched the Chen Manor in the distance. He, like Xue Yifei, was here for a single reason: Wei Wuyin. Unfortunately, neither of them dared to barge in uninvited or out his identity. It wasn't just them, but countless others who had heard Xue Yifei's words that day were hiding in the shadows in wait.

If Wei Wuyin saw this as annoying, wouldn't they leave empty-handed? The worst-case scenario was their entire status would crumble from a mere displeasing word from him. No one truly knew what his personality was, except the rumors of his utmost ruthlessness, immense wealth, and outrageous talent. Basing it off this, they could only approach with caution.

In the Chen Manor, Chen Xiaowei had a headache. Countless elites were sending all sorts of private gifts and messages in an attempt to verify Wei Wuyin's identity or be invited in. She didn't dare accept any of it, fearful that it'll disturb Wei Wuyin and lead to an unfortunate event. Who would've thought such a character would seek housing in her territory?

She could only ruefully sigh in her heart. In this same heart, there was a wisp of excitement as she recalled Wei Wuyin's compensation. While twenty-percent of her territory was great, he had promised ten Astral Dipper Fountain Pills, three Astral Sea Pills, and Sky World Pill. They were all seventh-grade, but their effects were beyond extraordinary!

Especially the Sky World Pill, a peak-tier pill. It can infuse the Sea of Consciousness with a flood of unique mana that sharpens one's senses towards it. This unique mana would temporarily change one's senses and perception of the world, allowing them to observe and analyze the ambient mana of the world.

This was a state of enlightenment that could nearly guarantee the ability to assail the Second Stage of the Astral Core Realm. The price of these pills exceeded the entire worth of Blood Titan City, let alone a measly twenty-percent of her territory. However, she knew that her accepting this likely meant that she was no longer an independent leader, and she was likely within Wei Wuyin's influence.

However, who would reject?! She happily accepted and became his vassal in Blood Titan City, even without him asking. Her allegiance was set, and she even made a harsh loyalty-based Spirit Oath to ensure him. While it wasn't needed, she had no issue attaching her fate to the golden thigh that was Wei Wuyin shamelessly.

Just as she was planning who to nurture with the Astral Dipper Fountain Pills into an expert amongst her talented juniors, a dignified voice resounded outside the manner.

"His grace, Duke Zhao, Duke of Scarlet Ash Prefecture, seeks an audience with the Chen Clan!"

Chapter 216 - 214: Duke Zhao's Invitation

The voice that radiated dignity and prestige resounded like a thundering clap. It demanded response and respect. Those nearby, especially those seeking to see or interact with Xue Yu and Xie Yifei were startled into amazement.

A Duke?!

The Xue Country was divided into three prefectures, and the Scarlet Ash Prefecture was territory awarded to Zhao Jihan by the current Bloodforge King, Xue Duan. He had performed major meritorious achievements and served under Xue Duan during the reign of the previous Bloodforge King, and was renowned to be a top-tier expert at the Second Stage of the Astral Core Realm. In all of Xue Country, he was widely considered the third strongest cultivator beneath the Bloodforge King himself.

Furthermore, within this prefecture was the entirety of the Blood Titan City, so he owned the land rights of the city and held authority beyond any clan or force within. While these elite clans and forces couldn't be considered his subordinates, they lived, served, paid taxes, and obeyed as long as they remained within his territory.

The chatter and clamor died down as many were drawn to the origin of the sound. They saw a middle-aged man dressed in luxuriously scholarly attire standing directly in front of the Chen Manor's gate. He had a set of round spectacles that gave him an intelligent and direct bearing. His back was ramrod straight, and his chin was lifted somewhat. The immense pride and arrogance within his bones might be contained at the moment, but these inherent qualities were clearly there.

He was the messenger of Duke Zhao and a highly respected figure that would be given the appropriate level of respect and reverence wherever he stepped.

Chen Xiaowei and a few experts of the Chen Clan exited from the front door. While she had a calm expression, not betraying a hint of her emotions, the others had dark and solemn expressions. Duke Zhao was not an individual that could be curved to the side or ignored, and if they stonewalled him, who knew the consequences they could face?

A flash of indifference and a hint of contempt flashed within Chen Xiaowei's eyes, but it was incredibly concealed. If they thought they could use their status and authority to push the alchemist to the forefront against his will, they were idiots. Perhaps it would work for typical Lord Alchemists, but Wei Wuyin wasn't a typical alchemist by any means.

Just the pills she received as compensation was enough for her to reach Duke Zhao's level in a few years. Now that she hugged the golden thigh that was Wei Wuyin, this figure that could once cause her to tremble in her panties and lower her head felt insignificant and small. Unbeknownst to the influence currently affecting her mentality, Chen Xiaowei walked forward with light steps and performed a respectful yet small bow.

Regardless of her belief in his insignificance, the messenger was still the acting proxy of Duke Zhao, so she reacted in accordance with proper etiquette. "Chen Clan's Matriarch, Chen Xiaowei greets the Messenger of Duke Zhao."

The messenger didn't show any emotion or happiness, besides his suppressed smugness, he merely glanced at Chen Xiaowei and said, "Matriarch Chen, his grace has invited you and the Victor of the All-Alchemic Clash to his Manor tonight." After those words were spoken, as if the intent was said and done, he extracted a scarlet letter and casually flicked it outwards. It soared like a leaf before levitating quietly before Chen Xiaowei.

After, he didn't bother to await a response as he turned. With a step, he jumped up high and was met by a Shadow-Blight Hawk. It was no less impressive, perhaps even slightly larger, than Chen Xiaowei's. With a woosh, the two left without looking back.

So succinct. However, this display truly showed their utter lack of regard for the Chen Clan and even a hint of disrespect towards the alchemist himself. Regardless of whether those actions were under Duke Zhao's orders or simply the messenger attempting to heighten his prestige with this display, it reflected poorly in Chen Xiaowei's eyes.

As for those watching, it served an appropriate response, and further lessened the importance of the mysterious alchemist in their hearts. Only an exclusive few knew of Wei Wuyin's possible residence within the Chen Manor, so the majority were only awed by the princes and princesses. This fueled their speculation and beliefs that the Chen Clan was housing this mysterious alchemist.

The clamor once more restarted when the messenger left. Chen Xiaowei held the scarlet letter in shock. How disrespectful! The left side of her upper lip twitched in disdain, contempt, and a little bit of disappointment. This way of action was truly too high-handed and arrogant. It won no points to any alchemist to simply one-sidedly invite via messenger.

While this happened, Wei Wuyin's eyes opened as he watched the Shadow-Blight Hawk fly away. He had a slight pout, a little frustration in his eyes. "I didn't think this minor character would catch the bait. Where's Xue Duan?" He frowned a little. While he hadn't invested much into his plan, he hoped to have the initiative with Xue Duan.

'Xue Yifei...the Blessed...Bloodforge Continent...' He closed his eyes once more and made some brief calculations using his two minds. Only then did his pouting expression dissipate into a tranquil smile. "This might be a little dangerous." When those words left his lips, a wisp of excitement flashed within his eyes.

He looked into the sky, his Celestial Eyes peering until he saw a Void Gate levitating above the skies. This Void Gate was housed in a crimson-colored tower, and it served as the residence for the guardian of the Bloodforge Continent.

Wei Wuyin learned that these towers were the homes for the resident guardians, and Xiang Ling, Fairy Blessed Spirit, was the guardian selected by the Myriad Monarch Sect for the Myriad Yore Continent. Her cultivation base was sufficiently powerful to oversee the entire continent and ensure its safety in the case of potentially continental-threatening conflicts.

A strand of spiritual force left his glabella and flashed upwards into the sky. It carried with it a spiritual transmitted message for the guardian of this continent. After sending this, his eyes looked towards the building that Xue Yifei was situated. An idea formed in his mind as he wanted to test out his theory. If it didn't work, then at least he'll have a breathtakingly beautiful woman by his side.

In the sky, the Bloodforge Tower. A middle-aged man sat cross-legged as he held an astral stone within his hand. The pure, refined astral essence within was being ceaselessly extracted and absorbed, causing all sorts of astronomical phenomena to erupt, such as glittering stars that appeared and vanished without order and a gorgeous aurora borealis above.

He was called Qi Lang, and he was the assigned guardian of the Bloodforge Continent. As he was quietly cultivating, a strand of spiritual force penetrated the protective wards through a specific method and arrived.

Crush!

Startled with a heart-pounding jump, he clenched his fist as his eyes flashed into battle readiness, causing him to crush his astral essence within his grip. The astral essence erupted and started to wildly escape, enriching the immediate vicinity temporarily. He did not expect to receive a transmission directly, so he was quite skittish. It was only after he received the secret code and orders within that his heart inevitably calmed down.

Biting his lips slightly, he didn't think he would be called so soon. Two years ago, Wei Wuyin's subordinate, Su Mei, had approached him and offered a deal. This deal was so sweet, salivating, and tempting that he couldn't reject it even if the requirements were harsher. In return, all he had to do was to listen to all orders given, as long as it didn't break sect rules. While he was a little uneasy at first, he truly could not decline. When has there ever been an Alchemist that could offer such extraordinary benefits without blinking an eye?

Giving in to his greed and heartfelt desires, he was now a subordinate of Wei Wuyin. This wasn't an issue at all until the first order came that ordered that he doesn't record or report his arrival on the continent immediately, and to wait a full year before doing so. This wasn't directly against the rules, and he wouldn't be punished if found out, but he guessed Wei Wuyin's intentions from this.

Now, receiving this transmission, his heart grew cold. He didn't think Wei Wuyin would be this type of individual. But he didn't dare to delay. While Wei Wuyin could give him this deal, he could similarly destroy his position, status, self, family lineage, and reputation with ease. The Ji Clan was a prime example of this.

"This is the fate of those who accept bribes from outrageously powerful people," he lamented in his heart before he stood up, took a deep breath, and left the tower. His flight path was directly towards the Xue Country's Royal Capital!

Chen Xiaowei stood outside Wei Wuyin's door. "Heavenly King Wei, I have a letter for you."

Wei Wuyin opened the door. He revealed a slightly indifferent smile as he said, "I know. Let's go." He swiped his hand over his face, once more creating his faceless mask that disguised his features.

Chen Xiaowei was somewhat taken aback by Wei Wuyin's response. She thought for certain that Duke Zhao would earn his ire for such an arrogant announcement and summons. That being said, she didn't

dare to refuse. She had already thrown her lot in with Wei Wuyin, and she was going to wholeheartedly follow him.

Chapter 217 - 215: Followed By All

Chen Xiaowei summoned her Shadow-Blight Hawk. It soared into the skies with a piercing cry before descending into the open grassy area of Wei Wuyin's courtyard. They both leaped, landing on the back of the hawk in an exceptionally practiced manner. With a powerful flap of the hawk's wings, it took off with the two in tow.

There was no need to bring the other Chen Clan's experts. Since Duke Zhao invited them, then he would have them. All others were unnecessary. When they took off, Wei Wuyin didn't hide his mask or aura, even faintly releasing a strong alchemical scent often emanated from high-level alchemists. Normally, he didn't reveal this scent because it typically matched the quality of his alchemical energies circulating within his body. Now, it was like a storm of explosive scent.

Chen Xiaowei was taken aback, her eyes glazed as her cultivation base seemed to be stimulated by this aura. Even the Shadow-Blight Hawk had a bit of drool leaking from its beak, its eyes and wings seemed to lose a lot of its force. That scent was simply too attractive to the innate energies within the bodies of any existence that cultivated essence or energies.

Wei Wuyin sent a trace of eden force through his feet, shocking the hawk back to full alertness. It seemed to gain vigorous energy from some unknown depth of itself as it cried loudly and explosively shot off faster than ever before. Its display attracted the eyes of all those below and hidden, countless spiritual senses veered their way.

The old man beside Xue Yifei looked upwards, his gaze piercing the ceiling of his building, as he noticed Chen Xiaowei and the masked alchemist take off. When he felt the overwhelming alchemical aura through his spiritual sense, his heart raced three times faster than before. If he was a mortal, his heart might've exploded immediately.

"Such high-quality alchemical energy!" He had never seen such potent alchemical energy from any alchemists before, even those with Alchemic Souls as their cultivation base. It was simply unheard of. However, a glint of realization dawned in his hazy eyes.

"He's definitely Heavenly King Wei!" Only the Second Coming of the King of Everlore, the Prince of Everlore, the renowned #1 alchemic talent of the starfield, excluding the currently developing Princess of Everlore, could possess such high-quality alchemical energy!

"My thoughts exactly," the gorgeous Xue Yifei stood up and walked over, her hazel eyes looking above at the departing Shadow-Blight Hawk. While she had speculated earlier about his identity, she wasn't entirely sure until this very moment. In fact, the level of this alchemical energy was about to alert countless figures of his presence.

It seemed counterintuitive that he would continue wearing a mask while revealing his extraordinary aura. What was he planning? Her eyes narrowed, unsure in her heart.

"He's heading to the Scarlet Ash Manor," the old man stated. It wasn't long before they were nearly beyond the horizon. His gaze looked towards Xue Yifei. He didn't know what she intended to do, but her

actions right now were exceptionally risky. If 'that' man who stood behind her, allowed her to maintain her current status, was to learn that she was trying to approach Wei Wuyin, perhaps he might not do anything, but the alchemist was still a male. And she? She was a fairy-like beauty of the ages.

If he got interested in her, this could definitely spiral out of control.

Just as he was about to recommend that they avoid contact, Xue Yu and his entourage had already left before their eyes, following Wei Wuyin. It wasn't just him. Everyone else felt that aura and its alchemistic effects it subjected them to, their eyes became spirited and invigorated as they called forth their mounts and followed in haste. A few were slower than others, cursing their two legs and single mind as they similarly followed.

Xue Yifei lightly bit her soft-as-water lips, "Let's go."

The old man's words were caught in his throat, but his heart was also screaming to follow. If possible, he sought to obtain Wei Wuyin's favor. With his current age and cultivation base, his lifespan was approaching its limits. If he could assail to the next phase, he could gain a hundred or so additional years as well as being ranked amongst the top five experts on the continent. His old, time-worn heart yearned for it, so while his mind wanted to advise, he didn't in the end.

With a light breath, he wrapped Xue Yifei in astral force as they sped through the lands, vanishing from their building.

After a few minutes of flight, Chen Xiaowei looked behind her with curiosity and the scene caused her scalp to grow numb. Numerous mounts nearly blotted out the horizon as they trailed them from behind. It was a fantastical scene! A flock of avian creatures of a wide-variety was flapping their wings intensely, and the beasts had eyes that were even a little crazy. It was as if they were stirred by something.

Turning to see Wei Wuyin, her heart trembled. Was this all because of his aura?

Wei Wuyin didn't bother about the amassing crowd. With each passing second, new mounts were seemingly appearing from thin air. These were individuals intrigued by what was happening or felt entranced by his aura.

He stayed silent. At the moment, he was assessing his cultivation base. After the three thousand Astral Sea Pills, each of his Astral Souls' Astral Core expanded by six times, and with additional products, his mental, physical, and spiritual energies were amplified in intensity and quality. With this, his astral force had grown at least twenty times as powerful as he was just a few days ago.

It was nearly unbelievable of the difference. However, he knew there was a limit to his enhancements, and he was very close to approaching it. Especially in regards to Astral Core size. If he wanted to expand it and the World Sea that was his astral force, he needed to advance to the Second Stage of the Astral Core Realm.

The only issue was that he couldn't initiate it. No, that wasn't exactly correct. His Astral Souls were unwilling to evoke it. He had long since taken a Sky World Pill, and even without it, he could sense the world's mana perfectly with his Celestial Eyes. Just a little bit of sensing and exploring and he could achieve control it slightly with his mental energies. The unique ability of Sky Pressure was his to a minor extent, but it was too minor and only a prelude to his true abilities if he could assail the next stage.

When he questioned them, they said they weren't 'full' enough. He didn't understand this initially, but after using those pills to explosively enhance his foundational strength, he deeply understood. They wanted to reach their maximum potential in this stage before ascending.

Perhaps this offered benefits he was unaware of, but considering he wanted to have the sturdiest foundation imaginable, he agreed with their desires. After he returned back to the sect, he intended to obtain enough resources to concoct enough Astral Sea Pills to reach maximum potential. As of right now, he only had enough for three thousand or so.

He really hadn't expected to need so much. Perhaps to normal cultivators, three thousand was more than enough to create a world of elites, but to these four high-tier Astral Souls, it wasn't even enough to fill their bellies.

As he was lost in his thoughts, he didn't seem to notice that vast, sky-blotting shadow tailing him. This shadow was the dense mass of numerous mounts that ranged from ten to fifty meters in wingspan. Chen Xiaowei's eyes were bulging with a pulsating fear. How did this come about?

Xue Yu was within this thick shadow, his brilliance and status ignored and overshadowed as everyone followed Wei Wuyin like a pack of lost dogs. They seemed endless, and no one seemed to approach Wei Wuyin, simply tail like the others. He cursed these shameless people, but he was confused as to why this was happening.

Within this shadowy giant was An Ge, An Biru, and An Feijing. They were drawn to this phenomenon just like the majority of others.

An Ge had a slight frown. An Feijing's bright eyes couldn't help but ask, "What's happening?" Her voice was innocent and truly radiated pure curiosity.

An Ge opened his mouth slightly but found that he was unable to explain. Was everyone here hoping to gain Wei Wuyin's favor? That didn't seem right. An Biru quietly answered with her best response, "I think he's summoning an audience."

Audience?

An Ge was taken aback. For what? His brows furrowed deeply. If he was gaining an audience, then it was for a purpose, but why did he need one?

Chen Xiaowei soon lost her nerves as she urgently asked, "Heavenly King Wei, this...is this okay?" While she wanted to ask, she didn't know exactly what to ask.

Wei Wuyin laughed slightly, his eyes bright beneath his mask. He was just about to speak when his tri-layered ring flickered with spiritual light. He sent his spiritual sense in the ring and received the message. When he did, his eyes beneath the mask shrunk slightly.

He took a deep breath, cursing in his mind: *'She's already gone. I guess three years is too long.'* His second candidate for the Ascendants had departed, and Zuhei, a member of the Silver Wolves and rumored to be of the lineage of legendary Fenrir, was renowned for tracking and had discovered her scent. He traced it to an ancient Void Gate that was highly concealed. It seemed to have left.

According to him, her scent indicated that she left about five months ago.

'Ill-timing. But, what about this ancient Void Gate?' Intrigued, he decided to inspect it later. Right now, he sent Su Mei and Zuhei a message, each with a different order. For Zuhei, his order was:

"Come to Scarlet Ash Manor. I need my fangs and claws."

With his plans to recruit the two Ascendant candidates in secret and cultivate them either completed or delayed, he was going to move onto his next objective: Conquering the Xue Country.

Chapter 218 - 216: Unknown Intentions

Conquering the Xue Country was his overall objective, but it was by no means an easy feat. The preexisting rules made it nearly impossible for a member of the Myriad Monarch Sect, regardless of rank, to establish themselves as the ruler of this country. It was highly protected, giving respect to its natives and lineage. However, 'nearly' impossible was merely that—nearly impossible.

Wei Wuyin's thoughts were lively as he once more recalled and pondered on the various steps of his plans. While he couldn't become a sitting ruler, or send a member of his sect as a sitting ruler, he could rule via proxy. While the Xue Country only possessed twenty-percent of the continent's territory, it contained seventy-percent of the continent's central wealth and resources.

Essentially, it was a goldmine that surpassed all the other contested areas of the continent. It was this very reason the sect regulated its influence and gave the natives this piece of land, allowing it to remain uncontested. Even though he was a Heavenly King, he couldn't have any piece of this pie without openly breaking established rules.

Soon, a gigantic luxurious mansion with ten acres of flat land surrounding it appeared in the distance. This was the Scarlet Ash Manor, home to Duke Zhao, a top-tier powerhouse and loyal supporter of the current Bloodforge King.

Those who followed the amassing crowd out of curiosity were sent into a quaking shock. Why were they traveling towards the Scarlet Ash Manor? The Duke was by no means a small character, and his cultivation base was at the apex of the continent. He was renowned for his fierce attitude and domineering bearing.

Xue Yu frowned. "I didn't think so many people would be following us. If we're just here visiting Duke Zhao, wouldn't it seem as if we were about to siege him?" He felt somewhat awkward, as the level of misunderstanding these hundreds of thousands of mounts that blotted out the horizon could produce. Furthermore, he was one of the few at the forefront.

While he was a prince, his status and influence was far below Duke Zhao, not to mention his personal power. If he ended up poking the tiger, his livelihood as a prince would be threatened. A wisp of desire to retreat soon grew in his heart. He had an uneasy feeling as the manor became larger and larger.

Before he could even make a decision, Chen Xiaowei halted her Shadow-Blight Hawk. When it did, the numerous aerial mounts screeched to an abrupt halt, and there were even a few slapped out of the skies. The chaos was abrupt and unexpected, and as those in the forefront of the pack tried to stop, those behind smashed into them.

There was one unlucky fellow that got clipped by a beast wing and directly exploded into bloody mist. The mount he was on went out of control and plummeted, smashing into those who flew at a lower altitude. It cascaded into chaos and danger as several mounts and cultivators met their deaths.

They clearly didn't think this through.

They weren't a trained unit of the military which practiced how to signal those behind or avoid crashing into each other, so it made unfortunate yet perfect sense for this to occur.

Xue Yu's entourage had to conjure a collectively infused qi ward to defend against the feathers, blood, and fragmented bones of those blown forward violently. Several mounts smashed into the ward, bones, and bodies were broken on impact. A few cultivators smashed their qi into those approaching, trying to avoid a direct collision.

The chaos was lively! Some even devolved into straight life and death aerial battles! Raging Qi and maddened cries echoed. A few shrieks of those sent to death resounded as well, unwillingness and shock suffused their voices.

Wei Wuyin didn't bother about this. However, he couldn't help but remember an event similar to this one. In Jade Circle City, he and Su Mei were being chased and threatened, and after a little display of power, they tumbled backwards and chaotically ran every which way.

The difference here was that these individuals wanted to stay, brewing enmity and misfortune with every misstep.

He turned to Chen Xiaowei, who looked at him and nodded. They didn't fly to the manor, staying several kilometers away and several hundred meters above.

Scarlet Ash Prefecture, Scarlet Ash Manor.

The commotion outside was noticed without a doubt. In fact, every living soul had received transmission messages from those outside who witnessed the horrifying array of aerial beasts. The warriors of the manor were already geared and ready, quite a few displayed a fierce willingness to fight to the death. They mounted their beasts and traveled via the ground and sky, creating an exceptional array of war.

They stared at the incoming titanic shadow with sweaty palms and solemn gazes. The owner of this manor and land itself, Duke Zhao, had also noticed this abnormal display. However, his information network was more detailed as he knew that the alchemist was merely answering his summons.

This mass of followers was merely curious or opportunistic idiots that were trying to gain favor with the prince, princess, or alchemist. He felt a headache, but just to be sure, he allowed his men to form a defensive array. It was best to be safe than unprepared.

Duke Zhao was a middle-aged man with faint signs of aging, a set of droopy eyes, dull black hair, and grey temples. While his cultivation base was said to be exceptional amongst the continent, his age was already high, being over a thousand years old. He seemed like a harmless uncle, and if it wasn't for his stately attire that lends his title some credence, it's unlikely anyone would believe his status and ranking in the country.

He walked outside, his droopy eyes meeting the chaos outside. His eyelids twitched a little as he saw lives ended. This was a mess.

Then, he saw the masked alchemist and Chen Xiaowei. His eyes narrowed as he focused on them. *'Such a thick alchemical aura. Is this a peak Alchemic Lord or an Alchemic King? If so, which one?'*

He had sent a summons to the masked alchemist after hearing the news of his exceptional ability. While there were rumors the masked alchemist was an Alchemic King, he wasn't so sure. There were so few in this starfield. Unlike Xue Yu and Xue Yifei, he hadn't discovered an inkling as to who the masked alchemist was. If he knew it was Wei Wuyin, perhaps his attitude would be vastly different than indifferently sending a summons.

After all, comparing status, influence, and authority, he paled nearly a dozen levels below a Heavenly King and Alchemic King. Unfortunately for him, this ignorance played into what will be his last moments in this life.

Wei Wuyin's eyes beneath the mask met Duke Zhao, they were the picture of indifference.

Chen Xiaowei spoke from up high, her gaze looked down at Duke Zhao, revealing open scorn and disdain that he and his subordinates could see. "Duke Zhao of the Scarlet Ash Manor, come and greet Lord Alchemist." Her words were direct, more arrogant than the messenger before.

Duke Zhao's nose twitched, a flash of anger at these words and her tone. Did she not know her place? However, her words revealed a clue to his identity. Lord Alchemist? So he was a Lord Alchemist? This idea, belief, started to cement in his mind. However, it also made his eyes flash with a light of disbelief.

A measly Lord Alchemist dares to be so arrogant?

Just as he was about to respond, his words were caught in his throat.

Then, Wei Wuyin verbally said with words amplified by astral force: "Did you not hear her?" However, simultaneously, his spiritual force was sneakily slithering into Duke Zhao's ears. His eyes were filled with shock, then anger, and then rage.

"Fine. Duke Zhao, I've been wanting to meet you a long time ago." Again, while he spoke loudly enough to be heard, a series of transmitted messages kept bombarding Duke Zhao. Each passing second caused the rage and fury within his eyes to grow.

Many were shocked at Wei Wuyin's arrogance, but seeing him take a step back after witnessing Duke Zhao's expression revealing anger was slightly on par. Even Xue Yu felt that Wei Wuyin realized his arrogance wouldn't serve him much here, so it would be best to take a soft approach.

However, Xue Yifei and the old man saw differently. Xue Yifei's hazel eyes revealed a strange ripple as she observed Wei Wuyin, floating alongside the old man. "He's sending him transmitted messages..." Xue Yifei slowly said as her beautiful brows furrowed inwards. It seemed that these series of transmitted messages were ceaselessly infuriating and provoking Duke Zhao somehow.

The old man could barely feel the spiritual force, but he couldn't tell if it came from Wei Wuyin or not. It was elusive and concealed. In fact, if it wasn't for Xue Yifei's comment, he might've assumed it was just faint elemental fluctuations. This type of disguising means was intricate.

But why?

Wei Wuyin was still speaking, saying some amicable and well-meaning words of greeting, typical perfunctory exchanges, but each word within the eyes of the crowd seemed to enrage Duke Zhao. This confused them, but they attributed it to this mysterious alchemist's previous arrogant words and speaking from high above.

"Shall we have a drink and sit down?" Wei Wuyin's voice echoed, but Duke Zhao's temple had the thickest vein and his teeth were clenched fiercely. When he looked at Wei Wuyin, his eyes revealed murderous killing intent.

"I don't care who you are! I will not stand for such disgrace! Men, get ready to kill!" Duke Zhao sharply raised his hand, and the trained response of his subordinates were their flaring auras as they took to the skies and primed their qi weapons. Before long, tens of thousands of mounts rose to the skies!

Wei Wuyin softly smiled beneath his mask, but he asked with a tinge of disbelief in his voice: "What do you think you're doing Duke Zhao? This is madness!" His tone held some timidness and weakness within, and this could easily be deduced as fear and uncertainty to the audience behind him.

His acting skills were on point as many believed his words. The Shadow-Blight Hawk even backed a little, ready to depart. However, before that could happen, Duke Zhao roared and clenched his fist. He used the unique ability of Sky Pressure that Sky Rulers could utilize and caused the world's mana to weaponize into layers and layers of solidified blockades. They enclosed the Shadow-Blight Hawk and enclosed, seeking to crush them.

Chen Xiaowei moved her smooth, delicate fingers, and waves of astral force battered the enclosing pressure, preventing them from being crushed into a bloody and crushed mess. Her eyes were solemn as she screeched angrily at Duke Zhao, "You're trying to kill us?! What have we done to you?"

However, while the crowd sought an answer, Duke Zhao directly ignored Chen Xiaowei's words and ordered his men with a glacial tone, "KILL!"

"And there you go," Wei Wuyin nodded in his heart. Without hesitation, he waved his hand quietly and the sky pressure was dissipated in moments. Chen Xiaowei took this opportunity to fly away, her reaction surprisingly quick as if she expected the pressure to be removed. The Shadow-Blight Hawk was swift, seemingly faster than it had ever been before, blazing a path away.

The audience could only watch in confusion, shock, interest, and horror as tens of thousands of mounts shot after Chen Xiaowei with weapons of war and murderous intent. While none of these cultivators were at the Astral Core Realm, they were in unique thousand-men Spiritual Qi Formations and Mobile Astral Arrays. With these in hand, they chased without fear.

Furthermore, Duke Zhao hadn't let them chase alone. He shot a bursting light in the sky, and a star-grade eagle wreathed in fierce violet-colored winds arrived. With a flash, he sat atop it, and his eyes were fierce. With a powerful flap, it shot out like a hurricane of violet wind. In moments, it led the chase.

They traveled for two hundred kilometers before the Shadow-Blight Hawk seemed to have exhausted all its strength

Wei Wuyin turned to face the pursuing forces, "I think that's enough."

Chen Xiaowei's panicked expression became abnormally calm. She looked behind her and a wisp of pity in her eyes. She didn't know what Wei Wuyin had done, but Duke Zhao had flown into a blind rage and sought to end their lives. Regardless, this would not end well for him. Considering her belief in Wei Wuyin's objective, Duke Zhao was likely going to be a stepping stone.

The chase was quite intriguing as numerous individuals decided to follow behind them, wanting to see the final outcome. They remained as the 'audience' and Princess Xue Yifei and Xue Yu remained a member of this group. They were following closely, but they didn't interfere.

Xue Yifei asked, "Do you think he's doing this on purpose? Is it a play for us? Is Duke Zhao in on this? If so, why?" She had numerous questions, but she felt unsure of anything at the moment. Nothing made any sense. She regarded herself as intelligent, but she couldn't see the path ahead.

The old man stared at Wei Wuyin through the various aerial mounts. "I...donot know." His words were spoken with a trace of confusion as well. What was Wei Wuyin trying to accomplish by antagonizing Duke Zhao? Did he want to find an appropriate reason to kill Duke Zhao? But that didn't seem needed. With his reputation, status, or wealth, he could hire assassins or directly influence the Bloodforge King to remove him from his position.

As for Duke Zhao being in on this act, it was possible, but if so, why?

Wei Wuyin shouted with an explosive vigor, "Duke Zhao! I've done nothing to you, why are you trying to kill me?!" His words contained grievance and it resonated in the hearts of countless. While he was a little arrogant, it didn't warrant being hunted down in the crowd's opinion.

Duke Zhao seemed insane, his droopy eyes pulsed with blazing rage as if he was a bear poked in his sensitive area. "My Xue Country will ensure your death! YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE!!"

Wei Wuyin swiftly replied with shock, his figure visibly taken aback, "Your Xue Country wants my demise?! You're under orders from the Bloodforge King to kill me?!" When those words were spoken, they seemed to not have been registered by Duke Zhao, but his silence gave everyone a feeling as if this was him agreeing with his statement.

The Bloodforge King ordered Wei Wuyin's demise?!

Duke Zhao no longer held back, seemingly losing all his patience in a moment. He shot off his eagle and blazed a path towards Wei Wuyin. He flew at outstanding speeds, arriving directly before Wei Wuyin in a blink.

Chen Xiaowei was appalled! The speed of a Second Stage Astral Core Realm cultivator was nearly five times hers! She was terrified as Duke Zhao blinked in front of her, his fist clenched and vigorous astral force was exerted.

He punched forth!

「Astral Art: Grand Fist」

A fist image composed of astral force was conjured, and it had the size of a small mountain as it crashed heavily upon Chen Xiaowei, Wei Wuyin, and the Shadow-Blight Hawk! The amount of power in this fist image could shatter an entire mountain chain!

A few members of the audience gasped in horror! Duke Zhao truly intended to eradicate this mysterious alchemist! The doubt in everyone's eyes was certain of this!

Chen Xiaowei felt her body engulfed by overwhelming sky pressure, and she could only defend against the incoming attack, but her astral force was slow from the sky pressure! She was thoroughly suppressed and an astral ward would not be enough! Her heart sank instinctively, forgetting about Wei Wuyin's existence as she faced what was likely her death.

The absolute difference between phases. She experienced it today.

"No..."

A silver light flashed in front of the fist.

Boom!!

Chapter 219 - 217: Sky Rulers Collide!

The explosion was devastatingly massive, causing a maelstrom of violent, whipping, and torrential wind currents to manifest. The audience was buffeted by these intense winds in the manner of seconds. Caught up in those intense winds, they were sent flying and into a chaotic mess!

Despite staying at least three kilometers away, they were still affected!

Xue Yu was directly blown off his mount, and smashed against other mounts. His entourage and guards wailed as they tried to catch him, failing in doing so. Fortunately, his astral-tier robes contained defensive formations that automatically activated, shielding him in a temporarily conjured astral ward. Those that he collided with became a mess of blood, feathers, and bones, but he was safe as he fluttered wildly in the sky, treated like a loose-leaf.

He wasn't the only one, as numerous individuals were sent away and met their maker in the form of the solid ground.

The old man cursed Duke Zhao for his recklessness. He hurriedly acted, using his astral force and creating numerous strings that attached and stabilized the falling, flung, and spinning figures of mounts and cultivators alike. It took him a few seconds before he stabilized the situation, keeping Xue Yifei protected by an astral ward.

He cursed once more as he lifted them all and flew away with them in tow. It was like a small mouse carrying trees and leaves. Fortunately, this small mouse had enough power to devastate half a continent, or at least secure their lives. It was quite surprising when he had to save a First Stage Astral Core Realm expert.

It was An Ge, and he was protectively wrapping his two granddaughters in his ward. But his astral ward was cracking just from the sheer resulting shockwave. The old man shook his head and brought them away.

While he acted like a saint, protecting numerous lives, Duke Zhao shouted in shock. "Who?!" His aura was seething, but his eyes effused vigilance. Just before his astral force manifested fist smashed against Wei Wuyin, crushing the life out of him, a silver light arrived and blocked his attack. It was this action that caused its explosive response.

Chen Xiaowei was sitting on her plump butt, her eyes widened as she couldn't help but hold her hand over her racing chest. She saw death for a moment. She saw the difference between the first stage and second stage! How massive was this?! She felt useless.

In truth, it wasn't her fault. Her foundation was severely lacking compared to Duke Zhao. For example, Duke Zhao didn't focus on elemental or a specific type of power. Instead, he devoted his time to increasing his Mortal State of his Natal Soul. This gave him ample time to raise his Mortal State to the 7th Level.

As for her? She was simply a 4th Mortal State cultivator, barely qualified to reach the Astral Core Realm. This coupled with his cultivation base being one stage above her was sufficiently massive. Furthermore, his lack of specific cultivation direction and requirements allowed him to refine and focus on his foundation entirely.

He could be considered a Pure Cultivator. His Heart of Qi became a Spirit of Qi. Chen Xiaowei cultivated a Heart of Wind Qi, so she required far more resources to cultivate her wind energies and Qi Essence.

Wei Wuyin knew this deeply; the stronger your Natal Soul independently, the harder it was to progress. When he first consumed an Astral Dipper Fountain Pill, he realized this stark difference immediately. King required the least amount of resources, but Kratos, Eden, and Ori required more, with Kratos requiring the most. Even Ori required double the amount of resources than King.

"Fuck." A voice finally spoke, causing Duke Zhao's pupils to constrict. A figure, tall, barefooted, and radiating a slightly feral aura appeared before him. A pair of scarlet eyes lifted themselves lazily towards him, but after it locked onto him, it became abnormally sharp and intense.

His heart unintentionally raced as he clenched his fist, circulating his astral force.

"Master, are you alright?" The loosely-dressed figure that bared his chest to all turned that gaze that instilled a sense of violence and murder away. Those scarlet eyes revealed calm and respect as he turned to Wei Wuyin.

Wei Wuyin noticeably nodded. After that, the Shadow-Blight Hawk seemed to become invigorated and acted even without Chen Xiaowei's orders. It shot away, fleeing into the distance carrying its master and Wei Wuyin.

Zuhei stared at Wei Wuyin leaving for a moment before turning away.

'Master?' Duke Zhao was startled. This beastman was the alchemist's subordinate? His droopy eyebrows furrowed as he clenched his fists, raging astral force surged outwards causing the sky to roil and the earth below to tremble. A dense degree of killing intent seemed to solidify as he didn't hold back.

「Astral Art: Grand Fist」

He once more launched his astral art with pure, unattributed astral force. It was incredibly powerful as the fist seemed capable of overturning the earth, sky, and heaven as it smashed towards Zuhei.

Zuhei breathed lightly. His hands became claws as they swiped towards the first image. His claws were like five swords, emitting sharp, bloodthirsty light. Those lights shot out, expanded until they were each a full hundred meters in length, and they sliced into the fist image.

There was no explosion as the five sharp lights sliced into the fist causing it to dissipate. Duke Zhao's expression changed as he executed a movement art.

「Astral Art: Sky Stepping Stride」

He strode across the skies like he was skating, and retreated instantly. His hands, however, weren't idle and neither were the five sharp lights. As he formed a series of handseals, the sharp lights were like homing swords of death as they pierced through the void and seemed intent to dismember his body.

「Astral Art: Wave of Obliteration」

He inhaled deeply before erupting with an explosive exhale. The resulting shockwave caused the earth and sky for ten kilometers to be blown away, and the earth became a crater in moments. All living existences below were annihilated without being able to wail in grievance or hatred. They didn't even know their killer, be it beast, demon, elf, or human.

The shockwave impacted the five lights and turned them into glittering bits of slaughter force.

Duke Zhao felt relief as he neutralized the attack. However, just as he was about to once more launch an assault, the bits of slaughter force condensed into a single sharp light that took the form of a claw, five times larger than the other lights, and pierced towards him with deadly force.

His eyes became a needle. Executing his Sky Stridding Steps, he attempted to retreat but the claw was faster than he could imagine. In moments, it was directly before him.

He clenched his fist, a vicious expression on his face as he roared. He punched out. Then, he punched again. And again, and again!

「Astral Art: Myriad Grand Fist」

He launched a total of nine fist strikes and conjured nine fist images that combined, and with relentless momentum, it clashed with the claw.

BOOM!!

The moment the two collided, the world experienced numerous and major upheavals and nearly a hundred kilometers of distance from them was immediately ravaged by varying degrees of damage. Countless protective arrays and formations were triggered in response as numerous cities and areas were impacted by the shockwaves!

This was the damage two Sky Rulers could achieve! They fought in the skies, clashing again and again without end, yet the earth was devastated, the sky was torn asunder, and lives afar were ruined without knowing why. Entire environments changed on a whim or a flick.

The claw of slaughter force was obliterated by the overlapping fist art, and even its bits of astral force was grounded down until it became nothingness.

Duke Zhao's heart was rampaging with fear. Each clash with this beastman was like fighting an immortal existence, he had to expend enough astral force in each attack and defense to obliterate his slaughter force or it regathers and attacks at full force!

It had achieved permanence!

This beastman had achieved the legendary Zenith Mortal State, allowing his Astral Force to perfectly adhere to the world's mana! With that, it would remain within his control even if it was shattered and scattered into millions of bits. Unless destroyed completely, one would constantly be forced to face the same attack over and over while their opponent expended little energy.

Wei Wuyin had expended enormous resources to modify Zuhei's Mortal State post-Astral Core Realm. Fortunately, in those three years of non-stop cultivation, he had rebuilt his foundation and even reached an unprecedented level! Only in this state could he truly act as Wei Wuyin's claws and fangs, slaughtering everyone in his path.

Duke Zhao bit his lips, already formulating ways for a stable retreat. However, just as he was planning to do so, he received several transmitted messages from other Astral Core Realm experts questioning his actions. He was currently striking with full force, devastating countless lives, and causing mass environmental damage.

They wanted to know why!

He was about to respond, but Zuhei arrived before him like a shadow. His eyes shrunk into needlepoints! He realized his body was constricted by a sky pressure that contained Intent! His Astral Soul was impacted, causing his battle power to drop. He tried to muster his spiritual force to fight against the influence, but Zuhei had already clawed towards his fist.

He lifted his arms in defense, conjuring a flimsy astral ward, but it lasted not even a single millisecond before it was shredded. A rain of blood and flesh flew everywhere!

"Ahhh!" Duke Zhao screamed as he shot into the sky, his sleeves shredded and missing appendages. Now armless and handless, he sought to seek the protection of the guardian. He immediately realized Zuhei hadn't taken him seriously since their first exchange.

He specialized in close-combat! Furthermore, he comprehended two Intent, both of which could amplify his strength and suppress his opponent. He was a monster!

He sent out a wide-range spiritual force message through the skies in hopes of contacting the guardian placed here by the Myriad Monarch Sect. He was terrified that Zuhei would strike him while running, ending his life then and there, but when he turned back, he was shocked to see Zuhei casually stand on the ground, picking his left ear and yawning.

His scarlet eyes were looking at him as if he was looking at a dead man. This look gave him horrific chills, but then he lost feeling. He lost feeling in everything.

"Gargh!" He spat out a wad of refined blood, spewing rivers as his vision seemed to split apart and descended into darkness.

Boosh!

His body ripped apart into spaghetti strings, erupting in a storm of blood as his body parts were separated and fell lifelessly to the ground.

Not too far away, Wei Wuyin looked at this and slightly nodded in his heart. He turned his head towards the distance and quietly murmured in his heart, "Your move."

In the distance, two figures were rapidly flying towards them with purpose.

Chapter 220 - 218: Xue Duan, Bloodforge King

When the incoming two figures arrived, they swept their senses and observed the devastation that spanned for tens of kilometers. The entire scene was the picture of destruction, with countless unprotected lives ended prematurely. Furthermore, the core energy signature that engulfed this area, the one responsible, belonged to an incomparably familiar individual: Duke Zhao.

"How careless," one of the voices reverberated throughout the surroundings with a tinge of simmering anger. It would cause even the bravest of warriors to tremble in their boots. It belonged to Qi Lang, the Guardian of the Bloodforge Continent. Normally, this would fall on his shoulders as neglecting his responsibilities.

However, the Xue Country was slightly special. His overall objective wasn't to prevent the loss of life but to prevent the destruction of the entire continent. The only reason he interfered with An Ge and Chen Xiaowei's actions was because of Wei Wuyin's existence there. If it wasn't for that, he wouldn't interfere with Xue Country's affairs.

In the cultivation world, lives ended swiftly, entire clans can collapse, and thousand-year-old established forces could be annihilated overnight. Therefore, he was absolved and could coldly make remarks like this without a single trace of guilt. While this usually didn't involve Astral Core Realm experts, and thus the resulting fallout wasn't nearly as catastrophic as today.

"..." The man beside him was dressed in a blood-crimson robe that was quite animated. It was as if a river of blood was forged within every strand of fabric. His thick eyebrows were slightly furrowed. Those blood-red eyes carried an innately oppressive and regal might.

While his silky caramel skin helped his countenance, he wasn't particularly attractive or displeasing to look at. If it wasn't for his attire and crown that sat upon his head, with rubies that emitted faint shimmering light, he could easily be lost in the average crowd.

"Do you have an explanation for this, Xue Duan?" Qi Lang directed his cold words to this man, the Bloodforge King, and the leader of the Xue Country. As the Guardian of this continent, while he didn't have a responsibility towards obtaining justice, and he likely still wouldn't if it wasn't for that particular man, he pushed the blame onto the owner of the rabid, chaos-bringing dog that was Duke Zhao.

Xue Duan's frown deepened, a wisp of silent rage within. However, he didn't dare express his displeasure or make a snarky remark. Qi Lang was an elite expert with a full cultivation stage above him,

and while he possessed the authority of a Sky Noble while in the Xue Country, the Resident Guardian was not subjected to it. This placed him in a passive situation for a moment before his eyes spotted Zuhei.

Zuhei was sitting quietly to the side on a fragmented piece of a mountain. His aura was faintly being released to reveal his presence deliberately. Those scarlet eyes of his weren't looking at anything in particular, and he had a rather nonchalant expression.

Xue Duan could feel his aura and knew he was the opponent that clashed with Duke Zhao. "Let's see if I can find you one." He flashed, arriving before Zuhei while floating within the air, his robe fluttered wildly giving off a dignified and immortal-like appearance. Despite this showing, Zuhei was entirely unaffected.

He snorted a little, lifted his head slightly back, located an empty spot, and spat out a wad of saliva and snot. Smacking his lips, he eyed this Bloodforge King. His cultivation base wasn't greater than his own, and Zuhei felt he was much weaker than those he killed before.

'Master should just kill his way through. All this roundabout manner seems pointless.' His master had wealth, influence, status, and power, so it would be utterly easy to crush this continent and own it through force. However, when this thought entered his mind, he felt a piercing chill crawl down his spine. He didn't dare look towards it, merely continued playing his role.

'Master usually direct. If he wanted simply to take the continent, he could probably just buy it from the sect or have them bestow it to him. There's more to this.' From the start, he didn't feel that Wei Wuyin's goal was this measly continent, and his plans seemed to be broadening with each passing moment. He couldn't fathom his interest, but it wasn't his purpose to question or make orders.

Claws and fangs; his purpose was that simple, and he enjoyed this. After all, the alternative was an enclosed, painful hellscape until death. Being out and about, killing, and traveling; It was a life he thought he'd never have since that day.

Xue Duan's attempt to pressure Zuhei with his innate imperial bearing was a failure, so he decided to be direct. "Who are you?" A faint sky pressure engulfed the world as he galvanized the world's mana to compress and surround the two. As a Sky Ruler, his strength was mountain-crushing. However, before Zuhei, it was truly useless.

Zuhei stood firmly, his Slaughter Intent fused with his own sky pressure, directly influencing the world's mana to contain horrific killing intent. This killing intent was unprecedentedly sharp and could bring about delusions of injury, blood, and death.

Xue Duan paused for a moment as he felt himself be plunged into a world of blood and death, as he watched a silver wolf the size of a mountain ravage lives of all types without the slightest hint of mercy. The wolf feasted on the flesh and blood of its victims and enjoyed every warm drop. The shrieking wails were particularly heart-clenching.

This was the innate difference of possessing an Intent versus not. The spiritual impact affected his cultivation base and his astral force slowed its circulation by nearly a fifth. "Slaughter Intent!" He exclaimed in his heart as he became vigilant.

No wonder Duke Zhao was killed. His corpse was like twine with organs and flesh being evenly split.

Qi Lang watched from afar, but he didn't interfere during this clash. He knew that this Bloodforge King already discovered Zuhei the moment he arrived, but he was very quiet and observing, clearly wary. This should allow them to see their differences. His gaze swept to see the masked figure standing on a Shadow-Blight Hawk.

His heart trembled for a moment before calming down. He didn't know what Wei Wuyin was planning, but this Bloodforge King was likely going to suffer considerably, especially considering the orders he was given.

Indeed, after Zuhei revealed his Slaughter Intent, unharmed self, and incredibly potent aura, Xue Duan's momentum was shattered. He was hoping Qi Lang would interfere at this moment, but he remained a silent observer. Now he was stuck in an awkward position.

If this was within Xue Country's Bloodforge City, its capital, he wouldn't fear Zuhei. He wouldn't even fear Qi Lang. There was a powerful Astral Array that had been established and reinforced by numerous Bloodforge Kings. Even if a Third Stage Astral Core Realm powerhouse descended, they could only leave their lives behind or flee.

However, he was in the Scarlet Ash Prefecture.

Fortunately, Zuhei reigned his Intent and spoke, "I was hired to protect, and that man threatened my employer's life. I acted in accordance with my job requirements and removed that threat. He declared publicly that the entire Xue Country intended to kill my employer, and it seemed to be a premeditated incident. If you want witnesses, we have quite a few" This explanation was very apathetic, treating Duke Zhao's life like flies on a hot summer. He pointed towards Wei Wuyin and into the distance where the old man brought the others away with a careless expression.

Xue Duan's eyebrows flared up and anger burned within his gaze, but he didn't act. Instead, he turned towards Wei Wuyin, spotting Chen Xiaowei. When he did, his eyes shrunk to needlepoint because Qi Lang decided to send him a spiritual transmission at this moment.

It was as if he was waiting for this exact moment. "That's Wei Wuyin, the Heavenly King and Alchemic King of the Myriad Monarch Sect. He's on a traveling vacation to explore the continent. Tread carefully." This message was like a thunderbolt to Xue Duan's mind.

If it was someone else who said those words, he would be skeptical, but Qi Lang was tasked with knowing the identities of any and all disciples and elders who came into the continent. If he said it was so, it must be so. As for Zuhei, it only supported the claim. After all, Wei Wuyin had the qualifications to hire a peak-tier expert at the Second Stage of the Astral Core Realm as a protector in a continent while he was still weak.

It's only been four years since his arrival, and supposedly, he was still trying to find ways to advance using the flawed Haven Heart Qi Method. However, that was incredibly difficult. Because the split meant the tribulation would be split and the effects would be reduced. Unless one had a way to double the tribulation's force and benefits, the person would inevitably be stuck as a pseudo-Astral Core Realm. Of course, if they could merge their Natal Souls, that would change the matter entirely.

In the end, he gave Zuhei one last glance before ignoring him. He flew towards Wei Wuyin, but his regal pressure and authority were like snow on a scorching morning. It disappeared without a trace. He didn't even dare to be in a slightly higher elevation than Wei Wuyin, keeping his approach leveled.

Wei Wuyin inwardly shook his head. The rules of the sect made it very difficult for Wei Wuyin to directly interfere with the Xue Country unless a situation like earlier occurred where the country acted against him first. With the 'audience' and 'silent confession' of Duke Zhao, he was well within the rules and his rights to eliminate Xue Duan and uproot the entire Bloodforge Royal Clan.

And Xue Duan knew this.

However, he would still have zero influence on the selection of its next leader. That was a democratic matter dealt with by the natives themselves. He wasn't at a level he could treat the rules of the sect as glass, shattering them as he pleased, nor did he wish to develop into such a person. Rules and principles were there for a reason. If the higher-ranked officials regarded them as a paltry joke, then they would soon become chains that restrained the weak for convenience, and that often bred discontent and unfavorable civil results.

Likely cursing Duke Zhao's ancestors, Xue Duan had an amicable smile as he greeted Wei Wuyin. "Heavenly Ki-, I mean, Alchemic King, it's a pleasure to meet you." He corrected himself, realizing that Wei Wuyin's faceless mask had a meaning to his incognito status.

"..." Wei Wuyin remained silent.

This caused Xue Duan to feel an unfathomable pressure. *'Could he intend to kill me?'* The thought bred unreasonable fear as he observed the mask that was as blank as nothing. In the silence, a soft gulp resounded. He didn't know what to do. The aura Wei Wuyin emitted was quite intense, and he was subconsciously affected.

Qi Lang sent another well-timed spiritual message towards his way. "Wei Wuyin was renowned for his ruthlessness. Chances are he'll act against you soon. Unless..."

The first two sentences clutched his heart in a vice grip. How could he not know of the recent moves made by Wei Wuyin? He eliminated an entire Sky Noble Faction and organized his beheading! He blew a hole through a planet's sky layer with the permission of the sect's upper-echelon! He eliminated an entire clan, condemning hundreds of thousands to a desolate lifestyle!!

Ruthless? Influence? Status? Backing? Ability? Wealth? Did he lack any of it?! Before just the title 'Heavenly King', he was simply an ant. One of the five million experts of the starfield? Pfft. How could that matter when you could move every force imaginable in the Myriad Monarch Astral Territory with a bounty/call?

So he tugged heavily on that unless...

That unless was his lifeline because he truly didn't know what to do. How could he, a King, be so lost?

Perhaps it was Wei Wuyin's casual hiring of an expert at the same realm yet far beyond his battle prowess before him. Or the threat that was caused by the idiot Duke Zhao! A single wrong move and his legacy as king was kaput!

Qi Lang continued, "I talked to him earlier. He said he was seeking a beautiful, virgin concubine during this vacation. His weakness towards beauties seemed quite potent, and it was said he condemned the entire Ji Clan of my sect because of a favor to one."

It was these words that started the cascading ignition of a sequence of events that was now unstoppable!