

Chapter 2661

If Fane was actually someone who only knew how to brag like what Claude had claimed then Claude would have been fine no matter what he said. However, Fane had just shown off his worth, and everything Claude had said would definitely be a huge problem if it got out.

Claude had mentally collapsed at that point. He gulped as he said, "Why do you have to be so petty? I might have said some nasty words earlier, but it hasn't caused you any harm.

"I only said all of that because I didn't know who you were. If I knew you were as skilled at this, of course, I wouldn't have said anything!"

That excuse annoyed Fane even more. The moment Fane remembered the look on Claude's face earlier, Fane's cold smile deepened, and refuted, "You're calling me petty? You claim that you just said a few harsh words... You're really good at pushing responsibility away from yourself."

The panicking Claude replied, "What is it that you want? In the end, I didn't cause you any harm, so why are you hounding me like that?!"

If it had been in the past, Fane would not have bothered with this, and would probably have just let him off. However, this time it was different. Fane still needed to deal with that troublesome Elder Rick when he got back to Phoenix Valley.

If he did not teach Claude a lesson, he might be seen as someone with too soft of a backbone, so Fane was resolved to not let Claude off easily.

That would just be sharpening Elder Rick's knife for him. Claude was already trembling at that point, he was desperately trying to find some allies.

He abruptly looked up at Elder Maurice and shouted, "Elder Maurice! He's threatening me at this point. I know I went overboard with what I did before, and I can apologize to him, but it's too much for him to want to chase me out of Phoenix Valley!"

Elder Maurice raised an eyebrow, seemingly thinking of something. After thinking about it for a long time, he did not say a single word.

Claude had been waiting for Elder Maurice to stop Fane, but Elder Maurice seemed to be thinking about something incredibly difficult. Looking at how Elder Maurice was acting, Claude immediately understood that Elder Maurice did not plan on interfering, and was allowing Fane to do as he pleased.

Mr. Zayne had his head lowered, looking like he did not want to care at all. Claude's heart chilled when he saw how the two of them were acting.

The Hestia continent really was a place where the strong ruled over everything. After Fane showed his skills, the two of them were immediately placed in different positions. Even if Fane was acting like that, the two of them did not seem to have any plans to stop him, even as higher-ups of Phoenix Valley.

They were allowing Fane to continue threatening Claude like that. The more Claude thought about it, the more anxious he got. He nervously turned to look at Benedict, but Benedict was desperately trying to inch away to the side at that moment.

It was like he was trying to make Fane feel like he did not exist at all. That way, he would not be targeted by Fane. Seeing how Benedict was acting, Claude fell into despair.

Everyone went their own ways whenever there was trouble. After he was targeted, even his so-called brother refused to stand up for him. In order to avoid being targeted by Fane, Benedict did not even dare to raise his head.

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Claude's shoulders shook as he started to lose his footing from shock. Fane smiled as he said, "Don't even think about working together with Elder Rick against me when you get back. If you dare to do that, the one who falls will be you!"

Claude shuddered, losing all hope. Fane continued to say, "Just focus on obediently completing the tournament and stop with all your nonsense. I could treat you as if you don't exist if you did that. However, if you try to cause me more trouble, I'll immediately make you wish you were dead."

Claude looked up at Fane, seemingly finding a chance of survival. Even though Fane did not say he would let him off, at least there was a chance.

Claude had really been thinking that he would definitely join Elder Rick's camp for one last struggle if Fane really wanted to force him into a corner. Even if Elder Rick looked down on him, as long as he showed that he was useful, Elder Rick would protect him.

However, Fane had seen through his thoughts immediately. If he really did that, Fane would definitely kill him first. Those words had completely dashed Claude's hopes. However, right after that, Fane had pulled him back from the dead.

Claude's mental state was in constant fluctuation at that point. The moment Fane said that, he immediately nodded and replied, "I won't anymore! I'll quietly complete the tournament. I won't say another word that I don't need to say!"

Fane grunted and said nothing else. Time passed very quickly, and an hour went by in a flash. The five of them returned to the center of the hall instead. At that moment, Master Forrest had already recomposed himself.

Sky Peak Pavilion had returned to how they were at the start. Bradley seemed intent on keeping his gaze forward, not willing to talk to anyone. Master Forrest still had a smile on his face, but this time his smile looked incredibly forced.

There were a few red veins in his eyes. Even though he had already composed himself, Fane could not help but feel like he was trying to force himself.

Master Forrest looked at Phoenix Valley's group, and his gaze stopped on Fane for a very long time. Fane raised an eyebrow, ignoring everything Master Forrest was doing.

Master Forrest said, "Time's up, the second stage of the tournament is about to start. This time, it's very simple. We just need all of you to refine a middle-level seventhgrade pill in one day."

After he said that, all of the participants looked up strangely. Even though a middle level seventh-grade pill was not easy for them to refine, it was not that difficult either.

They even had a whole day. It was more than enough time. Practically everyone there would be able to do it. Master Forrest was immediately able to guess their thoughts when he looked at their expressions.

His lips curled up into a cold smirk and said, "The first stage was already so hard, do you really think the second stage will be that easy?"

Naturally, none of the participants thought that the difficulty would be reduced, but they felt like refining a seventh-grade pill could not possibly be anything that hard.

Master Forrest continued, "The pill you have to refine is called the Three Suns Pill."

The moment he said that, everyone was stunned other than Fane and Conrad. Conrad widened his eyes as he said, "You mean the Three Suns Pill that had always had its refinement process kept a secret?"

Master Forrest looked at Conrad approvingly, "That's right, you're quite knowledgeable. The Three Suns Pill's recipe has always been a secret. Alchemists like you would never be able to obtain the refinement method without first becoming a core member of any clan.

"It's because the Three Suns Pill can quickly heal any injuries a person suffers from. It's a secret that's rarely passed on. Today, you'll have to sign a contract if you want to take part in the second stage. Only those who have signed it will be able to get the recipe for the Three Suns Pill."

Even though Master Forrest did not explain the details of the contract, anyone would be able to figure out that it was probably a

contract to swear them to secrecy. When it came to that, there was not a single one of them who was not willing.

After all, obtaining the recipe for the Three Suns Pill was definitely a good thing to any alchemist. They could use that to make more spirit crystals from then on. However, Fane was different, since the Three Suns Pill was something he already knew how to make.

After all, the ancient warrior used to stand at the pinnacle of alchemists. Pill recipes like that were not worth anything to the ancient warrior at all.

Furthermore, the effects of the Three Suns Pill were nothing that incredible. It was just to treat internal injuries, but for some reason, it had become a secret in Hestia Continent. If a contract was not signed, it was impossible to tell how valuable it was.

There were so many pills that were more effective than the three Suns Pill, but only the Three Suns Pill was kept a secret.

After everything that had happened earlier,

Master Forrest was in no mood to waste any time. Since everyone had agreed to sign the contract, they proceeded with everything. The contracts were handed over to be signed. Fane was already quite familiar with contracts, they were something that could not be changed.

The moment a contract was signed, it would be enforced by the laws of the world. If a contract was violated, one's soul would get impacted by the backlash. Even a god would not be able to help.

However, there was nothing Fane could do at that moment. He was forced to follow the crowd and sign the contract. After the contract was signed, Master Forrest continued the announcement, "The Three Suns Pill's recipe is on this plaque in my hand. The plaque has the ability to store information. All you need to do is send out your senses, and the plaque's contents will be revealed in your mind's eye!"

As he said that, he distributed the plaques

to the six participants. The moment they got the plaques, the participants all threw their divine senses inside. They were all quite composed. After they looked through it, they failed to see what was so special about the Three Suns Pill.

Even though the Three Suns Pill was considered a middle-level seventh-grade pill, the fact that it was being used for the tournament naturally meant that it should have something special about it. Yet, when they looked at it, no one could figure it out.

It was just a very simple seventh-grade pill. The ingredients needed to refine the pill were not that special either.

Master Forrest continued, "Refining the Three Suns Pill requires two Lorn Roots, a Starlight Grass, a Black Frost Flower. They're all commonly seen ingredients.

This time, we've prepared enough for all of you. No matter how much you use up in the day, you can continue trying it as long as the time limit still isn't up."

The moment he said that, everyone's eyes widened as their confusion deepened.

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An unlimited amount of materials meant that they could comfortably ignore any mistakes they made. All they needed to do was to refine it in a day.

That felt far too relaxed. The first stage had been so tense, but the second stage became much more relaxed. No one could believe it.

Fane raised an eyebrow before he started to ponder on the question with the plaque in hand. Even though Master Forrest had made everything seem so relaxed, Fane felt like the second stage's test would definitely not be so simple.

At that moment, Bradley said, "What is the target for the test? Are we competing to see who refines the pill the fastest?"

Master Forrest nodded, "That's exactly it. Whoever makes the pill the quickest will be the one who scores the highest score."

However, the moment Master Forrest said that Claude refuted, "This isn't fair, We're all alchemists. We all know that testing an alchemist on the speed an alchemist can refine a pill is absolutely not the right way to gauge the level of an alchemist.

"The only way to test an alchemist is to see the quality of the pill they refine. Many high-level alchemists often use up a large amount of time refining a pill to make sure they put their full focus on it. Testing an alchemist this way won't be able to test how good an alchemist is."

Claude was absolutely right. Just as he said, testing the level of an alchemist could not be done through the amount of time an alchemist used. The thing that needed to be tested was the quality of pills that were refined. It was something every alchemist knew.

Claude knew that Master Forrest was an alchemist who should already know that. The tournament had been set by the higherups from both ends as well.

However, he was too emotional at that moment, and could not really stop himself from asking.

Master Forrest raised an eyebrow as he looked at Claude with some disdain, "Do you really think I wouldn't know something as basic as that? Since time is the criteria for this contest, there's naturally a reason for it. You've all looked at the contents of the plaque earlier, but did you notice anything different?"

Everyone looked up and exchanged looks. Their eyes were all filled with confusion, obviously not having noticed anything.

Master Forrest let out a smile as he explained, "Have you thought about why we wanted to choose the Three Suns Pill?"

Of course, they had but try as they might figure it out, they could not understand why the Three Suns Pill was chosen.

Master Maurice held up two fingers, "There are two reasons. The first reason is that the Three Suns Pill is a secret pill. None of you would have ever refined the pill, so it's completely new to all of you.

"What we're testing is how long you need to figure out a new pill recipe.

"Meanwhile, the second reason is the main reason we chose the three suns pill. You've already looked through the contents earlier, and you've naturally seen what runes you need for the Three Suns Pill. You need a total of three thousand and three hundred pills runes.

"Out of those runes, only sixty of them are ones you've never seen before. The Three Suns Pill's recipe is kept a secret precisely because of that."

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After Master Forrest's words, everyone took up the plaque in their hands and at the same time looked through the contents. They had seen that there were three thousand and three hundred pills earlier, but since time had been limited, they did not look at it in detail.

After looking at it for a while, Bradley was the first to react. There was a look of shock on his face, "There are sixty ancient pill runes?"

Master Forrest nodded, "There really are sixty ancient pill runes. Even though it's not that many, memorizing them and being able to draw them in one day won't be a walk in the park.

"Ancient pills have their own unique forms and are different from the usual runes we see. However, the principles behind drawing them are the same. As long as you're talented enough, you'll definitely be able to completely memorize and draw them out."

Master Forrest lifted everyone's confusion at that. No wonder the Three Suns Pill was chosen, it was to test these abilities in the participants. Sixth-grade or above pills all required pill runes to be carved in them during refinement.

Each pill recipe would record in detail what runes needed to be carved. The Three Suns Pill might not be high-ranked, but sixty pill runes needed to be carved in.

They were all ancient pill runes. They had not even finished memorizing all the basic pill runes in the Hestia Continent, let alone ancient pill runes.

The sixty ancient pill runes were completely foreign to them. Hence, the key part of the test was to see if they were able to memorize and carve out those sixty ancient pill runes in a day!

They would also need to properly learn the recipe for the Three Suns Pill at the same time. After all, they had never refined the pill before. It was inevitable that some mistakes would be made. There were so many hurdles to overcome that even Bradley felt the pressure.

Only then did they understand what the key point of the test was. All of their confusion had disappeared, replaced with heavy pressure on their shoulders.

Other than Fane, everyone present had a smile on their faces. Even if they were confident in themselves and confident in the fact that they would end up becoming one of the top alchemists of their own forces, they were a bit apprehensive about the Three Suns Pill.

That was because the Three Suns Pill was far harder than they had anticipated. Even though a whole day sounded like enough time, it included the time for them to get familiar with the recipe as well as remember how to carve those sixty ancient runes.

Benedict said with a dark look on his face, "Isn't this too hard? Those ancient runes are so different from the runes we know now."

"It's incredibly hard to memorize them in a short time, and we need to do it in a day. I feel like..." Benedict might not have continued, but everyone knew what he wanted to say. That was because everyone wanted to say that they did not have the confidence that they could do it.

Benedict suddenly felt like he was incredibly useless. Even though they won the first stage, the person who contributed the most had been Fane. All Benedict did was rely on Fane.

This time, the test was different from the last. If he really failed to refine a Three Suns Pill in a day, he would really end up dragging his team down.

Claude's expression was incredibly dark as well. He had the same worries as Benedict. He was also worried that he would be unable to refine the pill in the end while the Sky Peak Pavilion would succeed.

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Both Claude and Benedict would end up shouldering the responsibility should they fail the tournament.

With that in mind, Claude felt his heart burdened deeply. He looked up as he shuddered, shooting a glance at Mr. Zayne and Elder Maurice.

The two of them were not relaxed either, but they focused fully on Fane. Fane had become their greatest hope.

Claude, noticing that both men did not gaze at him in disappointment, sighed in relief. He walked to Benedict and whispered, "It's different this time. Before this, it was Fane who'd shoulder the blame if we lose, and we won't be implicated heavily. However, if we don't manage to stave off the pressure this time and end up dragging the team down, then we'd be the one to blame. The consequences won't be pretty."

Hearing that, Benedict shuddered involuntarily. His mood sank as he felt tears pooling in his eyes. Alas, no one could help the two of them at that moment.

Both Claude and Benedict felt their chests tightening rapidly.

Perhaps both men were far too nervous that Elder Maurice averted his gaze from Fane and gazed at both Claude and Benedict. When he saw their expressions, he knew what the two of them were thinking.

He could not help but frown as his expression turned cold. "Both of you must do your utmost best. This portion is just as important as the last. Even though we won the first portion, we'll still have to go through the second part if we lose this one.

"I trust you've heard everything Master Forrest and I have said before; this is a best of three. If we win both stages, then we won't even have to go through the last stage.

"However, if we lose, we'll have to go through the third stage. If the two of you drag us down right now, rest assured you'll be hearing from me when we get back."

Those words caused Claude and Benedict to stiffen, and they felt, at that moment, just how severe the issue was.

Elder Maurice was right. If they won this one, they would not have to compete anymore.

The tournament was incredibly important, and the two of them suddenly felt a lot more nervous. Their bodies suddenly shuddered.

In truth, the ones from the Sky Peak Pavilion were not much better. After all, they had ended up losing in the first round, despite thinking that they had a sure win. The pressure greatly increased for them in the second stage. If they lost this time, they would have lost the tournament completely.

Not only would their reputation be affected, but they would have to pay up a lot of resources as well.

This was tremendously important to Sky Peak Pavilion, so much so that they would end up being punished, especially the organizer, Master Forrest.

Before the tournament, he had assured and sworn to the higher-ups that they would win. Out of the blue, however, a dark horse joined the fray, and the results were out of their expectations. Master Forrest refused to accept this, but the dread he felt was undeniable.

Bradley's calm expression had vanished completely, replaced with a frown on his face. The pressure was evident.

Even though he was exceptional, Fane had been a foil to him. He would still receive punishment if they lost, even if he did his best.

In truth, Bradley did not really care if he lost at all.

The most important thing was the fact that he was not as talented as Fane. Bradley had thought that he was the best there was with his talent, but Fane had somehow soundly beaten him.

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During the first stage, Fane had produced 300 pill runes more than he did, much to Bradley's bitter disbelief.

Master Maurice could immediately tell what Bradley was thinking. He walked next to Bradley and whispered, "That brat might be talented in a way, but this stage is different from the last. Even though you've never seen these sixty ancient pill runes before, you've still carved other ancient pill runes before.

"As long as you can maintain your calm, you'll surely refine them. Furthermore, I have faith that you'll be able to do it in less than a day!"

These words, though uttered as compliments, were not blind praise.

It was just his inner thoughts. Bradley was no ordinary genius. The Three Suns Pill should not be anything incredibly hard for Bradley. As long as Bradley was at his usual standards, Bradley would be able to finish refining the pill in one day.

Bradley would probably not even need a full day. The main focus of the tournament was Fane and Bradley, and it all depended on which of them could refine the pill faster. Master Forrest did not want to admit it, but Fane was very talented as well. He would probably be able to refine the pill in a day.

However, this was something they could not ignore. This time, they were competing in terms of speed.

Both sides thus began consoling their representative before the match started, most likely driven due to the pressure.

Elder Maurice patted Fane by the shoulder and whispered, "You don't have to feel any pressure; just do as you usually do. As long as you're in your usual form, you'll no doubt wow the crowd!"

Fane's performance had been far too great last time. Even Elder Maurice, who was usually quite modest, could not bear to be all that modest. With Fane's performance last time, Fane should be able to get a good result in the match.

Furthermore, Elder Maurice felt like Bradley was no match for Fane.

Mr. Zayne nodded and said, "You're our key participant this time. As long as you do well, we'll be able to win."

Despite their praises, Fane remained visibly passive. In fact, he felt somewhat... exasperated. There were some things he did not want to say, but Elder Maurice and Mr. Zayne were expecting too much of him, so he had to say something.

After a deep inhale, Fane commented, "Don't hope so highly. The key this time isn't on me or Bradley, but on Claude and Benedict. We'll both naturally be able to finish refining a pill, but it's not a done deal for the four of them.

"Claude and Benedict are at the same level as Conrad and Jameson. The key point will be who manages to refine a pill among them.

"Even if Bradley and I both manage to refine a Three Suns Pill in the shortest amount of them, it'd be completely pointless if the other four can't even succeed,"

Fane's words served as a reminder to Elder Maurice and Mr. Zayne. It was then did they realize that Fane was right. The key for the match was not on Fane and Bradley.

The two of them were exceptional and would no doubt be able to refine a pill in a day, but such a case was uncertain for the other four participants.

The tournament might look into everyone's results, but being able to, or even failing to, refine a pill depended on their skills individually.

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Internalizing that fact, Elder Maurice's expression scrunched as though he had swallowed a bitter pill.

At the same time, both Benedict and Claude had overheard Fane's words, and their expressions soured even more. The pressure had already gotten to them at that point, but with Fane's no-nonsense statement, the pressure felt even worse.

The worst situation would be if not a single one of the four of them managed to refine the pill after a whole day; that would be absolutely embarrassing.

Elder Maurice's lips twitched helplessly. "You two will have to work hard as well. I've seen the sixty ancient pill runes, and it's not too hard to draw them, in fact. As long as you manage to compose yourselves, you'll surely succeed!"

Elder Maurice looked at Claude and Benedict seriously as he spoke, but Claude had a twisted look on his face, not knowing what to say in response.

Master Forrest cleared his throat before saying, "Alright, time's up. The timer will start from now on. I've already had my people prepare the ingredients-they're right behind you. We've even prepared the best furnaces for you, so you can show us what you've got now!"

Master Forrest then waved at the entrance of the hall. All of them looked over and saw a group of burly men carrying specially made wooden planks. With a shout, they walked in at the same time.

Fane and the others were stunned, momentarily unable to guess what those planks were for. Master Forrest had probably been too emotional before and was not in the mood to explain at all.

Master Forrest ordered the men to place the planks in the right place. Astoundingly strong physically, the muscular men quickly brought in the planks and arranged them accordingly and made up a total of six small rooms.

Even though the tops were sealed off, there were six isolated spaces. There was no need for Master Forrest to explain anything at that point. All of them knew what the small spaces were for.

After all, refining pills was something that did not allow for any distractions.

Spectators would have no effect on the first stage's results. Even if they were distracted, they would be able to get good results if they composed themselves. However, refining pills was different, and everything would be in ruins if they made a mistake. They would not only waste time but their resources as well.

Even though the Three Suns Pill was a seventh-grade pill that was not all that valuable to any large forces, the materials needed to make them were provided bountifully. If they wasted the ingredients haphazardly, it would still be a large expense nonetheless.

Fane could not help but let out a small laugh as he looked up at Master Forrest and Elder Maurice. He could not help but lament that even powerful forces could not use resources recklessly.

The six individual spaces were not large, but there was enough space for them to do anything they needed to. Each entrance had its label.

Master Forrest furrowed his eyebrows as he pointed to those labels. "We'll go with your results from the first stage: Fane will be number one, Bradley will be number two, and so on. All of you know your results better than I do, so go on."

Master Forrest fell silent afterward; it was evident how bad his mood was. Everyone could remember how pleased Master Forrest had been during the first segment.

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Fane had the urge to burst out laughing at the decline he was seeing.

It was about time, and they could not delay for much longer, so Elder Maurice turned to look at Fane with a frown.

The moment Fane looked at Elder Maurice, he knew the elder had a lot to say. Fane pursed his lips helplessly, knowing that Elder Maurice was disconcerted. The tournament was incredibly important, after all.

If they won, they would not even need to compete in the third stage; they would win over Sky Peak Pavilion with two wins out of three possible ones. However, if they lost, there would be too many variables that would follow.

Elder Maurice's conflicted expression was awfully visible, and Mr. Zayne was no different. He, too, wished for the tournament to be a success.

After all, they would have to bear the wrath of Phoenix Valley's higher-ups if they lost, and no one would be able to come out of it unscathed. Mr. Zayne had planned on not saying anything to not give Fane too much pressure, but the pressure he felt was too much to bear.

Before Fane walked into the room prepared for him, Mr. Zayne suddenly walked forward and whispered, "You were right before. The key to this match isn't you, but..."

Fane frowned as he sighed helplessly. "Mr. Zayne, it's pointless for you to worry. Just wait for the results. I can only tell you that I'll do well, but I can't guarantee what'll happen with the others.

"It's a competition in the end, and the results won't all be totaled together but counted individually. The one I'm facing is Bradley. As long as I beat Bradley, I'd have done my part. As for everything else, that's out of my control."

It was as if Master Forrest had heard what the two of them were saying as he suddenly spoke, "All of you should have an understanding of how the results will be counted this time."

Fane frowned. Master Forrest had brushed past the topic earlier, not going into it in detail. Master Forrest let out a smile as he glanced at Fane, moving forward.

He slightly raised his chin as he said, "The six of you will be refining the Three Suns Pill together. The target is to successfully refine the pill, and the one with the shortest time taken will be ranked higher.

"If the six of you all manage to refine the Three Suns Pill, then all of your times will be added together and the side with the lowest total time will win.

"However, if not everyone succeeds in refining it, then the side who refines the most pills will win. Have I made it clear enough?

"Feel free to voice out any opinions you have. Of course, I'll just give it a listen. After all, both I and Elder Maurice set these criteria."

Fane sighed internally. Master Forrest was clearly aiming those words at Phoenix Valley. The rules were very much in Sky Peak Pavilion's favor.

Fane's skills were already plain for all to see, and as long as he performed like he usually would, he would be able to beat everyone there. However, this match was incredibly special.

Only if everyone managed to refine the Three Suns Pill in a day would the time be used as a metric.

However, if not everyone managed to refine the Three Suns Pill, then the side with the most pills would win. Even though they had not started, Fane was sure that there would be those who would fail.

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The Three Suns Pill might not be difficult for Fane, but it was different for the others. After all, there were 60 ancient pill runes among those that the Three Suns Pill needed.

Those ancient pill runes were distinct from modern ones. They would not only need to memorize them in a short amount of time but also successfully carve out those runes with a refinement of over 50 percent.

Anyone with a subpar talent would be stuck there. After all, they have never refined Three Suns Pills before. The first

refinement would take a while to get used to, but they unfortunately had a time limit to it.

All these setbacks made the competition all the more difficult.

Fane did know what Claude and Benedict's final results would be. After all, he was not sure what their level was at.

Even though he had already seen them completing the pill runes, no one would know if they would be able to successfully refine the pill based on the results of the first segment.

The second segment was a bigger test of one's talents.

Fane sighed helplessly. Bradley and himself would no doubt be able to refine the pill, of course, but even if he managed to beat Bradley, his efforts would go to waste if Claude or Benedict hindered them.

Fane shook his head in exasperation, and Mr. Zayne sighed heavily as well. He knew that Fane was right. Fane's job this time was to eliminate Bradley.

The true key of the match was the four others. If they failed on that front, they would lose the match, but Mr. Zayne did not have much hope for Claude and Benedict.

Even though they were somewhat talented, it did not mean that the talent would shine through at such a key moment. Mr. Zayne looked at Claude and Benedict, his entire being haunted with worry. He had a lot of things to say, but the words never made it out of his mouth.

After all, there was no point to saying anything else at that moment. Claude and Benedict were already incredibly nervous, and they both knew very well that they could determine the outcome of their match.

Fane sighed, not saying anything else as he entered the first space. Everything was already prepared inside, including a furnace about half as tall as him. Giving it a good once-over, Fane deduced that it was wellmade and probably cost a lot of money. Apart from that, the materials for the Three Suns Pill were right next to it. Just counting the Lorn Roots, there were eight of them.

Fane took a deep breath. Since the planks encased him, no one could see his expression. At that moment, Fane thoroughly relaxed.

The match might be an incredibly harsh test for anyone else, but it was not difficult for Fane at all.

He grabbed onto the plaque again as he sent his senses inside. The refinement process for the Three Suns Pill revealed itself. Fane already had that memory in his mind.

Even though the ancient warrior already stood at the peak of alchemy at the end of his life, even in a first-grade world, getting to the peak required him to start from the bare basics.

The Three Suns Pill was nothing to the ancient warrior, but he had nonetheless refined it before in his youth. All Fane needed to do was make use of that memory. He did not start off refining the pill right away but instead tried to carve the 60 ancient runes.

He needed to first master that before he started the refinement. It would make things much easier. To Fane, ancient runes did not exist because they were called ancient runes, simply because they were inherited from second or first-grade worlds.

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They were not common in third-grade worlds at all, so they would naturally be seen as pill runes from ancient times. To Fane, however, those runes were just like any other runes-there was nothing special about them.

His hands moved as faint golden pill runes were formed through his fingers. When he was carving the fortieth pill, Fane made a mistake after his body could not keep up with his memories, and the pill rune suddenly collapsed.

All of the pill runes in the air suddenly turned back into pill aura. Nonetheless, he remained expressionless as he raised his hand to continue drawing, after the pill auras merged back into his surroundings.

He did not need to remember the pill runes and only needed to focus on having his body keep up with his memories.

Compared to how calm Fane was, however, Bradley was no longer as composed as he was before.

In truth, Bradley was somewhat similar to Fane in some ways. The two of them never reacted too emotionally to any major events, always incredibly composed. At that moment, Bradley was not capable of keeping his cool.

After all, Fane's talents had overshadowed his, and everyone could see that. It was impossible for him to deny it. Fane singlehandedly trampled the pride nurtured after being put on a pedestal for so long.

However, Bradley had never been someone who wasted too much time on words. He wanted to use his skills to prove that Fane, while talented, would not always be better than him.

Even though it was his first time refining a Three Suns Pill, he had already used ancient runes before. He was much more familiar with ancient runes than any ordinary person, so he believed that he would take the least amount of time to refine the Three Suns Pill.

He had chosen the same method as Fane and did not start refining the pill at the very start. Instead, he decided to deal with the ancient runes first. He threw his senses into the plaque before he started to memorize those runes.

Even though there were only 60 ancient runes, time was nonetheless limited. He needed to assign the time for other matters as well and, at the same time, was worried that Fane would be faster than him.

At that moment, Bradley was incredibly anxious, and every participant was fully focused on the refinement process.

Meanwhile, the higher-ups in the hall were all trying to look into the spaces.

After a while, they finally composed themselves; only Master Forrest's face remained sour. The first loss had really dealt a blow to him.

Even though the second segment was advantageous to Sky Peak Pavilion, he could still not relax. So what if they won the second segment? They would still be at a tie with Phoenix Valley.

He did not want that. He wanted to squash them.

Elder Maurice, on the other hand, did not reveal too much emotion on his face. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

After a long time, Mr. Zayne whispered, "We have to make some plans, regardless if we win or lose."

Chapter 2672

Elder Maurice felt rather incredulous at Mr. Zayne's words and turned to look at him. "What do you mean? What plans?"

Mr. Zayne took a deep breath as Fane's face surfaced in his mind. "Elder Rick really went too far this time. It'd be great if we win, yes, but we may just lose, too. These two are possible entirely.

"We need to consider the consequences of those two results and prepare ourselves for them. From the start, the two of us were allowed the thought of defeat to destroy our rationality. We've never really thought about the problem.

"Now that all of them are fully focused on refining the Three Suns Pill, we have the perfect opportunity to think about what we should do after we get back."

Elder Maurice furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at Mr. Zayne. He never really had much of an impression of Mr. Zayne before this since the man had always been a private person.

After their interaction extended, Elder Maurice immediately felt like Mr. Zayne was not a simple-minded person. Even though the guy was just a deacon at that moment, he would be an elder eventually if his intelligence was anything to go by.

He was smart and level-headed when facing problems. He was always very logical when he spoke as well.

Elder Maurice sighed. "Elder Rick will no doubt be bitter. After we head back, we have to make sure to embellish the matter.

"You're right: we have to be prepared for the results, win or lose. Let's put winning aside for now. How will we deal with the higher-ups' anger if we lose?"

Mr. Zayne nodded before he said decisively, "If we're talking about responsibility, then Elder Rick has to take up eighty percent of the responsibility if we lose. The five of us will only need to take up twenty percent."

Elder Maurice raised an eyebrow at that, looking at Mr. Zayne approvingly. "You're very right about that, but there's a detrimental issue here. Elder Rick recommended Fane, who's the most talented person of the three. He was the one who helped us win the first part of the tournament.

"What do we say if we push eighty percent of the responsibility onto Elder Rick? In truth, him pushing Fane to participate was a good thing!"

Elder Maurice was right. Elder Rick might not have had good intentions initially, but the results were still good in the end. Fane did not disappoint them and had even helped them obtain victory.

However, if they ended up losing in the end, citing Fane as the problem would not be very convincing. Elder Rick might actually use it to turn things around.

Mr. Zayne raised an eyebrow as he said, confidently, "This problem is actually quite simple. We just need Fane to go along with it."

Elder Maurice's eyes brightened as various schemes popped up in his head, but he did not voice out his thoughts immediately.

Meanwhile...

Master Forrest looked on as Elder Maurice and Mr. Zayne whispered to each other. His heart boiled in anger, feeling like the two of them were deliberately putting on a show for him.

After all, he had mocked them quite a bit at the start, but since they had gotten a pass, they would naturally get back at him several times over. Master Forrest was no longer in the same position as before, which caused him to suffer a lot.

He loathed Fane, and his hatred ran deep. Had Fane not participated, no issues would have risen in the tournament. He had a trump card in Bradley and would not have needed to worry about the second possible result.

"Elder Maurice, are you not very confident right now? Didn't you say that you'd definitely win before? Didn't you say that Fane would beat Bradley?" said Master Forrest coldly.

Chapter 2673

Master Forrest was filled with too much hatred at that moment and, even when knowing his words were futile, spoke so spitefully. All of his hatred came from Fane at that moment, so he naturally hated Elder Maurice as well.

Elder Maurice chuckled coldly as he turned to look at Master Forrest with disdain. To him, Master Forrest was like a clown. He looked at Master Forrest and immediately noticed hatred clouding the man's eyes.

Elder Maurice let out a laugh. "And why wouldn't we be? After all, the results were clear for all to see. Weren't you praising Bradley to the heavens earlier? All that, yet Fane still bulldozed him in the end!"

Master Forrest grew furious at those words. He started to shudder as he glared at Elder Maurice and gritted his teeth. How he wanted so badly and gave him a good punch!

Elder Maurice looked at Master Forrest with contempt. The two of them did not continue speaking, since they were still higher-ups of their respective sides. If they continued bickering, it would look far too embarrassing, so they had to cease.

Time ticked away, and after four hours passed, a sound came from the first room. All of them looked over to see a hand slowly pushing the door open.

A familiar figure walked out from within with a box in hand. When they saw Fane, their eyes widened at the same time.

Elder Maurice looked over with some worry as he said, "Did something happen? You came out so quickly..."

Elder Maurice was more afraid than anyone else that something might have happened to Fane. Even if Fane would not be the key to the final result, Fane was still Elder Maurice's trump card.

Fane would be able to cancel out Bradley in the second segment, but if anything happened to Fane, then no one would be able to stop Bradley. Similarly, Mr. Zayne looked at Fane worriedly as well.

On the other hand, Master Forrest looked rather pleased as he gazed at Fane, truly hoping that something had happened to Fane.

When Fane walked out, he looked at

everyone calmly.

He let out a snort as he walked over to Master Forrest-who was the tournament's organizer, after all-and passed him the box in his hand.

Master Forrest frowned as he looked at Fane with a puzzled expression. Everyone else looked over curiously as well.

Fane smiled as he opened the box in front of everyone.

A dense medicinal smell immediately revealed itself. When they clearly saw what was inside, almost everyone was stunned. At that moment, not one of them cared about how they should act, their lower jaw hanging open as they looked like they had seen a ghost.

Master Forrest even forgot to breathe. His eyes were wide open, and Fane even wondered if his eyes would pop out with some force.

After a long while, Master Forrest pointed at the thing in the box and said, "What's this?"

Fane's lips twitched helplessly, feeling like Master Forrest had been dealt too big of a blow.

He smiled and answered, "Don't you recognize the Three Suns Pill?"

Of course Master Forrest knew the Three Suns Pill. Even if he closed his eyes, he would have been able to tell that it was the Three Suns Pill from the smell alone.

How? It did not even take that long! Had Fane really managed to refine the pill in just four hours?

Chapter 2674

At that pace, even Master Forrest had to be shocked. It was not like he had never met geniuses before, but it was the first time he had ever met someone like Fane.

The match was incredibly difficult this time. If Elder Maurice had not signed a secrecy contract before, he would have suspected that Elder Maurice had revealed the contents of the test to Fane beforehand.

Master Forrest took a deep breath as both his hands trembled slightly. "Four hours..."

Fane raised an eyebrow as he nodded. "That's right, four hours."

Master Forrest gulped, his breathing a little erratic. "You're far more capable than I thought. Are you from the inner valley?"

Fane shook his head, not bothering to explain himself. He did not care if Master Forrest believed him or not.

Fane looked at Master Forrest coldly and said, "What should you be doing as the organizer of this tournament right now?"

Those words caused Master Forrest's face to stiffen. He looked at Fane hatefully, but said nothing else. He took the box from Fane's hands, and put the successfully refined Three Suns Pill in his hand.

To Master Forrest, it was very easy to see if the Three Suns Pill was a success or otherwise. He kept on praying in his heart that Fane's Three Suns Pill had a defect, and that it was not at a 50-percent refinement.

Alas, after studying it, he was disappointed to find that Fane's Three Suns Pill was an incredible success and had even reached 60-percent refinement. Master Forrest had a sour look on his face and, after a long while, declared rather reluctantly, "There are no problems. This is a successful Three Suns Pill."

Despite his chagrin, there was nothing he could do at that moment. The results were clear for all to see, and he could not possibly do anything at that moment.

At the same time, Elder Maurice was rather emotional to even speak at that moment. He felt like he had found a piece of treasure. Even Mr. Zayne looked at Fane emotionally.

Even though they knew that Fane was not the key to the match, they still felt relief and a storm of emotions. After all, Fane was far too talented. Even if they lost this time, they should still win the last round if Fane performed as he always did.

Elder Maurice walked over to Fane and patted him by the shoulder. "Well done! Even I can't compare to your talents. When we go back, I'll immediately recommend you to enter the inner valley!"

Fane raised an eyebrow and nodded, not saying anything else.

Mr. Zayne, meanwhile, looked even further into the future. He was already trying to figure out how he would gain Fane's favor.

He already saw how bright Fane's future was, and as long as Fane could maintain his talent, Fane would be a key figure in Phoenix Valley, or even the master of the valley.

"Don't be too happy now. Even though Fane successfully refined the Three Suns Pill, don't forget that he might not be the one to shift the tides this round.

"The remaining four are the ones who will decide the round. If Claude and Benedict aren't successful, what use is there with Fane being this capable?"

Chapter 2675

All Master Forrest thought of at that moment was to rain on Phoenix Valley's parade; he did not want to see them being too pleased with themselves.

Elder Maurice coldly looked at Master Forrest after that.

As an elder, he could not just look at Master Forrest insulting Phoenix Valley and not do anything about it.

Elder Maurice chuckled. "How do you know if your Conrad and Jameson will be able to refine it? During the first segment, the two of them were weaker than Claude and Benedict.

"They only managed a thousand and fifty pill runes between them, while our side had a hundred more. Can't you see the relative strengths?"

Master Forrest almost lost his rationality in his anger. He no longer cared if continuing the argument would be good for him or not. All he wanted to do was vent his frustrations and suppress Phoenix Valley.

He narrowed his eyes and remarked, "Elder Maurice, surely you know that completing pill runes might be a proof of talent, but it has not much to do with being able to refine a Three Suns Pill."

Elder Maurice frowned. He was about to rebuke Master Forrest's words but was not given a chance as Master Forrest continued, "Elder Maurice, just think about it. What's the second portion? Sixty ancient pill runes. They've never seen those pill runes before at all. They're fighting to see who can memorize and carve out those runes the fastest.

"They also need to be able to adapt to the refinement process very quickly. After all, they only have a day! Even though Claude and Benedict both exceeded our representatives by a hundred pill runes, it still doesn't mean that you'll be better than us in the second segment!

"You might only have gotten a hundred more than us just because Claude and Benedict have studied more than Conrad and Jameson. They might have just put all their efforts into condensing pill runes normally!"

Elder Maurice felt like Master Forrest was just pushing it at that point. No matter the reason, Master Forrest just wanted to prove that Sky Peak Pavilion was better.

"Let's not entertain that notion," sneered Elder Maurice. "Fane's already refined a pill, while your side hasn't even completed one. Just like that, we're stronger than you!"

The two of them were arguing intensely, with neither of them giving in at all.

Fane frowned, feeling rather irked. If this continued, they would end up arguing for ours, and Fane would get incredibly

annoyed.

He hated people arguing around him, so he interrupted their fight as he interjected, "There's actually no point to the two of you saying all of this. Why don't we just wait for the final result?"

Thankfully, Fane's words silenced both Elder Maurice and Master Forrest. Regardless, even if they had stopped arguing, it was easy to tell from their expressions that neither of them were willing to give in.

After a few more hours, in the second room...

Bradley's eyes were bloodshot as veins surfaced on his eyeballs. Excitement racked his being, all because he was so close to success.

At that moment, the sides of his furnace were covered with dust, a reminder of his failures. Even though Bradley was talented, he had never refined at Three Suns Pill before.

There would always be unexpected problems when an alchemist started refining a new pill. It would lead to failures, but he was not disappointed by it at all. He continued to look for the problems and focused on the refinement.

At that moment, he was already at the last step to successfully completing the Three Suns Pill. He had already condensed three thousand 280 pill runes and was only 20 runes away from successfully refining the pill.

Chapter 2676

Despite Bradley's calm exterior, the sweat on his forehead revealed how anxious he was at that moment.

After all, this was a very important moment for him. As long as he completed the last 20 pill runes, he would be able to successfully refine the Three Suns Pill, and he would then pat his chest and guarantee that he was the fastest among the other participants.

Only those who had tried this before would know how arduous the test was. Even though Fane had talent, Fane could not have possibly been faster than him.

Bradley had a nervous look on his face as he condensed the pill runes. He could not help but mumble to himself, "If I hadn't had experience with ancient pill runes, I wouldn't have been able to condense and refine them in such a short time."

Since refining pill runes required using true energy, Bradley had expended most of this internal energy, and even his internal organs were starting to hurt.

He endured the pain, regardless; the only thing on his mind was condensing the pill as fast as possible. That way, he would be able to squash Fane with his prowess.

He remembered how Fane humiliated him before this, and he would surely return the favor. Even though Fane's results were higher than his in the first portion, he would use his results in the second stage to beat Fane!

The thought of winning back his pride and returning the shame Fane had caused him made Bradley smirk.

Meanwhile...

Fane was already losing his patience outside. The tournament was still on, and he could not do anything by himself. He had nothing else to do but stare into space silently.

It was not long until an idea occurred to him, and he abruptly turned to look at Master Forrest. "The materials were all meant for us anyway. Can I just continue refining a few pills?"

The moment he said that, everyone was stunned, and even a few of them looked at Fane speechlessly, feeling like what he said was rather moronic.

The competition was still on and everyone was working hard to refine the Three Suns Pill, yet that brat wanted to go inside and refine a few more pills. Fane was a stark contrast to everyone else!

The participants who were still in their respective plots would no doubt retch blood if they had heard Fane's words.

Master Forrest's lips twitched. He wanted nothing more than to scream profanities at Fane...but he knew this was no suitable time to do so. He did not want to let Fane do as he pleased, too.

Master Forrest wanted to reject Fane's request when the latter quickly interjected, "Surely you can't be that petty, are you, Master Forrest? After all, the materials are all already here. After I refine them, I'll give you one and keep the rest for myself."

Fane was obsessed with wanting to earn more spirit crystals, and he did not-would not care if Master Forrest hated his guts on it.

Master Forrest nearly shot up in anger upon hearing Fane's new remark. Fane had shut him down with those words before he could say anything, and if he disagreed, people would think he was a cheap person!

Fane had also said that he would give Sky Peak Pavilion one of the pills he refined, which was rather...gracious on his part.

Master Forrest would be a little petty if he refused, but if he agreed, his frustration would only be fueled even more. After all, Fane had floored Sky Peak Pavilion through and through, and it was good enough that they were not causing Fane trouble.

They just had to cater to Fane again.

Master Forrest's expression started to darken as his fury slowly rose from his chest. All of a sudden, Elder Maurice piped in, "Master Forrest, you're still the host. Are those materials really worth that much to Sky Peak Pavilion?"

"It's prepared for the tournament anyway, and you'll even be getting a free pill. Instead of just leaving them there, you might as well allow Fane to continue refining them. With Fane's standards, he won't waste the resources!"

Chapter 2677

Master Forrest's expression completely darkened at that point. Elder Maurice was basically in cahoots with Fane, putting him in a bind and forcing him to agree!

Master Forrest, though incredibly frustrated, relented with a nod. If he did not, Elder Maurice would no doubt spread the word about this, and he would gain a reputation for being petty. He could not allow his reputation to be ruined, and to add worry into the mix, the materials were not prepared with his own resources, too!

Master Forrest had to give his consent, though with a mere nod, after careful deliberation.

Fane smiled. He did not want to give up any chance to make any spirit crystals, and the Three Suns Pill could be sold for a good price.

Before, Fane had been refining sixth-grade pills. Even though the Three Suns Pill was a seventh-grade pill, the secrecy behind the recipe meant that it was much more expensive than regular seventh-grade pills.

After seeing Master Forrest nod, Fane wasted not a second longer, not wanting to give Master Forrest the chance to revoke his permission. He immediately re-entered the room and threw himself into refinement.

Master Forrest was left outside, gritting his teeth in anger.

After a moment, shuffles were heard from the second room before the door opened, revealing an exhausted but excited Bradley.

He walked out of the room emotionally. He was different from Fane in that he did not place the Three Suns Pill into a box to preserve the medicinal properties, but instead held it in his palm.

He had rushed out of the room impatiently and ran up to Master Forrest. When he saw that there were no other participants around other than himself, he was so exhilarated that he could not even speak.

It was just as he had expected; Fane was not as quick as him. He was the fastest out of all the participants. He could beat Fane with his talent!

He had won the second stage. He had defeated everyone and proved his capabilities!

Bradley's breathing grew erratic at these thoughts, and the excitement on his face was plain for all to see.

Master Forrest frowned slightly, feeling like Bradley was a bit too highly strung, but he did not get a chance to say anything about it before Bradley hastily placed the Three Suns Pill into Master Forrest's palm.

"Master Forrest, kindly inspect if the refinement was a success for me!"

With Bradley's abilities, there was no real need to test it. Nonetheless, it was still a tournament in the end. Even though he knew he refined it perfectly, he needed Master Forrest to determine the results.

Master Forrest furrowed his eyebrows and looked at the Three Suns Pill in his hand no real problems with it, of course. He nodded and said, "The refinement is a success. Fifty percent refinement, and there are no blemishes. It's a very standard Three Suns Pill."

Bradley let out a sigh, feeling his entire body relax. The pressure he had felt before suddenly had left him, and his inner peace returned.

He turned to look at Mr. Zayne and Elder Maurice. Sure, they were not Fane, but he was their subordinate, nonetheless.

Bradley said proudly, "Fane can surely refine a Three Suns Pill, given his talent. Alas, his talent in refining pills is still a step below.

"Even though he's better than me at completing pill runes, I've already said before that the results of the first stage don't mean he'll be stronger than me!"

Bradley grew haughty as he spoke, and he could not deny the thrill he felt in regaining the respect for himself once more.

He wanted to say this all over again when Fane finally stepped out of his confinement. He wanted Fane to know that he was more talented than he was!

Chapter 2678

Bradley had pride. After Fane had overpowered him before, he refused to admit defeat, even though he did not say too much about it. Even if Fane's results were better than his, Bradley believed that he was more talented than Fane.

The reason Fane's results were better than his was that Fane was just slightly more talented in condensing pill runes, but that was all. Fane would not be able to one-up him in any other situation.

His hypothesis had been proven right, and the pride in his heart soared once more, evident by how radiant he looked.

However, Bradley was surprised that Master Forrest did not praise him after all that he said.

Sure, they should not go overboard with the praises and congratulations, but Bradley felt like Master Forrest would have at least said something along the line. After all, Master Forrest regarded him so highly...but nothing came after he waited quietly for a moment.

Bradley could not help but frown as he looked up at Master Forrest, who looked back at him speechlessly with furrowed brows. Master Forrest's lips twitched, as if he had something to say but could not.

The conflicted expression on his face looked downright uncomfortable.

The curiosity in Bradley's heart rose even more when he saw how Master Forrest was acting.

At that moment, he suddenly heard a huff.

Bradley turned his head and saw Elder Maurice's lips curled into a smile as he started to laugh. When he saw Bradley's gaze, Elder Maurice realized that it was unbecoming of him and composed himself after a slight cough.

Still, he could not completely hide the smile on his face.

Mr. Zayne's eyes were averted as well. Looking closer, there was a dense sense of amusement in his eyes, which stunned Bradley. Why was everyone reacting that way?

Should they not have acknowledged his talents and offered a few words of praise? Even though they were on opposite sides and unlikely to praise him that much, they should not have been laughing either.

Something was wrong, and Bradley could feel it.

Elder Maurice, worried that it would turn into even more of a joke, reached out to grab Bradley's shoulder. "You weren't the

rst to come out; Fane's results were better than yours. He'd already refined the Three Suns Pill fourteen hours ago."

At those words, Bradley felt like he had been struck by lightning as his whole body stiffened, his eyelids blown wide open.

Master Forrest's heart wrenched when he noticed Bradley's reaction.

After all, Bradley was someone he had seen grow up. Others might not know about Bradley's pride, but after being with him for so many years, Master Forrest knew how Bradley was. He might not talk much normally, but it did not mean he was without pride.

In truth, Bradley was far more prideful than anyone there, and it was because of that pride that he could not accept a result like that.

Master Forrest took a deep breath before he consoled him, "There's always a mountain higher, always someone who's more talented. Back then, you were too sheltered in an environment. Meeting someone like Fane is good, in fact, to broaden your horizons.

"I don't think he's more talented than you.

As long as you have enough time, Fane's just a small blip in your road to maturing."

Even though he was not willing to, he had to acknowledge Fane's talent. Fane was the most talented person Master Forrest had ever met.

Fane had outstripped anyone he would consider a genius, and he had taken just four hours to complete the Three Suns Pill that all of them regarded as incredibly difficult. Compared to Fane, everyone else was far more inferior.

They were not even qualified to be spoken about in the same conversation as Fane. The difference in talent between them and Fane was like an insurmountable gulf, but he still could not admit that Fane was far better than Bradley.

Bradley suddenly coughed violently and slumped over as his breaths became uneven. His coughs seemed so startlingly terrible that it looked like he could cough out his lungs.

Even though Bradley was just at the early stage of the innate realm, he was already at the innate realm. His constitution was fundamentally different from that of a regular person. Without being injured, he would never get sick.

Since his coughing could not have been caused by sickness, then there was only one other possibility.

His emotions had run too wild, and it affected his whole body, causing him to cough violently.

Master Forrest looked at Bradley worriedly as he held Bradley's arm while he patted Bradley's back.

Bradley's breathing got worse as he coughed. It looked like he was incredibly ill at that moment. Elder Maurice and Mr. Zayne exchanged a look of surprise at that.

They never expected Bradley to be affected so much. Even though Fane's results were better than his, Bradley's results were not that bad either. If Fane was not there, he would have taken first place.

However, the moment Bradley found out that Fane had been 14 hours earlier than him, Bradley looked like he was about to die. The reaction startled them both.

Mr. Zayne whispered in exasperation, "This brat is a little too frail. Even though it's quite a blow, we're all warriors here. Unless a knife is held to our necks, nothing else matters! To be so emotional just because Fane was better than him..."

Master Forrest nodded at that. Bradley's actions caused them to look down on him with disdain. Even if it was a big, emotional blow, he did not have to end up in such a state. Master Forrest looked at Bradley with pity.

He knew how bad Bradley was feeling at that moment, thus he helped Bradley up while assuring him, "It's fine. It's fine, even if you lose. You don't have to think too much about it.

"It's just a small bump in your road to success. You'll be fine after it passes."

Bradley was caught in a coughing fit for a good while before he slowly recovered. At that moment, his face was as white as paper, his eyes already bloodshot. Without context, anyone would definitely assume that Bradley contracted some incurable illness.

Bradley's hands trembled as he was seized in his emotional state. At that moment, his mood had hit rock bottom as an untold amount of thoughts raged in his mind.

Master Forrest's words of consolation echoed in his head...but they failed to convince Bradley. The man had been too emotional earlier, and had not recovered that much.

It took a long time before he finally said, "You're right."

That was all he said, and nothing else.

Meanwhile...

Elder Maurice frowned at their insults at Fane. Initially, Elder Maurice did not want to disarray that brat's emotions even more, so he did not stop them.

However, the two of them kept on going, referring to Fane as 'a blip on the road' and 'a stepping stone'. How could Elder Maurice stand it?

Chapter 2680

Thus, Elder Maurice chuckled humorlessly as he looked at Bradley. "You can't beat him, so you say he's just a blip on the road. You seem to think that all you need to do is get over this, is that right? Can you use your head when you're saying all that?"

"Fane isn't just a blip on the road to you; he's a mountain that you'll never scale. There's such a huge gulf in your results, so how could you agree with Master Forrest?"

Master Forrest's face twisted in rage at Elder Maurice's words. It had not been easy for him to console Bradley, but Maurice just had to come out and ruin everything!

Master Forrest immediately knew what Elder Maurice was up to.

The second match was still underway, and the results were not certain yet. No one knew if a third round would have to be carried out. As long as there was a third round, Bradley would still be Sky Peak Pavilion's trump card.

If Bradley completely collapsed, then the results of the third round would be obvious.

Master Forrest would not let Elder Maurice get what he wanted. He squinted as he pulled Bradley behind him, sporting a snide smile. "Stop with your petty schemes. Don't assume that everyone here is an idiot. The results of the second round aren't out yet. We don't know who the victors will be.

"Even though Fane's talents are a little better than Bradley's right now, what of it? No one knows how they'll develop in the future.

"Fane might just be peaking right now and might not improve afterward. Bradley will surely be able to keep on improving and become a real grandmaster!"

Master Forrest was already struggling to keep his composure at that point. He knew his words were not very convincing and were no doubt a bit petty.

All thoughts of that flew out of the window, however, as anxiety slowly crept into Master Forrest's mind.

Sure enough, Elder Maurice got riled up. Master Forrest's words had crossed the line.

Just as he was about to shoot back at Master Forrest, a sound was heard from the first room again. A familiar figure opened the door and walked out confidently.

Fane furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at everyone somewhat unpleasantly.

He had been immersed in refining pills, but the noise outside had annoyed him. Even though the rooms had sound-canceling effects and he could not hear what they were talking about outside, it still affected Fane in the end.

Elder Maurice looked as Fane walked out and saw what Fane had in hand. He let out a pleased smile as he said, "Did we disturb you? We apologize. Master Forrest really doesn't know how to keep his cool and likes to talk so much nonsense. How many pills did you refine?"

Fane nodded at Elder Maurice before he raised his right hand, revealing three Three Suns Pills in his palm. Fane passed one over to Master Forrest.

"As per our prior agreement, no matter how many pills I've refined, I'll give the Sky Peak Pavilion one."

Master Forrest's expression soured as he looked at the Three Suns Pill in Fane's hand. Even though the Three Suns Pill was more expensive than a regular seventh grade pill, it meant nothing to him.

Looking at the Three Suns Pill in Fane's hand, all Master Forrest felt was shame, and it was as if he had just been slapped on the face a few times.

Unable to stomach the feeling, he pushed the Three Suns Pill back with a frown.

"We don't need your charity," remarked Master Forrest coldly. "Since we've already agreed to it, the pills are yours. We won't take a single one. The Three Suns Pill might be pricey, but it's only a number worth noting for you."

Chapter 2681

"This sum is nothing to the Sky Peak Pavilion. Won't we be laughed at if we accept your pill?" spoke Master Forrest, though stiffly and through gritted teeth.

He looked at Fane as if Fane was a mortal enemy.

Fane's lips twitched helplessly. Master Forrest was acting like a brainless shrew, he thought to himself. It seemed like he could do anything at that moment.

Fane was not someone who would force others. Since they did not want it, he kept it for himself. The spirit crystals he would gain would be his own, so Fane calmly placed the Three Suns Pills that he refined into a box before keeping it in Mustard Seed.

Only then did Fane look over at Bradley behind Master Forrest. Bradley's eyes were wide at that moment as he looked at Fane with a complicated expression.

There were many complicated emotions playing in his mind at that moment, and hatred was the most prominent one.

Fane did not feel like bothering to see what Bradley was thinking at that moment. After all, to him, Bradley did not amount to anything much other than having a bit of talent.

What Fane truly cared about were the geniuses in the inner valley. Even though Bradley was talented, he was nothing compared to them.

Ever since he knew more about the inner valley, Fane had been trying to figure out what level the alchemists there were already at. Regardless, Fane had a cheat in hand and did not think much of the alchemists in the Hestia Continent.

Granted, he needed a lot of time and effort to absorb his memories, so he might not

actually be at the level of the geniuses within the inner valley at that moment. After all, Phoenix Valley was the core of the Middle Province Alchemist Alliance.

The inner valley was the true trump card of Phoenix Valley, where the most talented alchemists of the Hestia Continent gathered.

All of a sudden

"I'll definitely beat you! Don't get so full of yourself!" roared Bradley fiercely.

It seemed like his lungs would lurch out of his abdomen with how he yelled.

Frowning, Fane was speechless, feeling like Bradley had joined Master Forrest, descending into madness. Fane had never really bothered with him at all.

In fact, he was just amused upon hearing that declaration.

"I've heard words like that countless times throughout the years, but no one has ever been able to actually do it," mused Pane, "Even if you destroy your throat with all that screeching, it won't be convincing at all. A loss is a loss."

Fane's simple words had destroyed Bradley's mental defenses. The latter suddenly widened his eyes as he lost his footing and fell on the floor.

Master Forrest hurriedly bent down and helped up Bradley, who, at that moment, looked pathetic and frail,

He looked like he would shatter with just a touch,

"Have you been too used to everything going your way? You're just going to crumble the minute something goes wrong and you can't take it?" commented Mr. Zayne incredulously.

Bradley merely looked down and said nothing.

Master Forrest looked up at Fane angrily,

"Don't think you can do anything with the talent you have. The third stage of the exam won't be testing your talent in alchemy. Even if you have the talent, you won't be able to use it at all!"

Based on the earlier agreement, Master Forrest should not have revealed the contents of the third stage so quickly.

However, Master Forrest was already too emotional and had lost his filter.

The third stage would not be testing alchemy, was it? That made Fane even more curious...

Fane narrowed his eyes as he started to speculate on what the third stage could be.

Chapter 2682

Meanwhile, Bradley fell into complete silence with his head hung low, seemingly to have been suppressed. Fane, on the other hand, glanced at him for a moment before he ignored Bradley entirely.

The two sides faced each other, and after over 15 minutes of silence, the tense atmosphere gradually subsided. Master Forrest was visibly worried over Bradley, fretting that Bradley might have melted under the pressure, and thus did not have the time to bother with Phoenix Valley's representatives. His full focus was on Bradley.

Elder Maurice looked at Fane, and the latter could practically feel the pair of eyes on him. "If you have anything you want to say, just go ahead," said Fane, mildly irked.

The agitated Elder Maurice let out a light cough and spoke, "I just can't seem to relax. Claude and Benedict aren't reliable. I'm worried that we'll lose."

Fane gave a light nod.

Elder Maurice's worry was warranted. After all, no one could tell what level Claude and Benedict were at. Almost 20 hours had passed, but no significant movement came from the four rooms. It was natural to be worried.

Mr. Zayne, on the other hand, was more composed. He took a deep breath. "I don't think you need to be too worried. Even though they're not that talented, what about the two from Sky Peak Pavilion? The four of them are more or less the same. I feel like all of them will fail. In the end, it'll be Fane against Bradley."

Fane nodded, feeling like Mr. Zayne's analysis was reasonable-the four of them were indeed more or less the same. The contest was incredibly difficult this time, and even Bradley needed 18 hours of hard work to complete a Three Suns Pill.

For the few of them to successfully refine it, a day was probably not enough.

Elder Maurice thought about it and nodded. "All we can do is pray that the four of them won't succeed. If we only compete with Fane's result, we'll definitely win."

The next period felt agonizing. After all, there was only roughly two hours until the end of the round. Representatives from both Phoenix Valley and Sky Peak Pavilion held their breaths with their eyes glued on the four doors.

Everyone tried to see what was happening inside, whether or not anyone managed to refine a Three Suns Pill.

Time passed as it should, no matter how anxious everyone was. After over two hours, Master Forrest announced darkly, "Time is up. Bring everyone out right now. They're to come out no matter the results."

The stewards standing guard immediately moved when they heard that. Four of them all went in front of the doors and calmly pushed them open, summoning the four that were still fighting inside.

When the four of them knew that the time was up, their expressions stiffened, with only Conrad not having much of a reaction.

"Time's up?" bleated Claude, sounding rather panicked. "So quickly?"

The steward nodded seriously, not wasting any time reasoning. After that, he turned. and motioned Claude out with his right hand.

Claude knew the time was already up and was forced to walk out in frustration.

When he came out, he looked at Elder Maurice, whose gaze was fixed on him. He gulped unconsciously, and Elder Maurice immediately had an idea of what had happened.

The footsteps could be heard as all of them walked out of their rooms. None of them had happy looks on their faces.

That actually had Elder Maurice and Mr. Zayne breathing sighs of relief. If they were all bad, then Phoenix Valley had won this round. After all, Fane only took four hours to complete the task.

Chapter 2683

Master Forrest had a bitter look on his face when he saw Elder Maurice relaxing. If none of the four of them managed to refine it, they would lose the second stage. Phoenix Valley would completely win this best out of three contest. If everything went that way, Sky Peak Pavilion was done for. He could even imagine how their people would deal with him once the news got out!

After all, he had promised and bragged so much. He practically guaranteed that they would win!

Claude and Benedict walked to Elder Maurice, visibly dejected and deflated. Elder Maurice let out a cold laugh. "It went just like I thought it would...but it's not too bad. The two of you are trash, but so are the other two."

The two of them lowered their heads and said nothing else. After a moment, Claude suddenly said, "Then...if all four of us failed to refine the pills, how will the result be determined?"

Mr. Zayne let out a snort as he said proudly, "Of course we'd win. Do you think Fane is as bad as the two of you? You didn't even manage to refine a single Three Suns Pill in twenty-four hours while Fane already refined it in four hours, and continued to refine a few more pills."

Those words completely stunned Benedict and Claude. The two of them suddenly raised their heads as they looked at Mr. Zayne in disbelief for a good while before their eyes trailed to Fane.

Fane looked the same as he usually did, still passive. No one could affect him.

Gazing at Fane, Claude hoarsely asked, "Is that true?"

Fane raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean by that? You don't believe it?"

Claude violently shook his head. Of course he would not dare question Fane, but Mr. Zayne's words came too much of a shock to him. Anyone who had gone through that round knew how hard it was.

The two of them had fought a great battle in that room; they had failed so much that they had gone numb. They were only surviving by sheer force of will. In such a nerve-wracking environment, it was easy to lose track of the time.

When the steward opened the door, the two of them felt like they were still detached from reality. A wave of disappointment washed over them. The only thing in their mind at that moment was of them lamenting why the round was so difficult.

For Fane, however, it came as a breeze. Claude was even starting to wonder if they were even part of the same contest. Otherwise, there would not be such a huge difference.

Elder Maurice stared at Claude, feeling like the two of them were like an eyesore. Still, it was good that they did not drag the team down despite their lack of results. They had easily won this round again.

Out of the blue, Master Forrest suddenly exclaimed, "We won!"

Everyone there basically heard his yelp.

Fane turned his head with a frown and saw that Master Forrest's defeated look had turned into one of happiness.

He had a pill in hand as he added, "Conrad successfully refined a Three Suns Pill. I checked it earlier, and there is a fifty percent refinement rate!"

Hearing such words, Elder Maurice immediately rushed over and snatched the Three Suns Pill from Master Forrest's hand, to which Master Forrest raised an eyebrow at the rudeness.

Master Forrest finally had the chance to say something.

He rubbed his chin as he said, "Why did you snatch the pill from me? Do you think I'm lying?"

Chapter 2684

Elder Maurice inspected Conrad's Three Suns Pill closely and noted the faint pill aura floating around it. It clearly looked like a pill had just been refined, and that was something that could not be faked.

He suddenly looked up at Conrad who, at that moment, sported a smile on his face, evidently pleased with himself. Mr. Zayne rushed over as well and also looked at the Three Suns Pill a few times.

Mr. Zayne might not be an alchemist, but he nonetheless knew the basics. Even he could tell that the pill was the real deal.

It really was just refined, and the handiwork was sloppy, only barely passing the mark. It was a far cry from the Three Suns Pill that Fane refined.

Fane walked over and only needed a glance to see that they had lost this round.

It seemed like a sure victory for Phoenix Valley, yet the tables were turned so abruptly. It was obvious that Elder Maurice could not really accept it. Even though they had won the first stage, no one knew if they would lose the third stage just like they did the second.

At that moment, Elder Maurice felt incredibly conflicted-it was like he had been thrown into cold water.

On the other hand, Master Forrest started to get excited. His initial hopelessness had been wiped away, and it was like he had found a new reason in life.

"Have you finished looking? Did we win the round?" spoke Master Forrest who was positively beaming. The moment he thought of the words Elder Maurice said to him earlier, Master Forrest felt like fighting back.

He coldly smiled and said, "Elder Maurice, you were too confident earlier. After all, this tournament tests everyone's results. You just have one exceptional alchemist. No matter how strong Fane is, he's still just an alchemist.

"Our side is different. We have one gem, but the others aren't weak either. Next time, you should think about your overall scores before you try to brag. You'd do well to avoid shouting so much, or you may have a bad time in the end."

Master Forrest would not have been so straight with his words had this happened before, but at this stage and round, he was already full of anger and frustration. With how the results suddenly turned, he naturally wanted to retaliate, to shove back all the negativity to his adversary.

Elder Maurice's face reddened in anger; gone was his relief as it was replaced with boiling-hot anger. He suddenly turned around and glared angrily at Master Forrest.

Elder Maurice had never been someone particularly emotional, yet ever since they got to Sky Peak Pavilion, everything that had happened there had strained his mind. The rapid rise and fall of his moods were something he could not handle.

Mr. Zayne, too, visibly glowered. If he had been important enough, he would have rebuked it.

Alas, he was merely a steward of Phoenix Valley.

He was nowhere near as high up as Elder Maurice, so there was no way he would be allowed to say anything of such nature.

Elder Maurice panted in anger, antagonized by Master Forrest's words.

Fane frowned as he reached out and grabbed Elder Maurice's arm. He shot him a look to calm him down.

Fane suddenly laughed as he looked at Master Forrest. "Aren't you bragging as well? Even though you have an exceptional student as well, the other two aren't that much different from our alchemists."

"It's not like I didn't see Conrad's results from before. He finished six hundred pill runes, and he's not even as good as Claude from our Phoenix Valley. I am a bit suspicious, admittedly.

"Since he didn't have good results before at condensing pill runes, how did he manage to remember and condense sixty pill runes in such a short amount of time?"

After hearing that, everyone looked up.

"Are you questioning the integrity of the tournament?" growled Master Forrest. "You think that Conrad cheated?"

Fane shook his head. "I'm not questioning anything. It's just that I feel that his results are a bit strange based on what we've seen."

Fane then looked at Conrad. Even though Conrad tried his best to compose himself, Fane could detect a trace of guilt in his eyes.

Conrad looked like someone had stabbed his back as he suddenly shouted, "Are you the only one who can refine a Three Suns Pill, and everyone that does is considered to have cheated?!"

Fane calmly shook his head at that accusing tone. "Of course I don't mean it that way. It's just that your results in the first stage were far too bad. If you had results like Bradley, I wouldn't have been suspicious at all.

"You managed to refine a Three Suns Pill now, but your results in the first stage weren't that great. Even though the results of the first stage do not directly affect the results of the second, they're still connected.

"The first stage tested whether or not you have talent in condensing pill runes. I'm not trying to insult you for the sake of insulting you. The four of you were at around the same standards.

"You were not even a match for Claude, so how did you suddenly improve so much in the second stage, exceeding everyone else and completing a Three Suns Pill?"

Fane's words sounded very logical, and his tone was very even. He was not targeting them out of malice or deliberately causing any trouble. He really did have his suspicions, which was why he asked those questions.

Master Forrest reached out and stood in front of Conrad. "You truly are eloquent, Fane, but aren't you just targeting us for the sake of doing that at this point? If someone from Phoenix Valley had completed a Three Suns Pill, you wouldn't be asking those questions."

"It's only because you lost that you're trying to cause all this trouble. Is everyone from Phoenix Valley just sore losers?"

"Who's a sore loser?" snapped Elder Maurice. "Is there something wrong with what Fane said? It's strange from the start! The four of them are more or less at the same level, and Claude had a better result than them in the first stage!"

"All of a sudden, in the second stage, he had no way of achieving a fifty percent refinement rate. Even forty percent was impossible for him. That was why he couldn't refine a Three Suns Pill.

"If the other three had a different reason for being unable to refine the pill, Fane wouldn't have asked this question!"

Master Forrest was no idiot. He knew that Fane's arguments were, in fact, quite reasonable. 1

This was precisely why he would not allow Fane to question things. He wanted to guarantee that Sky Peak Pavilion won the second stage.

Chapter 2686

Only then would they successfully proceed to the next stage. Master Forrest suddenly laughed out loud at those words and replied, "Stop trying to find excuses. The Three Suns Pill is right in front of you, and we won the second round fair and square. If you're not willing to admit defeat, then find a way to deny the results! You're crossing the line!"

Fane pursed his lips helplessly at those words. He could tell what Master Forrest was thinking. Master Forrest pinned them into trying to find trouble, and he would keep up with that accusation that they did not actually have a legitimate question.

That way, Master Forrest could guarantee the results of the second portion of the tournament. Fane looked over to Conrad again. At that moment, Conrad had his head held high and body straight as if he wanted to show everyone that he had won fair and square.

Fane shook his head helplessly, "Conrad really did refine a Three Suns Pill, but I suspect that he has seen the recipe before this.

"He has also practiced forming ancient pill runes. Otherwise, he would never be able to leave them in the dust in such a short time."

Fane spoke in an incredibly confident tone as if there was no room for doubt.

"I've never seen it before!" Conrad shouted. At that moment, his face was red like a cooked lobster.

His furious face looked like he would kill the next person who questioned him. It was obvious he was incredibly frustrated.

Everyone present was intelligent, and they could immediately tell that something was wrong. Master Forrest's mouth stiffened as he turned to look at Conrad, realizing that Fane could have guessed right.

However, he would not allow Fane's speculation to bear fruit. The moment Fane could prove that the first stage had not been fair, the second stage's results would not account for, and Phoenix Valley would win.

Master Forrest thought quickly and said, "Fane, I know what you're thinking right now. Are your two teammates dragging you down? If they are dragging you down and making you unhappy, you should be accusing them instead!

"What does it have to do with us? The loss was caused by those two. If any one of them managed to refine a Three Suns Pill, you would have won!"

Hearing those words, Fane could not help but look at Master Forrest in admiration. He could think on his feet and manage to change the point of focus swiftly.

He wanted everyone to feel like Fane's words were because of his good results being held back by his teammates. That was what caused Fane to be furious and looked for trouble.

Claude and Benedict had been quietly hidden at the back. The moment they heard Master Forrest's claim, their bodies shook.

The two of them were extremely afraid. If Conrad had not successfully refined a Three Suns Pill, they would not have technically dragged the results down. Yet, Conrad had successfully managed to refine the pill.

It meant that the two of them were the cause of their loss. If Master Forrest had not said those words earlier to distract Elder Maurice, the two of them would probably be in a difficult situation.

Chapter 2687

They would be scolded and severely punished when they got back. Fane let out a slight sigh as he glanced at Claude and Benedict behind him. They were both like obedient little dogs at that moment, no longer daring to say anything.

Fane turned around to face Master Forrest and said, "Don't try and shift the focus. The two of them might have dragged our overall results down, but I think it's a completely different matter to Conrad's problem. I refuse to believe that he's never seen the recipe for the Three Suns Pill before!"

Master Forrest narrowed his eyes and replied, "Conrad had never seen the recipe before, and I didn't reveal the contents of the examination to him either. If you don't believe me, you can ask Elder Maurice.

"When we were setting the rules for the tournament, both of us signed a contract. If I violated the contract, I'd immediately be rejected by heaven and earth, and my soul would be ripped apart!"

Fane nodded, " I don't think you leaked the questions to Conrad, but I refuse to believe he's never seen the recipe for the Three Suns Pill before. He must have drawn those sixty ancient pill runes before. As for whether or not he had succeeded before, I wouldn't know."

Due to the confrontation between the two parties, the atmosphere around them suddenly fell to a freezing point. They were actually stuck in a difficult predicament. Fane might be sure that Conrad had definitely gotten the recipe beforehand, but he did not have concrete proof.

Looking at Conrad, there was no way Conrad would tell the truth. Since that was the case, the simple deduction could not possibly overturn Conrad's results. After Elder Maurice realized that, he looked at Fane helplessly.

Even though he was not willing to recognize Conrad's results, there was no way anyone would take a step back in this situation. If they insist on this, it would just be a waste of time.

Elder Maurice sighed as he walked to Fane and whispered, "They won't admit to it. Let's forget about it..."

Fane nodded. In truth, before he even revealed his questions, he already knew that there was nothing he could do if he had no evidence. Yet, he still brought the issue up.

It was just to stop Master Forrest's rapidly increasing arrogance. Master Forrest would have constantly mocked the Phoenix Valley if he had not suddenly questioned them.

Fane raised an eyebrow as he said loudly, "Whether or not you've looked at the Three Suns Pill's recipe before, you should know yourself the best, Conrad. I don't have any proof right now, so I naturally can't overturn your results.

"However, don't think that your cheating will help Sky Peak Pavilion win this tournament. You might have won the second round, but there is still the third round."

Fane's words let Master Forrest breathe a sigh of relief. After all, he could already tell from Conrad's earlier reaction that Conrad was feeling guilty.

If Fane insisted on investigating the matter, the truth would be revealed. If that happened, Phoenix Valley would have won.

Since Fane decided to relent, Master Forrest seized the opportunity to stop things in their tracks, "Alright, since the result of the second round is acknowledged by everyone, let's stop wasting time and hurry into the third round!"

Fane let out a cold snort. Elder Maurice glanced at Master Forrest in disdain. Even though he had advised Fane to give up earlier, Elder Maurice was still feeling incredibly conflicted.

He knew what the third round was. He was afraid that they would end up losing in the third round like they did. If you end up with Sky Peak Pavilion winning two rounds out of three.

Chapter 2688

Then he would have no explanation when he got back and the punishments would definitely come their way. Thinking about that made Elder Maurice feel incredibly frustrated. Master Forrest led everyone to the back of the hall.

There was a hidden back door toward the side of the hall. When everyone arrived in front of the hall, Elder Maurice pointed at the door and said, "Behind this door is an isolated world that we made specifically for this tournament. A mature Phoenix is guarding the Green Phoenix Fruits within. Once the Green Phoenix Fruit ripens completely, it will collect the fruits.

"There are a total of six fruits within. Your task is to pick one of the Phoenix Fruits," The moment he said that, everyone froze.

Not a single one of the participants would have guessed the content for this third challenge. After all, they were alchemists that did not have much in terms of fighting ability.

A mature Phoenix was already at the spring solidifying realm. Spring solidifying realm beasts were like nightmares to alchemists. Asking them to retrieve the Green Phoenix Fruit from a phoenix was practically suicide.

Green Phoenix Fruits were absolute treasures for phoenixes to increase their power. Fighting over a Green Phoenix Fruit was equivalent to hurting a phoenix's child. The phoenix would immediately attack.

With their strength, there was no other possibility. The third round was practically a suicide mission. The five other participants were filled with confusion and distress other than Fane.

The first one to voice out a question was Benedict. His strength was only at the early stage of the innate level. In the eyes of a spring solidifying realm beast, he could not even be considered an ant.

He gulped as he said, "Phoenixes are already at the spring solidifying realm. Us stealing its Green Phoenix Fruit would practically be suicide isn't it?!"

Master Forrest looked down at Benedict in disdain before he said coldly, "There's no need to worry about your lives. Strong warriors are hiding inside. The moment you face a life-threatening situation, they'll immediately save you.

"This tournament isn't to test your strength. It's to test your composure in the face of danger, as well as your accumulation of knowledge. If you have both, you'll definitely succeed in getting the Green Phoenix Fruit. If you don't have both, then you'll never get it."

Master Forrest's words caused Benedict's eyes to redden. Elder Maurice immediately frowned and said, "Do you think we don't know you have no strength? As an alchemist, you don't just need talent in refining pills, you also need a mature mind.

"Only then would you be able to go far. Don't assume that being an alchemist means you're safe. An excellent alchemist doesn't just need success when it comes to refining pills, he also needs to be able to recognize valuable materials.

"The more valuable the materials are, the stronger the beasts that guard them will be. It's not reliable to just rely on warriors to pick the materials either. No matter how strong they are, they won't be able to recognize the materials as well as us!"

Hearing that, Fane immediately understood the reason for the third stage of the tournament. The first and second stages were to test the capabilities of the alchemist. The third stage was to test their adaptability.

They would naturally not be able to defeat a phoenix, so they needed to obtain the Green Phoenix Fruit. It would require them to use their minds.

Chapter 2689

Only an alchemist who fares well in every aspect would be able to walk further in the path of alchemy. It seemed like all three rounds in the tournament were going to be incredibly difficult. Fane could not help but glance at Elder Maurice and Master Forrest.

At that moment, Fane really approved of the tournament, but the others were not feeling the same. After Benedict was scolded, the others were naturally too afraid to voice their opinions again. They were forced to grumble their complaints.

Especially Claude, who regarded his body more than anything else. Fane who was standing next to Claude could hear everything Claude was mumbling.

Claude said unhappily, "There's no point testing that anyway. We won't go into the wild regularly. Even if you go to Grand Yorn Mountain, there will be many warriors next to us to guard us.

"Why do we have to do something as suicidal as fighting over a Green Phoenix Fruit with a phoenix. Even if there are guards, there's always a chance that we might get hurt..."

Fane looked at Claude speechlessly after hearing those words, but Claude had his head down guiltily. He was unwilling to voice his own opinion, nor was he going to calmly wait for the next round.

Of the six participants there, only Fane and Bradley seemed calm. Fane looked at Bradley and noticed that Bradley's strength was not that good, only at the early stage of the innate level.

His strength was nothing compared to Fane. On top of that, he had fully focused on alchemy, and never had a chance to learn any strong techniques.

Facing a spring solidifying realm beast, Bradley would be incredibly lucky if he lasted a few seconds, let alone stand a chance. However, he still managed to maintain a calm look as if he was very confident about the round.

Fane was even more curious about Bradley's reaction. Could Bradley already have figured out how to deal with the problem? Feeling Fane's gaze, Bradley suddenly turned to look at him.

Matching Fane's gaze, he suddenly let out a cold smile. Pride started to exude from his body again. He was showing Fane how confident he was, rendering Fane speechless.

Fane felt like Bradley was way too obsessed with defeating him!

Master Forrest had seen everything that happened. He suddenly laughed as he said meaningfully, "This tournament isn't just testing your skills in alchemy. I have to remind you that no matter how accomplished you were before this, you might not be able to achieve a good result here.

"This round will be testing your brain and adaptability. No matter how strong you were, you have to be careful..." Even though it sounded like Master Forrest was giving them a reminder, no one there was stupid. All of them could tell who those words were meant for.

He was trying to tell everyone that no matter how strong Fane had been before, he might not be able to get a good result this time. After all, what was being tested was not their talent as an alchemist.

Elder Maurice was furious but did not say anything else. If the tournament was still testing alchemic skills, Elder Maurice would have been incredibly confident. He would definitely be sure that Fane would give a perfect result.

However, this time, adaptability and knowledge were being tested. Even if Elder Maurice knew how to obtain victory, he did not say anything.

Chapter 2690

Thanks to the contract they signed, they would immediately receive backlash if they revealed the answer, so all he could do was silently cheer for Fane.

When nobody refuted Master Forrest's statement, he suddenly lost interest. He could not be bothered to continue speaking nonsense and announced the rules for the next round.

"All of you listen up. Once the round starts, all of you will go in one by one. No matter what you do, as long as you get the Green Phoenix Fruit, it'll be considered a success. Whichever side obtains the most Green Phoenix Fruits will win."

After announcing the rules, no one had a relaxed expression. Fane was no exception, but he was not worried about himself. After all, he was very confident in his own skills. He was worried that the results would end up like the second stage.

No matter how well he did, it was still useless. If two out of the three people from Sky Peak Pavilion obtain the Green Phoenix Fruit, then everything he did would be wasted.

Fane turned to look at Claude and Benedict. Their emotions were written on their faces. After all, they had already dragged the team down during the second stage. If it happened again in the third stage, there would not be any good consequences waiting for them. O

It would be fine if they were just punished, they could even be kicked out if the punishment was harsher. They might not be able to find anywhere else that would house them if they were kicked out of Phoenix Valley. The more they thought about it, the more worried they got. Their mood sank more and more as well.

Claude was so pale he seemed to have just fallen incredibly ill. At that moment, he was suffering inside, but there was nothing he could do.

The two of them had thought that Fane would be the one dragging them down. If the reason they lost was Fane, even if they would be punished, it would not be that harsh. However, the situation has completely reversed, and they were about to go crazy.

They were under far too much pressure. It was not just because they were worried they would drag the team down. The difficulty of the tournament had completely exceeded their expectations as well, which affected their mental state even more.

Elder Maurice looked at the two of them being so depressed and immediately felt a wave of hopelessness. He looked like he could faint at any moment. Elder Maurice had suddenly lost all his confidence.

In the end, he was not the one competing.

Even if he got so anxious to the point of fainting, it was completely pointless. Elder Maurice snorted and said, "What's the point of you feeling down? Do you still have the time to be worrying about your feelings? You'd better hurry up and think about how to get the Green Phoenix Fruit!"

Elder Maurice was really incredibly angry at that point. The two of them were far too absurd. When they encountered something difficult, they only knew to feel bad for themselves. They did not have any tolerance for it at all. Elder Maurice was starting to regret not using the inner valley.

After all, this tournament would not have been an issue at all if the inner valley was involved. Mr. Zayne was forced to shake his head and sigh at everything. Even with Fane leading the way, it seemed difficult for them to win.

After all, the last two rounds were not as simple as adding the score together. They focused on completion. Claude and Benedict had been performing far too badly.

Mr. Zayne could not help but lament, "We should actually be thankful that Elder Rick recommended Fane back then. Without Fane, we would have been even more humiliated. Our punishment would be far worse."

Elder Maurice sighed helplessly. Even if he was not willing to admit it, Elder Rick really did play a key part this time. Elder Rick's intentions might have been to punish Fane, but after Fane came, he saved the tournament for them.