

The Heavens 141

Chapter 141: The Cosmetic Cultivation Pill Appears Again

The pavilion was completely silent. Xu's death was quick and clean, which caused Lu Tao's eyes to narrow. Fear filled his heart as he looked at Meng Hao, who sat there looking quite dignified.

It wasn't just him. The well-dressed lady gave Meng Hao a penetrating look, and in her heart, she realized that this was not a person to provoke.

The middle-aged man with the flagon of alcohol stopped drinking for a moment; his eyes narrowed and filled with a sharp look. The disguised Cultivator of the late Foundation Establishment stage slowly lifted his head to look at Meng Hao. Hesitation seemed to blossom in his heart as he tried to analyze Meng Hao's Cultivation base.

As for the woman who was in disguise, she glanced at Meng Hao for a moment, and then looked away.

"If there are no further disturbances, then we can begin our secret meeting," said old man Qingshan slowly. He looked at Meng Hao with a friendly expression. "All of you made contact with the Secret Trade Alliance in the State of Clear Skies. If you do business here, I can serve as a witness. You can proceed without any reservations. If any problems occur, the Secret Trade Alliance will take responsibility. Now, I would like to invite all of the Fellow Daoists to begin business." He spoke in a tone you would use with people of the same generation. Actually, Meng Hao's actions just now had not just caused the others to be frightened. This old man was somewhat in awe of him too.

When he finished speaking, he flicked his sleeve, and a copper furnace inlaid with eight golden dragons flew out. It landed directly in the center of the pavilion.

"Fellow Daoists," said Lu Tao, clasping hands in salute to the others, "please allow me to go first this time." He waved his right hand and a jade slip appeared, which then flew into the copper furnace that old man Qingshan had just placed in the middle of them all.

"This is a list of all the items I'm willing to trade today. There's also a portrait inside. Fellow Daoists, if any of you see this person in the coming days, please send me a message with the

information. I will repay you with a chunk of stone from the Lightning Fringe Mountains.” He said nothing more.

After this, the well-dressed, beautiful lady gave a slight smile and produced a jade slip. Without a word, she sent it into the copper furnace. The items she required as well as could offer for trade were all listed in the jade slip. Anyone who was interested would contact her.

This secret meeting was really just a small-scale hosted trade session. After all, most of the participants were not locals, and needed to be prudent when dealing with strangers, especially in business. Thus, the Secret Trade Alliance came to be. They would organize similar meetings throughout the Southern Domain, all presided over by a third party who could bear witness.

Soon, it was Meng Hao’s turn. He thought for a moment. He actually wasn’t sure exactly what was going on, but he pulled out a jade nonetheless. After branding it with some Spiritual Sense he tossed it into the furnace. He had left a single message inside; what was the Black Sieve Sect up to, and how dangerous was their invitation?

It didn’t take long for the eight participants to place their jade slips into the furnace. Old man Qingshan lifted his right hand and flashed an incantation gesture toward the furnace. A droning sound arose, and within the furnace an intangible flame came into being. The jade slips inside began to melt, and as they did, the eight golden dragons on the surface of the copper furnace began to squirm as if they were alive. Mist poured out from them, instantly beginning to envelop everyone present.

Meng Hao’s heart flip-flopped. Although he didn’t resist, he maintained the utmost vigilance.

After the mist had completely covered him, everything grew quiet. Ahead of him, he caught sight of eight glowing globes of light; it was as if he had been separated into his own area away from everyone else. Information began to pour into his mind. There were lists of dozens of available medicinal pills, magical items, and miscellaneous goods, as well as various descriptions of items desired for purchase.

Soon, Meng Hao’s eyes began to glitter. Pulling back his Spiritual Sense, he touched one of the glowing lights. Instantly, the information from the jade slip he himself had just prepared appeared in his mind. Now he understood. After perusing the information from his own slip, his attention was drawn to the very last glowing ball.

Inside was a portrait. When he saw it, Meng Hao laughed coldly to himself.

The portrait in the jade slip was of himself. Furthermore, the desired item was a Thunderclap Leaf.

“So, in this so-called secret meeting, you can ask for anything you need. This method is pretty good. You can confidently ask or offer things that you normally couldn’t. If you strike a deal with someone, you won’t know who it was you were dealing with.

“It seems there are two others who, like myself, want information about the Black Sieve Sect.” He sat there cross-legged, waiting, sure that someone would contact him eventually. As he waited, he sent his Spiritual Sense out to examine some of the other glowing lights.

Suddenly, a white light appeared out of nowhere within the mist. Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed. He touched it, and a message appeared in his head.

“I don’t know very much about matters regarding the Black Sieve Sect, only a smattering. But what I do know is accurate. For my news, I require five hundred thousand spirit Stones.”

Meng Hao frowned. When buying information in a place like this, one had to consider whether or not the information was true. It would be hard to determine.

Just then, another white light appeared. Meng Hao took hold of it, and another message appeared in his mind.

“There are several rumors floating around regarding the Black Sieve Sect. I have some news from the Inner Sect. Whether or not it’s true, you’ll have to decide for yourself. If you want this news, you will need to pay seven hundred thousand Spirit Stones.”

“This is my first time doing business like this,” thought Meng Hao with a frown. “I don’t have any experience, and I’m not sure how to trade. Furthermore, regardless of whether the information is good, the price is very steep. I don’t have very many Spirit Stones at the moment.” Ignoring the messages, he continued to examine some of the other glowing lights. He found that many of the lights had been updated with more details, or had prices increased or reduced. Suddenly, the copper mirror within his bag of the Cosmos grew hot. A moment later, the heat disappeared.

Meng Hao gaped in shock. He pulled out the mirror and examined it closely. He couldn’t find anything all that different about it. Lost in thought, he placed it back. Then, he continued to examine the items for sale within the glowing lights.

Soon, his eyes began to shine as he gazed at one of the glowing lights. Of the multiple items inside, one stuck out to him.

“Classic of Time....” This item stuck out to him because within the glowing light, its name was somewhat dim. It hadn’t been there before, but rather, had seemingly just appeared. It seemed that if Meng Hao’s Spiritual Sense wasn’t currently higher than that of the mid Foundation Establishment Stage, then he wouldn’t be able to see it. It appeared to be cloaked by some mysterious technique, visible only to the Spiritual Sense of the late Foundation Establishment stage.

“The Classic of Time has a total of three volumes. Together, they describe Time refinement, which can in turn produce the magical Time Sword! I’m making the first volume available here. If you’re interested, please contact me.”

Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed. As he continued to examine the information, his eyes grew brighter. At the moment, there were quite a few requests floating about regarding Foundation Establishment Pills. He ignored them, as he was completely focused on the introduction to the Classic of Time.

“.... and Time is then produced. Lives are nothing.... The magic of this sword can produce varying results.... Three of these swords can produce powerful magic, nine, an even more consummate magic, and with eighteen, Time can be slain!

“Mystical trees can be used to forge the Time Sword. Because of their ancientness, such trees contain the vicissitudes of Time. They include the Spring and Autumn tree, the Missing Breath tree, and the best of them all, the Spiritualization tree. If none of these three are available, the mystical Thousand Times tree can also be used....” Meng Hao’s eyes flashed. He retracted his Spiritual Sense and took a deep breath, a thoughtful look in his eyes. He was very interested in this Time Sword, because he already happened to have a Spring and Autumn tree.

A moment later, Meng Hao lifted his hand toward the glowing light. Instantly, a white glow shot out and circled around his hand. He branded a message onto it, then sent it toward the glowing light. It disappeared.

It didn’t take much time for the white glow to fly back to him. As soon as he touched it, some text appeared in his mind.

“Since you could see the information about the Classic of Time, it’s clear you have the required Cultivation base. However, I only have one of the volumes. Acquiring the other two volumes will

require us to work together. There is one more person present who is willing to do so. If you wish to join us, then our chances will of course increase.

“If you plan participate in the Black Sieve Sect’s activity in this land, then you must swear a Dao oath not to reveal our information to anyone, including your Sect. Inscribe your Dao oath onto a jade slip and send it to me. With that, your share will be guaranteed.”

Meng Hao thought for a moment before his eyes shined with determination. He lifted up a jade slip and placed it between his eyebrows. After a moment, he sent it into the white light, whereupon the jade slip disappeared along with the light.

Some time passed, and Meng Hao’s eyes watched with shining eyes as several white glowing lights appeared. Scanning them with Spiritual Sense, he found the message he had been waiting for.

“One year ago, the Black Sieve Sect found a secret map. The map depicted a secret path to an ancient Blessed Land. The Black Sieve Sect has entered the place several times in the past year, but they have reached a standstill outside of a precipice. This precipice can only be entered by Foundation Establishment Cultivators.

“Those who enter must meet the demands of the Black Sieve Sect. The more objects they bring back from within, the more Sieve Earth Pills they will be given. Our meeting place is within this ancient savage land, where the shadows cast by the sun and the moon intersect.

“That is approximately ten days from now. You must quickly make your way to the Black Sieve Sect and join the group of rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivators they are gathering.”

Meng Hao frowned. As the white light disappeared, a look of deep thought appeared in his eyes.

“The information available nowadays in the State of Clear Skies is all over the place, so it’s impossible to say whether or not this information is true or false. However, most of it seems to involve some sort of ancient battleground or Blessed Land.

“It seems a lot of intelligent people have investigated and come to various similar conclusions. The State of Clear Skies belongs to the Black Sieve Sect. To say that the chaos within the nation doesn’t directly have to do with the Sect is ridiculous.

“However, that Sieve Earth Pill would definitely be of help to me...” Meng Hao had learned quite a bit about the Black Sieve Sect matter from this secret meeting. However, the more he learned, the more suspicious he became.

“I have to go,” he thought, having come to his decision. His Spiritual Sense swept over the rest of the glowing lights. He was just about to call it back when suddenly, his pupils constricted. Despite being sitting cross-legged, a strong spirit suddenly surged out of him. He stared fixedly at the same glowing light that contained the information about the Time Classic. A new item had just been listed for sale inside, a medicinal pill.

The name of the pill was “Cosmetic Cultivation Pill!”

Cosmetic Cultivation Pill. It was a common pill, and not very expensive. Among all the various pills, this was not one to catch anyone’s attention.

However, to Meng Hao, this pill contained memories from six or seven years ago. Memories of a beautiful scene underneath the moonlight.

“I never could have guessed that I would see a Cosmetic Cultivation Pill in this place,” said Meng Hao with a sigh. He paid the price for the pill, and soon a glowing white light carried it over to him. The pill landed in his hand, and when he saw it, his entire body shook with surprise.

Chapter 142: Black Sieve Sect

As Meng Hao’s body trembled within the mist, his eyes began to emit a powerful glow. Even his breathing grew rapid. His Cultivation base rotated rapidly, causing the mist to seethe.

Meng Hao didn’t notice any of that, though. He was staring intently at the Cosmetic Cultivation Pill and something that was etched onto its side: a mountain.

The mountain had obviously been etched by someone’s hand, not with magic. This was not a famous type of medicinal pill. It was ordinary. The etching was sentimental....

The mountain depicted was something that people outside of the Reliance Sect wouldn’t know about. It was the East Mountain of the Reliance Sect!

The shape of that mountain had been branded into Meng Hao's mind, and he recognized it immediately.

Who would possibly have placed this image of a mountain onto this Cosmetic Cultivation Pill, which would then show up in the State of Clear Skies...? A clear image suddenly appeared in Meng Hao's mind.

It was a beautiful, cold woman wearing white clothing. She had brought Meng Hao into the Cultivation World. Under the moon, she had glanced back at him.... Xu Qing.

Elder Sister Xu.

Meng Hao could not prove conclusively that this Cosmetic Cultivation Pill was the one he had given to Elder Sister Xu as a gift. But his intuition was telling him that it was.

He held up the pill in his hand, slowly closing his fist over it. He sat there quietly. Beneath the wide bamboo hat, a storm began to brew on his face.

"If she never used this pill, and even took it with her to the Black Sieve Sect, then... why is it here now? What has happened to her in the Black Sieve Sect? This is a picture of the East Mountain. Does she miss... the Reliance Sect, or does she miss a person...?"

"What does this picture of the East Mountain mean? Did she give this pill to someone? Or did she sell it? The person I was just interacting with could not have been her."

He loosened his grip and looked again at the etching on the side of the pill. His heart suddenly filled with a strong desire to see Elder Sister Xu. Deep inside, the answers to his questions existed already.

"Elder Sister Xu...." A sharp look glowed in his eyes and he took a deep breath. This pill told him that if she didn't sell or give away the pill, then the only other possibility was....

He felt a stab of pain in his heart, and his eyesight grew blurry. In his mind was the image of Elder Sister Xu from all those years ago. So long ago. He slowly put the Cosmetic Cultivation Pill into his bag of the Cosmos.

“The Black Sieve Sect.... And then there’s this Classic of Time....” Meng Hao slowly lifted his head, staring at the glowing lights in front of him. This was not a place where he could attack; it was impossible to tell what would happen if he did anything impulsive. He didn’t want to beat the grass and startle the snake, thus putting his enemy on guard.

He thought for a bit more, and then his eyes filled with determination. His mind was now made up; he would definitely go to the Black Sieve Sect.

Meng Hao was in no mood to participate in the rest of the secret meeting. He kept thinking about the image of Elder Sister Xu from all those years ago. When the meeting finally came to an end, he let out a light sigh. The mist around him dissipated. Old man Qingshan nodded to the group and waved his hand. Then he turned and left. Those who remained in the pavilion didn’t stick around to talk. One by one, they disappeared, randomly being teleported away. Such methods were making the Secret Trade Alliance more and more popular.

When Meng Hao reappeared, it was outside the gate of another mansion within the city.

This location was halfway across the city from the place where he’d followed Lu Tao to. Meng Hao had already ascertained that the palace he’d been in was not located within the city at all. The place he’d followed Lu Tao to was merely an entranceway.

He walked down the moonlit street, looking up into the sky. His long, lonely shadow stretched out on the ground, seemingly filled with bleakness.

The moon above was the same, but the location was different. It seemed like years had passed since the previous day. Looking back in time, it seemed as if he had no place to call home.

He sighed and walked onwards.

He continued to walk until the sun rose, and then walking until he left this city of Cultivators. Finally, his body transformed into a prismatic beam which shot through the State of Clear Skies toward the Black Sieve Sect!

Several days later.

The Black Sieve Sect was located in the east of the State of Clear Skies, in the middle of the Hundred Thousand Mountains. Its main gate was vast and mighty. Its majesty would strike awe into the heart of any Cultivator who looked upon it.

The Hundred Thousand Mountains surrounding it served as a foil to the ninety-nine mountains within their center. Above these ninety-nine mountains floated a massive mountain, upturned to create something that was almost a continent. On its underside, willows draped down, some a few dozen meters long, others hundreds. Clouds curled up around this massive land, giving it a truly celestial feeling.

Richly ornamented buildings, pagodas and temples covered it. Beneath it, the ninety-nine mountains were all connected with colorful arching bridges. It was unsurprisingly beautiful.

Gurgling water dripped off of the ragged rocks on the bottom of the floating mountain, making this Sect a place of indescribable beauty. The faint sound of bells filled the air, creating an incredibly serene air.

The highest peak of the floating mountain seemed to stretch up to the Heavens. It was there that for generations had existed an enormous incense burner. Three massive burning joss sticks stood up straight within the incense burner. They seemed inextinguishable, as if their fragrance would last throughout all eternity. Their smoke rose up into the sky to eventually be transformed by the wind into wisps like willow branches, and then dispersed.

These were the lands of the Black Sieve Sect.

In fact, if the Black Sieve Sect wanted to, it could claim the surrounding Hundred Thousand Mountains as part of the Sect. After all, it was one of the five great sects of the Southern Domain. Its Dao Reserves were profound, and its Sect techniques tens of thousands of years old.

The spiritual energy here was very thick. In fact, the spiritual energy in the surrounding Hundred Thousand Mountains was thicker by far than any of the Spirit mountains within the State of Zhao. Any single mountain here had spiritual energy thicker than the valley where Meng Hao had reached Foundation Establishment.

This was especially true within the Thousand Mountains; there existed spiritual energy so thick that even the mortals who lived in the region had increased longevity. From birth, they breathed in the spiritual energy, and didn't need to practice Cultivation to increase their lifespans.

Within the Hundred Mountains, it was even more astonishing.

A young man stood outside the Hundred Thousand Mountains. He wore a black robe, and his face was filled with a lofty and proud look. "The Hundred Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect," he said coolly, "is where only qualified members of the Inner Sect may practice Cultivation. In fact, the Thousand Mountains are far superior to many so-called Spirit mountains in the world."

Standing around him were five Cultivators, all of them gazing at the Black Sieve Sect. Each one wore different clothing, and had obviously come from different areas. One in their midst wore a scholar's robe. His skin was a bit dark, but he had a scholarly and refined disposition. It was none other than Meng Hao.

"The Ten Thousand Mountains are for guests. However, my advice to you, Fellow Daoists, is to not lightly tread into mountains other than the one assigned to you." The young man smiled as he looked at the five of them. "There are many fierce beasts sealed in the area. Furthermore, there are certain mountains which are reserved for special use, and are guarded by Inner Sect disciples. If you charge into one of those areas, you might not come out alive."

The young man smiled as his gaze passed over them.

"Fellow Daoists, you all responded to the call of the Black Sieve Sect. Now that you are here, you are guests of the Sect. You will stay within the Ten Thousand Mountains, one person to a mountain. Everything you need to practice Cultivation has been prepared for you. Upon entering your mountain, a disciple from the Black Sieve Sect Pill Mountain will deliver a Sieve Earth Pill to you.

"This pill is a welcoming gift. However, I, Zheng, must remind you, taking the pill, entering the mountain, and signing your fingerprint signifies that you are entering an agreement. If you renege on your promise, or secretly leave, then you will be punished by the Black Sieve Sect." With a smile, he cupped hands and bowed.

Nearby, five Black Sieve Outer Sect disciples waited to receive them.

"Seems fair," said one of the five Cultivators, an old man in a gray robe. The others voiced their agreement. Meng Hao said nothing as he gazed off into the endless mountains.

"Very well then. Fellow Daoists, you should not have very long to wait until we begin. Quite a few others have arrived already." The young man smiled and bowed again.

Within Meng Hao's group of five was a middle-aged man with a sallow face. "How many Fellow Daoists of the Foundation Establishment stage have come already?" he asked suddenly.

"Not counting you ladies and gentlemen, there are already ninety seven." The young man surnamed Zhen nodded, then turned, transforming into a beam of light that shot off into the distance.

"Fellow Daoists, please follow us. We will take you to your respective mountains." The group of five young disciples, who obviously were from the Outer Sect, cupped hands and saluted respectfully, then led the way.

The person leading Meng Hao was a young woman of about twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age. Her Cultivation base was at the seventh level of Qi Condensation. She was pretty, and had an intelligent air to her.

"Senior, please, follow me," she said softly. Although Meng Hao's skin was a bit dark, he was cultured and refined. He had the air of a scholar, which wasn't common among Cultivators. This caused the young woman to take more than a few glances at him.

What was especially alluring was his clear eyes, deep within which seemed to glint a bit of Demonic power. For a young, impressionable girl like her, being gazed at by Meng Hao made her blush.

"Senior..." she said, lowering her head.

"Lead on," he said with a slight smile. Seeing her reminded him of the Reliance Sect, and of Xu Qing. He looked off at the endless mountains of the Black Sieve Sect, and stubbornness glinted within his eyes.

The young girl led Meng Hao to a tall, emerald green mountain. On its top was a residence and a courtyard. Rattan vines wrapped around everything, and a limestone path wound its way around the mountain. The wind blew, causing the spiritual power to curl up and about. The entire scene would cause anyone's spirits to rise.

Upon reaching the courtyard, Meng Hao produced a pearl head-ornament from the bag of holding he'd acquired from the man named Xu, at the secret meeting. He gave it to the young girl, then sent

her off. She left, her face flushed, glancing back repeatedly at Meng Hao. Her heart seemed to be quite abuzz.

Soon, the sky began to darken. As night approached, everything was silent. The only thing that could be heard was the chirping of insects which drifted in from outside. Meng Hao sat cross-legged on the second floor of the building, meditating. Suddenly, his eyes opened.

It was at this moment that the silence outside was suddenly broken by a blood-curdling scream. It sounded like the struggles of someone in the throes of death. The silence was ripped to pieces as the screaming filled the air.

Chapter 143: Ghost in the Night

Meng Hao stood in front of the second-floor window. The moon hung in the sky. Off in the distance, he could see a mountain covered with rippling spells that looked like a fine gauze.

The miserable cry was coming from that mountain. At the moment, multiple figures could be seen flying up from various surrounding mountains to see what was happening.

Soon, several prismatic beams shot toward the mountain. Not long after, the ripples in the spells faded away, and everything returned to how it had been moments before. Everything was quiet.

Meng Hao frowned, and his eyes flashed. He remembered that mountain from which the scream had emanated was the same mountain that the sallow-faced man had gone to earlier that day. Having seen the figures emerge and fly toward the mountain, Meng Hao was about to go investigate, but then paused suddenly.

His face flickered as he looked down at his bag of the Cosmos. He slapped it, and the Demon Sealing Jade flew out, which he grabbed.

It shimmered, emanating a mysterious glow. A very strange feeling rose up in Meng Hao's heart. He couldn't put his finger on what it was, but it seemed as if there were some invisible Qi prickling at his heart.

Thoughtfully, he took out the jade piece left by the Eighth Demon Sealer and placed it in his palm.

The archaic voice of the Eighth Demon Sealer rang out in his mind. “Some spirits in the cycle of reincarnation avoid burial. Their Qi seems Demonic, and yet not. They are above living creatures, but infected with the tens of thousands of variations of the mortal world. The Qi is serene. Consumed by bones and spirit, they can lead the way to the path. If you encounter such Qi, you must seal it!”

Meng Hao thought for a moment, and eventually decided not to leave. He stood next to the window, casting his Spiritual Sense out toward the direction where the bloodcurdling scream had come from. The first thing he heard was quarreling voices.

“This is the sixth fellow Daoist to die. If the Black Sieve Sect doesn’t provide an explanation right now, then we will leave!”

“That’s right. We responded to your call for the sake of a Sieve Earth Pill. If people were dying in battle, then very well; but recently people have been dying miserable deaths in the middle of the night! Then you seal the area up and don’t allow anyone to investigate. It’s very strange! Of course we have questions!”

There were about ten Cultivators near the mountain, staring coldly at the Black Sieve Sect Cultivators who were preventing them from investigating the scene of the death.

In the distance, no small amount of Cultivators had flown out from their respective mountains and were watching from a distance. They said nothing, but all of them were exuding the power of their Cultivation bases. A great pressure rose up, transforming into a sort of voiceless revolt.

The Black Sieve Sect disciples’ faces all turned very unsightly. It was at this moment, however, that a gravely voice suddenly sounded out.

“The Sect will offer an explanation within three days.” As the voice rang out, an old man wearing a wide Daoist robe appeared. The pressure exuded by his body caused the surrounding Cultivators’ faces to change.

The Black Sieve Sect disciples all bowed.

“Greetings, Elder Chen.”

The old man strode forward. He stood below them at the foot of the mountain, and yet the Foundation Establishment Cultivators floating in the air above him were all silent. Many of them offered respectful bows. They obviously knew who this old man was.

Meng Hao stood at the window, his expression the same as ever. However, a slight frown slowly appeared. The old man was an Elder of the Black Sieve Sect, and his Cultivation base was not at the Foundation Establishment stage, but Core Formation.

His gaze swept over the gathering of people. When he spoke, his voice wasn't very loud, and yet it filled the minds of everyone in the area. "I very much appreciate that you all were able to come to the Black Sieve Sect. In regards to the killings that have occurred in the past days, I too am quite furious regarding this matter. Within three days, I will slay the killer with my own hand."

"With Elder Chen present, we are much more at ease. Thank you, senior, for administering justice." The Foundation Cultivators bowed one by one and then returned to their respective mountains. An Elder of the Black Sieve Sect had appeared; although he hadn't offered an explanation, how could they possibly continue to argue about the matter?

Soon, everything was quiet again. Elder Chen departed, as did most of the Black Sieve Sect disciples. The mountain from which the scream had sounded out was also quiet. No one was willing to make further attempts to go investigate.

Looking pensive, Meng Hao returned to sit cross-legged and meditate. Within his mind echoed the words of the Eighth Demon Sealer.

"There's something strange going on in the Black Sieve Sect...." Meng Hao's eyes opened, filled with an intense glow. The prickly Qi that he felt seemed to be growing thicker.

He lowered his head for a moment, thinking. Then he took out the Blood Immortal Legacy mask. Sending his Spiritual Sense inside, he saw the Li Clan Patriarch, enveloped by Meng Hao's blood mist. He seemed to be growing weaker lately. He no longer cried out like he had before; he didn't seem to have the strength.

"What do you know about the Black Sieve Sect?" Meng Hao asked through Spiritual Sense. He'd always found the old man's Blood Spirit identity to be somewhat strange. The feeling was even stronger when he thought of Li Daoyi.

“I know dog farts, you little son of a b*tch,” said the Li Clan Patriarch, his hoarse voice full of venom. “If you had any skill at all, you...”

Before he could finish speaking, Meng Hao calmly cut his finger and used a drop of blood to surround the old man in more blood mist. A miserable cry could be heard, and then Meng Hao retracted his Spiritual Sense. He asked no more questions, instead putting away the mask.

Meanwhile, underneath the Black Sieve Sect’s Ten Thousand Mountains, was an enormous network of limestone caves, like a giant labyrinth. Deep in its recesses was a tall platform adorned with burning torches. The dancing torchlight filled the place with flickering shadows.

Atop the platform, three old Cultivators sat cross-legged. Their bodies were withered, and as they sat there, they almost looked dead. A strong Death Qi swirled around them. And yet, their eyes were open, and gleamed with ancient, nether-worldly light.

Their figures seemed to twist and warp, as if they existed somewhere between the physical and the corporeal, and not completely within the world.

Situated in the middle of them was a hide. It appeared to be made from the skin of some wild beast. Its edges were tattered, and on its surface was some sort of map.

The hide map appeared to be slowly wriggling. Standing atop it was the phantom image of a man, who at the moment was letting out a soundless scream. It looked like the ghost of a middle-aged man, his face sallow. This was one of the five people who had arrived with Meng Hao.

His body started to get blurry, and soon disappeared. When it did, the edges of the hide slowly expanded a little, and the hide became a bit more glossy. It was a scene that anyone observing would find incredibly strange.

Some time passed, and then one of the old people spoke in a hoarse, scraping voice: “Under the moonlight tomorrow, it will consume another person. Then we can begin.”

“This time, we must succeed, no matter what. We must...! We must acquire that legendary item. Not just for us, but for the Patriarchs. Then we can all awaken. We will no longer have to conceal ourselves in this realm of darkness, this empty place with no land to step foot upon.”

“There still aren’t enough Foundation Establishment pups out there. We spread the news far and wide, but the Sects and Clans aren’t easily fooled. Hmph.”

“It can’t be helped. These Foundation Establishment pups are just a part of the whole. With everything else we’ve prepared, we will definitely succeed this time.” The sound of their voices slowly faded away. Soon the only movement was that of the wriggling hide, placed in between them like some sort of object of worship.

The night passed uneventfully, and soon dawn broke. Meng Hao opened his eyes from meditation. Outside his residence, he saw a beam of multicolored light approaching. It turned into a woman wearing a black gown. She was tall and slender, with fair skin and beautiful hair that draped over her shoulders. She slowed as she approached, coming to a stop outside Meng Hao’s residence.

“Disciple Han Bei [1. Han Bei’s name in Chinese is 韩贝 hán bèi - Han is a common surname. Bei means “shell”] of Black Sieve Sect Pill Mountain has been dispatched to deliver you a Sieve Earth Pill,” she said. “Fellow Daoist, can you please come out?” She had an intelligent voice and a smile as beautiful as a flower in bloom. Her presence seemed to make everything brighter. Her eyes were alluring, her smile white and lovely. She wore a long, emerald-green gown, trimmed with violet embroidery. Overall, she had an otherworldly look.

Meng Hao emerged, and they sat at a table.

She looked at Meng Hao, her smile unchanging. As she did, her eyes seemed to grow brighter, although whether this was done consciously or subconsciously was impossible to tell.

“Fellow Daoist, may I ask your honored name?” she asked with a slight smile. Her voice was as pleasant as the call of a lark. Listening to it could be described as a pleasure.

“Meng Hao,” he replied coolly, making no attempt to conceal his identity. Looking at the woman in front of her, he could tell that her Cultivation base was extraordinary. It seemed to be at the early Foundation Establishment stage.

“Meng...” Han Bei looked at him in shock for a moment. She studied his face and then laughed. “So, you are Fellow Daoist Meng. This here is a contract. Would you please mark it with your thumbprint? Then I can give you your Sieve Earth Pill. Afterward, if you follow all the requirements laid out by the Sect, then you will get a second.” She lifted her delicate hand. Around her wrist was an emerald green bracelet. A glow flashed off of it, and within her hands appeared a paper scroll. She handed it to Meng Hao.

His expression the same as ever, he looked at her bracelet for a long moment, then accepted the scroll. He looked it over, then lifted his right thumb and left a mark on the paper.

Han Bei gazed at him the entire time. After he placed his thumbprint on the paper, she produced a jade box the size of a hand and placed it off to the side.

“Here is your Sieve Earth Pill. Please note, the pill cannot be consumed during the daytime. After all, its full name is Moon Sieve Mother Earth Pill. When you consume it, it will drink in the moonlight.” She smiled, then rose to her feet to take her leave.

Before she could depart, Meng Hao suddenly said, “Have we met before?”

His words caused her to stare at him in shock.

“I don’t recall ever seeing you before, Fellow Daoist Meng.”

“My mistake,” he said. “I took you for someone else.” He frowned as if he were thinking deeply. Han Bei laughed. With a final nod, she transformed into a beam of light and departed. As she left, her smile turned into a thoughtful look.

Meng Hao picked up the jade box containing the Sieve Earth Pill. After heading back into his residence, he opened it. Inside was a medicinal pill about the size of an infant’s hand. It was white, and wrapped in a wax seal. Despite that, a thick medicinal aroma wafted off of it, as well as rippling spiritual energy.

“Actually, one of these pills is enough for me. But, I can’t casually consume it. I need to test it out to see if it’s real or fake.” He put the jade box away, then closed his eyes and continued to meditate.

Time slipped by, and soon it was late at night. The moon hung brightly in the sky, and everything was quiet. Outside of Meng Hao’s mountain, however, a shadowy figure appeared noiselessly. It was very strange in appearance, like a rippling piece of hide. A closer look revealed that the person’s features were none other than the sallow-faced middle-aged man who had passed away.

His eyes shone. He looked around at the surrounding mountains, then selected Meng Hao’s. His body flashed, and he floated up toward Meng Hao’s residence.

As he approached the residence at the top of the mountain, Meng Hao, who was sitting cross-legged meditating, suddenly lifted his head. His eyes glittered brightly.

Chapter 144: A Figure in the Crowd

Meng Hao gave a cold snort. His right hand slapped the bag of the Cosmos, and the two wooden swords appeared soundlessly. Next, a talisman dropped into his hand, and his body became invisible.

It was then that the figure of the sallow-faced man floated to the mountain top. All the vegetation he passed on his way withered up, as if the life had been sucked out of it. The limestone path turned into ash, and it seemed as if the entire mountain was encircled with a dense Death Qi.

However, no one outside of this particular mountain had any clue that this was happening.

The figure floated up to the outside of Meng Hao's residence. Not pausing for a moment, it passed directly through the wall into the second floor.

He floated there underneath the moonlight, his listless eyes flickering. A strange demonic air emanated from him. Everything around was quiet as the sallow-face man looked around the second floor with his menacing eyes.

Meng Hao hadn't moved even a centimeter. He sat cross-legged, invisible, looking at the figure in front of him. Naturally, he instantly recognized him. However, his appearance was very strange, as if something were wrong with him. Meng Hao thought back to the bloodcurdling scream from the mountain the previous night. That was where the sallow-faced man had been.

He already half-understood what was going on.

"This person is dead, and has been turned into an automaton. Or perhaps someone used some Spirit Puppet arts on him to control him...." Suddenly, his body flashed as he moved to the side about three meters.

There was a boom as the furniture near where he had been sitting all transformed into ash. The sallow-faced man, his eyes shining with a strange glow, charged toward Meng Hao, as if he could see him.

Meng Hao's eyes flashed. Ripping up the invisibility talisman, he lifted his right hand and flashed an incantation gesture. The two wooden swords flew directly toward the figure in front of him. The figure didn't even attempt to dodge. Both wooden swords flew directly through, leaving two holes, from which no blood flowed. It was as if the sallow-faced man was made of only skin, with nothing else inside.

If there were nothing more to it than that, it wouldn't be a big deal. But then, the holes that had been punched in his body began to merge together. They transformed into a large mouth, which suddenly ripped off of the sallow-faced man's body and shot toward Meng Hao, ready to consume him.

Meng Hao's facial expression didn't change. He retreated backward, his hand flashing an incantation gesture. Then he waved forward, and a Flame Dragon roared into being, rushing toward the figure. As it neared, the figure didn't attempt to dodge, but instead charged forward and consumed the flame dragon.

It turned its head to look at Meng Hao, its lips twisted into a hideous grin. Then it threw itself toward him.

Meng Hao frowned, both hands flashing incantation gestures as they pushed forward into mid-air. A multitude of flying swords appeared. Instantly, they shattered into pieces, turning into a cloud of shrapnel which shot forward with incredible force. Like a tornado, it sped toward the sallow-faced man. At the same time, the two wooden swords circled back toward the figure, radiating sharpness. They stabbed directly toward it's head.

They were followed by the black net, which Meng Hao had just tossed out.

Popping sounds rang out as the flying sword shrapnel ripped the figure almost completely in half and the wooden swords stabbed into its head. But the figure... despite being horrifically injured, still looked at Meng Hao with the half face it had left, and smiled. It tried to rush toward him again, but was enveloped by the black net. Its body writhed as it attempted to squeeze through the gaps in the net.

Its body appeared to be emitting some kind of gravitational force, which caused the second floor to shake as if it were about to be sucked into the figure.

"Can't kill it... because it's not really alive. No wonder it's killed so many Foundation Establishment Cultivators." With a frown, Meng Hao watched the figure trying to lurch toward him,

its eyes filled with fierce coldness. Meng Hao lifted his right hand and flashed an incantation sign, then pointed down to the ground.

“Demon Sealing... Eighth Hex, Body Sealing!” He lifted his hand up from the ground and pointed at the broken figure in front of him.

The entire building, the entire mountain shook. Although, they weren't actually shaking. It was only an illusion. Meng Hao's body and his finger were what was really shaking. In Meng Hao's eyes, the entire world seemed to congeal together. Then, multiple ghost images of the world appeared, one on top of another.

The building and the mountain were there in the illusion, and as for the figure, a ghost image appeared of it as well!

For the first time, a look of surprise and disbelief appeared on the figure's face. It seemed as if its mouth were shaping to cry out, but before it could, the ghost images of the world fell upon it, binding it up. It couldn't move at all.

At this moment, Meng Hao stepped forward and lifted his right hand. Using his thumb, he cut his middle finger. Blood flowed out, turning it into a Blood Finger.

This was one of the arts that had been branded onto his mind by the Blood Immortal Legacy, one of the three magical abilities that did not require the use of the mask.

However, these arts required a very powerful Cultivation base. After practicing a bit secretly, Meng Hao had been able to utilize the Blood Finger. However, as far as the Blood Palm and Blood Death World, he was still not able to use them.

In any case, this was the first time in tens of thousands of years that the Blood Finger had appeared in the Southern Domain. It was inherently powerful. When you consider that in the Blood Immortal Legacy spell matrix Meng Hao had already mastered the ability to focus the power of his Cultivation base, then this finger attack, combined with the three Perfect Dao Pillars of his Perfect Foundation, would shock even the Dao Children of various Sects.

Meng Hao strode forward and pressed the middle finger of his right hand between the eyebrows of the strange figure, then scraped it downward. A shrill scream sounded out as the figure's body began to tremble. A massive bloody cut appeared starting between its eyebrows and stretching down about

thirty centimeters. Vast quantities of gray-colored Qi poured out. Suddenly, its body could move again, and it retreated at top speed, shooting out of the second floor.

Without hesitating, Meng Hao followed in pursuit, his eyes flashing. Everything was quiet, which was odd, so Meng Hao stopped. After thinking for a moment, he returned to his residence and then slapped his bag of holding. He took out the good luck charm and cast some Spiritual Sense into it, then breathed a sigh of relief when he found what he was looking for. It was still operational. He chose not to teleport away, but instead looked coldly out of the building. There was no wind or rustle of leaves, no sign of trouble or disturbance. If there were, he could leave in an instant.

Time passed, and suddenly a bloodcurdling scream rose up from from one of the surrounding mountains. Then a second, and a third. In the end, there were a total of five!

Three of them were actually Black Sieve Sect disciples who were in the region but hadn't hidden themselves. They screamed as their bodies withered up, their flesh and blood sucked away until their lifeless skin flopped onto the ground.

This night would not pass peacefully. Many of the Foundation Establishment Cultivators were on guard, and even many of the Black Sieve Sect disciples were dispatched out. It wasn't until dawn broke that things seemed to calm down.

Many people saw that it was a broken-down figure who cruelly slaughtered the Black Sieve Sect disciples, and the two Foundation Establishment Cultivators. Eventually, the figure was put down by a Black Sieve Sect Elder. To most of the Cultivators, this counted as the explanation they had been waiting for.

In the following few days, there were no more mysterious deaths among the Foundation Establishment Cultivators. Gradually, people stopped talking about the event.

Time flashed by, and soon six days had passed since Meng Hao had arrived at the Black Sieve Sect. As the days passed, Meng Hao maintained his vigilance. However, no one bothered him during that time. On the dawn of the seventh day, the clear sound of bells rang out, filling the region of the Ten Thousand Mountains and reaching the ears of all the Foundation Establishment Cultivators.

"Fellow Daoists of the Southern Domain," a voice echoed out. "You have already received your Sieve Earth Pills. The time has come to perform your services. If you can help the Black Sieve Sect to acquire the object we seek, then you will be rewarded with more Sieve Earth Pills!" Beam after beam of multicolored light shot up from the various mountains as the Foundation Establishment

Cultivators flew into the sky. Meng Hao followed suit, flying up and floating in mid-air, looking around coldly.

From the Black Sieve Sect Thousand Mountains, dozens of beams of prismatic light whistled up into the air. In addition, there were multiple black-colored Feng Shui compasses, each one around thirty meters in diameter.

Upon each Feng Shui compass stood only one person. Three or four wore Daoist robes of the Black Sieve Sect and were at the Qi Condensation stage. The others were all of the Foundation Establishment stage.

The Qi Condensation disciples all had embarrassed, nervous expressions on their faces, as if they didn't want to be here. However, they could not defy the orders of the Sect. These were all Outer Sect disciples who had ordinary latent talent. Disciples with better latent talent would not have been dispatched out.

Shortly afterward, ten violet colored Feng Shui compasses, three hundred meters in diameter, flew out from the Hundred Mountains region of the Black Sieve Sect. Upon each of these compasses sat a cross-legged Cultivator. One of them was the girl named Han Bei. As far as the nine other violet-robed Cultivators who sat cross-legged on the compasses, there were both men and women. All of them seemed in high spirits. These were obviously Chosen from the Sect.

They flew forth and then hovered in the air. Further off in the distance, three golden-colored, three-thousand meter wide Feng Shui compasses appeared. They flew forward.

On each of these compasses sat a person. Two were men and one was a woman. One was Elder Chen, and the other two appeared to be middle-aged, with cold expressions. The power of Core Formation rippled out from them, attracting everyone's attention.

After the golden Feng Shui compasses, another, smaller one appeared. It was only about three hundred meters in diameter, and violet colored. Sitting cross-legged on this Feng Shui compass was an old man in a violet robe.

He had a black birthmark on his face which somewhat spoiled his transcendent demeanor. He looked fierce, and the instant he appeared, it seemed as if everything suddenly grew dark.

However, what caught Meng Hao's attention wasn't the old man. Behind him was a massive Feng Shui compass with hundreds of Cultivators. Amidst them was a lonely looking woman.

The instant he caught sight of her, Meng Hao thought of that day years ago, under the moonlight. In his mind, he could see her looking back at him, and could even hear the words she had spoken.

“I went to the Pill Cultivation Workshop. The Cosmetic Cultivation Pill you gave me before wasn’t purchased by you.”

Elder Sister Xu.

Chapter 145: An Ancient Mountain Path

“Patriarch Violet Sieve!”

“I never imagined that the person leading us would be the Black Sieve Sect’s Nascent Soul eccentric Patriarch Violet Sieve. They say his killing aura is incredible! Years ago when he was forming his Nascent Soul, his name rocked the Southern Domain. Once he wiped out three Sects in an single night!”

“According to the rumors, the Black Sieve Sect has already entered that danger zone five times. Each time they leave behind people to stay on guard. Today is the sixth time. Even still, look at how many people they’ve mustered! This Sect is so powerful! No wonder they’re one of the five great Sects of the Southern Domain.”

Meng Hao heard the talk around him and also felt the pressure exuded by the violet-robed old man. But his vision was focused further back, on the enormous, nine thousand meter wide yellow Feng Shui compass which was flying in his direction. Standing atop it, amidst hundreds of Cultivators, was a woman.

She wore a long, black gown, and her face was pale white, almost bloodless. This made her already chilly disposition even icier. However... looking at her, Meng Hao got the sense that in truth, she was actually just covering up her fragile heart.

“Elder Sister Xu...” he murmured as he looked at her. Finally he could rest a bit at ease. Now, they weren’t so very far away from each other. And yet, despite being so close to each other, they were still worlds apart....

It was at this point that Meng Hao frowned. He noticed that standing next to Elder Sister Xu was a pretty woman with a coquettish air and a sneer in her eyes. It seemed as if she were criticizing Elder Sister Xu, who then lowered her head as if she didn't dare to speak. Her face grew even paler.

A cold glow appeared in Meng Hao's eyes.

Along with Elder Sister Xu, there were several hundred disciples on top of the massive Feng Shui compass. Their Cultivation bases were varied, but it was obvious that they were ordinary disciples, not Chosen of the Sect.

Also on the Feng Shui compass was a gigantic pitch-black statue of a bare-chested man with wings growing out of his back. The wings were half spread open, giving the statue a very peculiar look.

Even more strange was that a very tall hat was perched atop the statue's head, which seemed very out of place.

If that were all there was to it, it wouldn't be a big deal. But upon further inspection with his extraordinary Spiritual Sense, Meng Hao noticed that the statue was not entirely lifeless: it was breathing!

With every breath, it sucked in a bit of Qi from the hundreds of Black Sieve Sect disciples who stood around it.

Meng Hao's eyes narrowed. Many of the disciples on the Feng Shui compass looked in very high spirits; they obviously had no idea what the statue was doing.

On the ten-sided violet Feng Shui compass was a refined and elegant young man. He stood up with a smile and spoke to the group of rogue Cultivators, including Meng Hao. "Fellow Daoists, I presume many of you know me. I am Xie Jie [1. Xie Jie's name in Chinese is 谢杰 xiè jié - Xie is a surname, and also the word for "thanks." Jie means "outstanding" or "heroic"] of the Black Sieve Sect."

Meng Hao recognized the voice as the one who had spoken moments before.

"I think quite a few Fellow Daoists have some speculations regarding our trip today," he said with a smile. "I will explain further once we are on our way! Please, follow me!" The violet Feng Shui

compass upon which he stood suddenly expanded in size until it was three thousand meters wide, and then flew toward them.

Meng Hao and the other rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivators all seemed to be thinking different things. However, one by one, they began to fly, transforming into beams of light and shooting toward the violet Feng Shui Compass.

Among the roughly one hundred rogue Cultivators, most were at the early Foundation Establishment stage, like Meng Hao. There were eighteen of the mid Foundation Establishment stage, and as far as the late Foundation Establishment stage, there were only three.

Of those three, one was the old man whom Meng Hao had arrived with. Another was a fierce-looking man who wore white robes and let off a ghastly air. He had no beard, and even his Adam's apple was very small. However, he was surrounded by a desolate killing aura.

The last was a woman. Her features were plain, and she was somewhat overweight. However, her late Foundation Establishment Cultivation base rippled, causing everyone around her to treat her very politely. The three of them joined Xie Jie on his Feng Shui Compass. Xie Jie treated them much more respectfully than he did the others, leading them off to the side with him.

At the same time, Meng Hao looked around at the rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivators and caught sight of Lu Tao over in the corner, along with the richly-dressed woman from the secret meeting.

There was another person who caught Meng Hao's attention; this person appeared to be at the early Foundation Establishment stage, and milled about innocuously in the midst of the crowd. Meng Hao's eyes passed over him at first; it was a hard to describe the Qi that caught his attention. It was like the stench which might roll off of a rotting corpse.

No one else seemed to notice, but after a while, Meng Hao thought about the information from the Demon Sealing Jade. He also thought back to the prickly Qi he had sensed in the Black Sieve Sect.

The Feng Shui compass began to vibrate beneath their feet and then shot forward. Together with the other Black Sieve Sect Feng Shui compasses, they transformed into colorful beams of light as they sped through the air.

The direction they were heading turned out to be the Hundred Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect.

Meng Hao stood there quietly, unmoving. Anyone who looked at him saw a Cultivation base at the early Foundation Establishment stage. He stood in the middle of all the Cultivators. Other than Lu Tao, no one seemed to notice him. Elder Sister Xu didn't notice him either. Her face was covered with a bitter expression, as if she was pondering her own future.

As the Feng Shui compasses neared the middle of the Hundred Mountains, the tendrils of smoke rising up from the massive incense burner began to twist in the air above the Sect. Layer upon layer, they twisted together to form an enormous ring of smoke.

As the smoke ring formed, the space in the middle began to ripple. Meng Hao watched as the lead Feng Shui compass entered into the smoke ring and then disappeared. His eyes flickered as the violet Feng Shui compass he stood on entered the ring.

Soon all of the Feng Shui compasses and Cultivators had entered, whereupon the smoke ring disappeared and the Black Sieve Sect returned to its normal state. Outside of the Hundred Mountains, a shield appeared. Shields also sprung up around the Thousand Mountains and the Hundred Thousand Mountains. The entire Sect was now sealed up tight; no one could leave or enter.

About the same time that the Black Sieve Sect sealed itself, Divine Sense from multiple locations began to sweep about the State of Clear Skies. This was Divine Sense from various Sects and Clans within the Southern Domain, come to investigate what was happening within the Black Sieve Sect.

Because of different agreements that they had with the Black Sieve Sect, they couldn't interfere.

Back on the Feng Shui compass, Xie Jie's voice rang out: "Fellow Daoists, there's no reason to be alarmed. This is one of the Black Sieve Sect's most valuable treasures, the Heaven Forged Furnace. In ancient times, it was inscribed with void-penetrating runes that turn it into a teleportation portal.

"As to where the teleportation portal leads to, I'm afraid none of you are familiar with it. Even I myself don't really know..." The teleportation just now had caused a buzz of conversation to arise, but after hearing Xie Jie's words, everyone quieted back down.

Meng Hao looked around coldly. They seemed to be surrounded by blackness interspersed with points of light that looked like stars. Everything around them was empty, without the least bit of light. Only the glow emitted by the Feng Shui compasses illuminated the people on them.

Ahead, one Feng Shui compass after another flew along. Most of the Black Sieve Sect disciples were sitting cross-legged meditating. Only the group of Chosen on the violet Feng Shui compass was staring out into the blackness.

Further away, the three Core Formation eccentrics seemed to be discussing something amongst themselves with Divine thought. And then, there was the most powerful person of all, Patriarch Violet Sieve, who sat motionless meditating, his eyes closed.

Elder Sister Xu was sitting silently in the midst of the several hundred Black Sieve Sect disciples. The statue in their midst seemed as if it were about to melt into the blackness of this dark world. Ghost images resonated out from it, adding to its bizarreness.

On Xie Jie's Feng Shui compass, one of the three late Foundation Establishment Cultivators, an old man in a gray robe, frowned and said, "Fellow Daoist Xie, you said you've been to this place a few times before. Yet, you don't know how to describe where we're going....?"

Xie Jie seemed to hesitate in thought for a moment and then looked around for a moment. "Well," he said, "I do know a bit about the path we're traveling. As Fellow Daoist Tu surmised, this is a path that Cultivators in ancient times would use to travel to the stars to collect foreign Spirit lineages. It is a path between Mountains!" The surrounding Cultivators stared in astonishment at him and, then looked around them, seemingly intent on fixing everything around them into the memories.

"It's not a true path between Mountains," said Xie Jie, looking around contentedly at the shocked looks on the faces of the rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivators. "Only Immortals can tread that path. This is just a subsidiary branch, like one of the hundreds of streams which flow into the Milky Way. That having been said, it's still a path we should not be able to walk, which is why we need the power of the Heaven Forged Furnace of the Black Sieve Sect. It can protect us as we travel the path."

It turned out that this was not a true path between Mountains, but only a branch of one. Even still, to open it required the power of a great Sect; an ordinary Sect wouldn't be able to.

Xie Jie's eyes swept over the crowd and came to rest on Meng Hao. He frowned a bit, then said, "Ah, you must be Fellow Daoist Meng. Please, come sit over here." He had actually taken notice of Meng Hao much earlier. Before departing earlier in the day, the three Core Formation Patriarchs had personally charged him with the task of keeping an eye on Meng Hao.

He wasn't sure why, and didn't understand why three Core Formation Patriarchs would pay attention to a trifling early Foundation Establishment stage rogue Cultivator. He smiled at Meng Hao, but this smile was not genuine. He had no goodwill toward Meng Hao and had called his name simply to sow discord among the other Cultivators. Perhaps in this way he could get some clues about Meng Hao.

Exactly as he had anticipated, his words caused the surrounding rogue Cultivators to look over at Meng Hao. Many of them stared.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever, as if he didn't care in the least. He'd known that his actions the other night would arouse some sort of attention. It was unavoidable. So hearing Xie Jie's words, he nodded slightly.

"I'm fine where I am," he said. "My Cultivation base is weak, so it wouldn't be suitable for me to sit amongst such powerful figures."

Of course, the three Core Formation eccentrics who were communicating with Divine thought up ahead noticed this. They didn't interfere. They weren't sure what extraordinary abilities Meng Hao possessed. This was why the Black Sieve Sect Leader had issued special instructions to pay attention to Meng Hao.

Xie Jie smiled lightly and was about to say something else, when suddenly the Feng Shui compass shook, and suddenly stopped moving. The Feng Shui compasses up ahead also stopped. The magical light emitted by the compasses instantly went out.

The faces of the three Core Formation eccentrics changed. The eminently powerful Patriarch Violet Sieve opened his eyes for the first time. They shone with both dignity and caution.

An archaic voice suddenly echoed out in the minds of all the Cultivators. "Everyone quiet!" It was as if an intangible seal had been placed on all of them, preventing them from speaking.

Within the silent darkness around them suddenly appeared a beautiful, five-colored glowing light. In front of them appeared an enormous jellyfish, tens of thousands of meters large. Its countless tentacles swayed gently, and its semi-transparent body slowly rippled. Its glow shone down into the eyes of the onlookers.

Within the body of the jellyfish, everyone was able to see a rotting corpse. It appeared to have been half digested by the jellyfish.

Chapter 146: This is Ultimate Vexation!

There was a hole between the eyebrows of the corpse, which appeared to be completely frozen. It was as if the rest of the corpse might decay, but this spot would exist for all eternity.

Everyone stood stock still, gazing at the jellyfish as it slowly floated along. Its long tentacles drifted through the midst of the Feng Shui compasses, then proceeded on into the distance. Finally, Patriarch Violet Sieve let out a light sigh. He stood and faced the departing jellyfish. Clasping his hands together, he gave a deep, respectful bow.

Then, his ancient voice slowly filled the air. “That was the third generation Ancestor of the Black Sieve Sect. His Cultivation base was at the peak of the Dao Seeking stage. As he was attempting to reach Immortal Ascension, a Patriarch of the Wang Clan mounted a sneak attack against him. He was not able to achieve Immortality, and fell to this path.

“That year, our Sect and the Wang Clan fought a bloody war that lasted for three thousand years. Eventually, the hostilities ceased. However, all of you Black Sieve Sect disciples should take to heart this bit of Sect history.”

It seemed that for many of the Black Sieve Sect disciples, this was their first time hearing of the matter. Their eyes glittered brightly as they listened. Meng Hao’s heart thumped as he silently watched the jellyfish depart.

Soon, the group proceeded onward; they didn’t encounter any more strange phenomena like the jellyfish. They flew for about two days, until suddenly, the blinding glow of the Feng Shui compasses disappeared down a smaller branch of this path between Mountains.

Meng Hao could now see an incredible mountain range that stretched out seemingly without end. Everything was gray as far as the eye could see, with no vegetation present whatsoever. Far in the distance was what appeared to be a massive, fissure-like canyon that formed a path.

On either side of the path were cliffs that stretched down so far that the bottom wasn’t visible.

Surprisingly, there were several hundred Cultivators sitting cross-legged outside of the canyon. Their faces were all pale, and they looked somewhat down and out. Forty or fifty of them were wearing random styles of clothing, and were obviously not Black Sieve Sect disciples. They were a group of rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivators who had arrived much earlier than the group Meng Hao was part of.

The two groups exchanged glances.

The rest of the Cultivators were Black Sieve Sect disciples. When they caught sight of the group led by Patriarch Violet Sieve, their expressions grew brighter. They all stood up, and from within their midst emerged a beautiful, middle-aged woman wearing resplendent clothing. She emanated a mature grace, although her face was somewhat pale.

When she saw Patriarch Violet Sieve, she let out a light sigh, and nodded.

The woman didn't notice Meng Hao, but he recognized her. She was the one who had taken Xu Qing away from the Reliance Sect all those years ago.

"Together with Patriarch Violet Sieve, there are now two Nascent Soul Cultivators present," thought Meng Hao. "... Exactly what is this place? Is it really a Blessed Land?" He thought for a moment, then lifted his hand up to pat his bag of the Cosmos. He then held up the good luck charm and sent a bit of spiritual power into it. He still sensed the teleportation ability within, which lessened some of his anxiety.

One of the main reasons he'd decided to come to the Black Sieve Sect was because of his ability to rely on the good luck charm's teleportation. Patriarch Reliance had kept this object in his collection, which caused Meng Hao to be confident in it, even though he'd never tried it out.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he caught sight of Xu Qing within the large group of Cultivators. Her brow was furrowed as the coquettish woman next to her ridiculed her.

Meng Hao frowned. He could see that Elder Sister Xu was unhappy. He glanced at the coquettish woman, and the coldness in his eyes grew icier.

It was at this moment that Patriarch Violet Sieve stood up, and the Feng Shui compass beneath him shrank down. He strode forward toward the beautiful woman, and they began to converse in low tones. An unsightly expression appeared on the face of Patriarch Violet Sieve as they continued to discuss some matter. Then, they turned together and walked toward the fissure-like canyon.

Next, all of the Black Sieve Sect disciples left the Feng Shui compasses, transforming into beams of light as they shot into the fissure. The Cultivators sitting cross-legged outside of the fissure also rose to their feet and moved in.

Xie Jie clasped hands toward the rogue Cultivators, including Meng Hao. “Ladies and gentleman, please, follow me.” The Feng Shui compass beneath them began to shrink. Everyone seemed to be considering what to do. However, no one retreated. Taking their various thoughts with them, the group turned into beams of light and shot into the fissure.

Meng Hao’s expression was calm as he flew forward slowly. Behind him, the group containing Xu Qing began to follow. However, she was obviously not of Foundation Establishment; she couldn’t achieve true flight and instead flew along on top of a colorful mist.

Meng Hao slowed down a bit, but then Xie Jie suddenly turned and looked at him, his eyes flashing like lightning. It seemed he was about to say something, but then didn’t, as a woman suddenly approaching Meng Hao from off to the side.

“Fellow Daoist Meng, we meet again.” The woman wore a long, violet robe. She was beautiful and charming, and when she smiled, her teeth were were white. She flew along at Meng Hao’s side.

“Ah, Fellow Daoist Han,” said Meng Hao, looking at her and nodding. This was the woman who had delivered the Sieve Earth Pill to him a few days ago.

The group of people, nearly one thousand strong, whistled through the air into the fissure. Cliffs rose up on either side of them. Nothing was visible beneath them, as if the fissure was bottomless.

“Fellow Daoist Meng,” Han Bei said suddenly, her voice light and pleasant, “you have a very refined style. Presumably, you come from an extraordinary family. Do you really need to participate in this event just to get a Sieve Earth Pill?”

Meng Hao’s eyes flickered as he looked at her.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand what you’re talking about, Fellow Daoist Han.” At this point, the group had flown quite a distance into the fissure. The cliff walls around them were gradually turning black in color. The rocks were now beginning to glitter.

Before Han Bei could respond to him, the surrounding Cultivators began to speak excitedly.

“This is... a crystal cliff!”

“What is this place? There’s so much crystal! It’s even superior to high-grade Spirit Stones!”

Some of the Cultivators flew up and struck the crystal cliff face, clearly intending to dig some out.

However, the instant they struck the cliff wall, blood-curdling screams rang out as their bodies withered up. Their life force, flesh and blood were sucked away in an instant. In the blink of an eye, they were transformed into drifting ash, including their bags of holding. The places where they had touched the cliff walls now seemed to have grown a bit more crystal than before. It twinkled mysteriously.

Seeing this, Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed. The surrounding rogue Cultivators sucked in their breaths. As for the Black Sieve Sect disciples, they didn’t even seem to notice. Apparently, they were already aware of what the crystal cliff wall could do.

“Brother Meng,” said Han Bei with a deep, meaningful smile. “You’re being watched. Please look out for yourself. By the way... are you really surnamed Meng?” Before he could respond, she left his side.

Suddenly, an enormous roaring sound could be heard. It filled the air, causing everything to shake. Then, just as suddenly, it disappeared. Meng Hao frowned as Han Bei flew away from him. Then his gaze fell onto an enormous stone door up ahead, which Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful middle-aged woman had worked together to destroy.

The stone door was refusing to stay in pieces. It seemed to have been congealed by some unusual power that caused it to grow back together.

Past the broken the stone door, Meng Hao saw another group of two hundred cross-legged Cultivators. They stood up. In front of them was a pale-faced young man who held a pearl in his hands. The pearl let off a gentle glow which seemed to be slowing the recovery process of the stone door.

“Junior Liu Wu extends greetings to the Patriarchs.” As he spoke, Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful woman entered through the stone door. They flicked their sleeves, causing the door to repair itself even more slowly.

Next, the group of a thousand Cultivators, including Meng Hao, shot quickly through. It didn't matter whether or not they wanted to, because behind the group were the three Core Formation eccentrics. With them taking up the rear, no one would dare to retreat backward.

The path beyond the stone door was even stranger. There were four similar doors in total that had to be destroyed, beyond each of which waited more Black Sieve Sect disciples.

As they proceeded, Meng Hao grew more and more cautious. Obviously, the Black Sieve Sect had investigated this area more than once. In fact, they seemed to have done so many times.

"These stone doors are like seals. This place...." Meng Hao looked ahead, his brow furrowed. Suddenly, he stopped moving. He wasn't the only one; everyone stopped and stared ahead.

There in front of them was a large black door. This door was not made of stone, but rather of some metallic substance. It was inset into both cliff walls, and emitted a black glow. On the surface of the door was an enormous face. The face's eyes were closed, as if it were sleeping.

As they approached, the eyes suddenly opened, and the face emitted a roar which caused everything to shake. Even Patriarch Violet Sieve couldn't prevent himself from coughing up a mouthful of blood.

Meng Hao did as well. The blood spit up by the group of people turned into a stream that the giant face sucked in. After gobbling up the blood, it let out a burp.

The face's voice was like the roar of thunder: "In accordance with the orders of my master, I guard Ultimate Vexation. Without the pendant, you may not enter the... Uh, what are you guys doing here again?"

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful woman both clasped hands and bowed deeply, reverent looks on their faces. Patriarch Violet Sieve pulled out a bamboo tube, out from which flew a dilapidated hide.

When he saw the hide, Meng Hao's eyes narrowed. The feeling he got when looking at it was exactly the same as that from the strange figure that night.

As the hide flew out, the indistinct image of an eye appeared. The eye stared at Meng Hao.

Their gazes locked, and Meng Hao's pupils constricted.

The hide unfurled and came to rest in front of the face.

Chapter 147: Looking at Each Other

"You can only use this thing one time," said the face, yawning. As it spoke, a fierce cry suddenly rang out from behind the group of people.

Meng Hao looked back and saw that the strange statue that was being carried along suddenly was melting. It turned into three globes of black mist. Inside each mist sphere was an old person surrounded by an aura of death. These were none other than the three people who had been on the tall platform beneath the Black Sieve Sect!

The Elder shot toward the face within their black mists. Next, they merged into it, causing it to twist and distort. Slowly, the mouth opened wide.

An archaic voice sounded out: "Enter quickly, we can only hold on for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn!" The voice sounded as if it had sprung from the yellow springs of the underworld. It echoed out, shaking the hearts of everyone present.

Before anyone could make a move, a flickering figure emerged from within the depths of the mouth. It was a middle-aged man; it seemed as if his entire Cultivation base was burning. Half of his body was completely destroyed, and his Crimson Core was visible inside, burning.

His hair was wild, and his face twisted with insanity. As he rushed out, he screamed, "All dead! The Hundred Names Pillar was not completed. All dead. HAHAHA! All dead..."

"That's Elder Zheng!"

"It is! He was in the advanced group that came here. How did he end up like that..."

A buzz of conversation immediately arose amongst the Black Sieve Sect disciples, who had instantly recognized the man. Xie Jie's pupils constricted, and Han Bei's expression flickered as she narrowed her eyes, within which flashed a strange light. The other Black Sieve Sect Chosen all had similar reactions.

The man rushed out in a frenzy, spewing lunacy, which echoed about within the fissure. Everyone was shocked at his words.

His shocking condition was even more astonishing. Considering his Crimson Core was visible, it was obvious that he was a Core Formation eccentric. For him to be in such a miserable state, and obviously insane, left everyone wondering what they might possibly be facing inside.

The man's words continued to echo about, especially the word "dead," which he'd uttered three times. It was like an invisible hammer, which struck down onto the hearts of those who heard him.

The Black Sieve Sect disciples were slightly less affected. After all, they knew a bit more about this place than Meng Hao and the other rogue Cultivators. Their numbers had increased as the group passed through one door after another, and now there were about two hundred of them. The faces of each and every one twisted.

An intangible shadow of death seemed to spread out from the crazed Core Formation eccentric, filling the area.

However, even as the man flew out of the black door ranting, Patriarch Violet Sieve's eyes shone with a powerful glow. He strode forward toward Elder Zheng and raised his hand. Color suddenly seemed to fade from the world, and Elder Zheng rushed toward Patriarch Violet Sieve, seemingly out of control. As he lurched forward, Patriarch Violet Sieve lifted his right hand and slapped the man on the top of the head.

The slap rang out with a boom that shook everything. Crazed Elder Zheng's body trembled, and his eyes suddenly grew clear. The burning of the Crimson Core within him began to fade.

He had recovered his wits, but before he could say anything, Patriarch Violet Sieve let out a cold harrumph and then flicked his sleeve. A black wind appeared, sweeping up Elder Zheng and tossing him away.

"Ramblings! You're an Elder, so I've spared your life. Return to the Sect and go into secluded meditation for a hundred years as punishment!" Patriarch Violet Sieve acted quickly and efficiently. He lifted his hand, and immediately Meng Hao and the other rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivators felt an intense pressure that sent their hearts racing.

“Rogue Cultivators from outside the Sect,” he said coolly, “you have accepted our Sect’s medicinal pills and have signed our contract with your thumbprint. We have arrived at the ancient Blessed Land. Unfortunately, its interior is unstable and also incompatible with high level Cultivation bases.

“If you are able to acquire some of the designated items, then you can trade them for more Sieve Earth Pills. Take these jade slips.” Pressure filled the area. He flicked his sleeve, and immediately two hundred jade slips flew out to hover in front of the rogue Cultivators.

“There is no doubt that this is a dangerous place, but it is not a death trap. After all, many of our Sect’s own disciples will enter with you. Please, rest assured.” As he spoke, the beautiful middle-aged woman next to him coolly looked over the crowd. The two of them did not need to utter any threats. Considering the Cultivation bases, no one could possibly defy them.

Meng Hao silently placed the good luck charm into his bag of holding. Around him, the other rogue Cultivators maintained similar silence. It was impossible to tell what any of them were thinking.

These were people who had reached Foundation Establishment but were not members of any Sect. There might be some among such rogue Cultivators who are stupid and foolish, but most of them could scheme and calculate. They had chosen to come to this place for their own benefit, and were also aware that there would be danger.

Seven or eight figures flashed ahead, heading directly toward the black door. As soon as they entered the mouth, they disappeared.

With them having taken the lead, the others followed in quick succession, flying forward wordlessly into the face on the large black door.

Murmuring to himself, Meng Hao looked at Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful middle-aged woman. In the very rear were the Core Formation eccentrics, who were watching over the proceedings with cold faces.

“Elder Sister Xu seems to be in some sort of trouble. Now that I’m here, I can’t just ignore it.” His eyes filled with determination. His body flew up along with a few dozen nearby Cultivators, who all turned into beams of light that shot toward the face in the black door. About halfway there, he turned his head and looked back.

He saw Xie Jie with his faint, hypocritical smile. There was pretty Han Bei, as well as the other Black Sieve Sect Chosen. And off in the distance, amidst the crowd, was pale-faced Xu Qing.

When Meng Hao's gaze fell upon her, Xu Qing suddenly trembled, staring in shock. A look of disbelief filled her face as... she looked back at him.

Many years had passed, and Meng Hao had experienced great change. But, she recognized him immediately. She had brought him to the Reliance Sect, and he had become her Junior Brother. He was the one who had given her the Cosmetic Cultivation Pill underneath the moon.

Scenes from the past filled Xu Qing's mind. The memories of that time, the frustrations, all merged within her heart to ripple out like a dream.

Their gazes locked. There were a thousand people in between them, but despite the distance and the time, they were not far apart. Rather, they were very, very close to each other.

Meng Hao gave her a warm smile. The entire reason he had come to the Black Sieve Sect to begin with was to see her, an old friend. Now, he had seen her, and she him.

He turned and disappeared into the mouth of the face in the black door. The moment he vanished, Xu Qing's heart suddenly seemed to grow empty. Without realizing it, she took a step forward.

But it was too late. Meng Hao was gone. Feelings welled up inside of her that she didn't understand. On the outside, she was as cold as ever.

Usually, no one could touch her heart; she protected it fiercely. However, for some reason a feeling of joy had arisen inside her.

Then Meng Hao had disappeared, and she felt as if she had lost something. She rarely experienced such feelings, and when she did, she would suppress them. Today, however, the feeling could not be suppressed.

"Hey, I'm talking to you, slut!" It was the coquettish girl who was standing next to her. "If you want to pretend you can't hear me, fine," she said venomously. "But do you really think you can avoid me? Humph!" She laughed coldly. "You got injured last time. If Elder Brother Zhao hadn't asked Junior Sister Han to save you, then you would have died inside. But, instead of being thankful, you got more standoffish! It's just a little cherry, why do you care so much about that? What an idiot!" The coquettish woman looked at Xu Qing's cold, beautiful face and gave a grim smile. The more jealous she got, the more she wanted Xu Qing to end up like her.

Xu Qing turned around to face the woman who had treated her so poorly all these years. One word at a time, she said, “That day in the Blessed Land, it was your own Elder Brother Zhao who broke the rules and almost got me killed. And Elder Sister Han didn’t save me because Elder Brother Zhao asked her to, but because she took my bag of holding and just happened to grab me along with it.”

Her demeanor was cold, and her expression very serious. This was the personality that she usually kept hidden from her fellow disciples. The coquettish woman could never have anticipated that the Xu Qing who she constantly taunted would ever talk back to her. She stared for a moment and then laughed coldly.

“So, the slut dares to speak,” she said derisively. “Elder Brother Zhao has already arranged everything. You won’t be able to get away this time. I’m going to stand there and watch while your cherry gets taken. Eventually, you’ll thank me.” The Cultivators around her began to fly up into the air toward the black door.

Xu Qing’s body flashed as she stepped onto her colorful mist and shot forward.

The coquettish woman was behind her, laughing coldly. But, then she noticed a man up ahead, wearing a violet robe. He looked back, and a charming smile instantly covered her face.

The handsome man in the violet robe was young and had a Cultivation base of the early Foundation Establishment stage. He nodded at her slightly. Then his gaze fell upon Xu Qing, and his eyes filled with a burning desire.

This was none other than the man the coquettish woman constantly spoke about. Elder Brother Zhao.

Chapter 148: Things Are About To Go Down

After everyone entered the black door, the massive face began to warp. Three misty figures dissolved out of the face, which then transformed into three wizened old Cultivators. They looked as if they had just crawled out of the grave.

Without hesitation, they head back toward the statue from which they had come. As they moved toward it, massive amounts of black aura emanated off of them, as if they were corroding.

“What happened?” said the face. “Oh well. Anyway, without the authentication item, you cannot enter!” It looked confused for a moment, but then its eyes grew clear and it began to howl.

Currently, there were only eleven people left within the fissure. In addition to Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful middle-aged woman, there were nine others, all of them Core Formation Cultivators. They ignored the howls of the face in the door, sitting down cross-legged and closing their eyes. At the same time, their hands flickered with incantation gestures. In the middle of the group of nine appeared a Ginseng fruit, floating in the air.

The fruit was glittering and translucent. Its interior roiled as if it contained good fortune from the Heavens inside.

The Spirit fruit writhed along with the rotation of the nine Cultivation bases, and it looked as if it were beginning to grow a head and four limbs.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful middle-aged woman stood off to the side, their gazes fixed onto the Spirit fruit.

“I went in once,” said the middle-aged woman with a frown. “But after the space of about thirty breaths, the expelling force within became very intense. Even with my Divine Sense, I was unable to locate the object. I can only hope that the Hundred Spirits Tower will be effective. It’s still not quite complete. Hopefully this time there will be enough.”

Patriarch Violet Sieve was silent for a moment before coolly replying, “I personally prepared this Spirit Ginseng. With the Ginseng form, we can stay inside for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. Everything is prepared. If we cannot succeed this time, then in accord with the words of the Sect Leader and the Patriarchs, we will open the Blessed Land to the public. We will borrow the might of the entire Southern Domain to refine the object of legends. After all, to Cultivators like us, that object is the only hope we have other than the Rebirth Cave!”

The beautiful woman hesitated for a moment and then said, “If that happens, though, we will be forced to share. Even if the Black Sieve Sect does the refining, the more people who are involved, the less of a chance we will get our turn.... I might have it a bit better off, but you and the others will be much more limited.”

“True. Even if we have to sacrifice some of our own Sect’s disciples this time, we will not fail!” A dark violet color appeared within the birthmark on his face, giving him a very fierce appearance.

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The world spun, making it impossible to determine which direction was which. Everything was murky. It wasn't long, though, before everything began to grow clear. The dark sky grew a deep blue color. The earth below was filled with dark soil.

Verdant foliage was everywhere, covering the hills, which rose and fell off into the distance. A large river snaked through mountains, and the gurgling sound of water could be heard.

This was what Meng Hao saw when he appeared. No one else was visible, only him.

"This place is pretty big...." he said, looking up into the sky. The sun was beginning to set, filling the sky with a beautiful red color.

In fact, upon closer observation, Meng Hao was able to see evidence of an invisible moon.

"The meeting place for our Classic of Time group is the place where the image of the sun and moon intersect." Meng Hao's eyes glittered as he strode forward, transforming into a beam of prismatic light.

"And then there's that supposed Hundred Spirits Tower. What's that?" Meng Hao felt misgivings in his heart. As he moved forward, the first thing he did was retrieve the good luck charm from within his bag of the Cosmos. Probing it with Spiritual Sense, he felt a bit more at ease. He was really coming to value the good luck charm more and more.

"No wonder Patriarch Reliance had this charm in his collection. It can even teleport out of this place." He put the good luck charm back. This was now his life-saving treasure.

"Elder Sister Xu was right behind me, but who knows where the Black Sieve Sect people appeared. Did they come out together, or were they sent in randomly? The latter is more likely. Well, in any case, I need to find her as quickly as possible." A fierce glow appeared in his eyes as he thought of the cold laugh of the coquettish woman who had stood next to Elder Sister Xu, and of Xu Qing's pale face.

As he thought about her, he took out the jade slip distributed by the Black Sieve Sect. Imbuing it with some Spiritual Sense, he saw a list of names. He perused the list, retracted his Spiritual Sense, and then crushed the jade slip.

Then he shot forward in search of Elder Sister Xu.

Time passed, and soon evening fell. The sky grew dark, and the moon rose. Everything was dark. Meng Hao currently stood on a small hill, looking out at some ancient ruins not too far off in front of him.

At the moment, the moon was covered by dark clouds, causing the ruins up ahead to be somewhat obscured. They seemed incredibly old, as if they had seen the passing of many ages. Meng Hao got the feeling that many, many years ago, it had been a bustling city.

Now, though, it was half consumed by the land. Only a few structures were visible, and even they were falling apart. On this moonlit night, it seemed very lonely. The wind blew across the ruins, carrying strange sounds with it.

It sounded like countless people murmuring softly. Meng Hao couldn't make out what they were saying, but all of the voices combined together created a very bizarre feeling.

In front of the ruins was a stone stele. Almost nothing remained of the characters that had once been carved into it, but now it was almost completely blank, and covered with cracks.

He looked it over, and was about to turn and leave when suddenly his expression flickered. The dark clouds passed, and suddenly moonlight spilled down. Meng Hao caught sight of something in one of the cracks in the stone stele. There inside was a golden vine-like twig. It seemed to be squirming. It was covered with leaves that wrapped around tiny pieces of fruits the size of a thumb.

He recognized this fruit from the jade slip he had just crushed; it was one of the items the Black Sieve Sect wanted, and was called a Moonstone fruit.

His expression calm, Meng Hao did nothing. He simply sat on the hill cross-legged, looking out with cold eyes.

Not too much time passed before a figure sped out from the nearby forest. It was a middle-aged man with a Cultivation base at the early Foundation Establishment stage. He shot directly toward the stone stele, arriving in front of it in the blink of an eye. He reached up to grab the Moonstone fruit.

However, the instant he touched one of the fruits, a cold light sprang out from within the Stone Stele. The middle-aged Cultivator shot backward, a look of shock on his face. The cold light transformed into several beams, which swept toward him.

Popping sounds rang out, and the man coughed up blood. Astonishment was written on his face as he attempted to defend himself. But before he could do anything, his body began to tremble. Suddenly, his head flew off of his shoulders, severed. At the same time, the golden vines in the cracks of the stele extended out, entwining around the headless body. One of the vines stabbed into the bloody flesh. It seemed to be swallowing something. Sure enough, in the space of a few breaths, the Cultivator's body shriveled and withered.

Meng Hao saw all of this happen. He continued to sit there quietly, a brilliant glow emanating from his eyes.

“What are the vines consuming?” he thought.

Even as he watched, the stone stele began to ripple and distort, and a grim-faced young man wearing a violet robe walked out of it. He was at the peak of the mid Foundation Establishment stage, close to the late stage. Wrapped around his arms were thick rattan vines, which stretched out like tentacles. He looked very fear inspiring.

Meng Hao had seen him before. He was one of the Black Sieve Sect disciples that had traveled in the group with him to this place. He had been among the Chosen on the violet Feng Shui compass.

The young man didn't give a passing glance to the shriveled up corpse. Instead, he raised his head to look directly at the hill where Meng Hao was seated. His eyes flashed.

Meng Hao sat there cross-legged, looking back at him. There was only a few hundred meters' distance between them. They looked at each other for the space of a few breaths. Then, the young man dashed forward and leaped into the air, his body transforming into a prismatic beam that shot toward Meng Hao.

Meanwhile, in a different location not too far away, Xu Qing sped along, her face pale. The colorful mist beneath her feet was on the verge of falling apart. Behind her was Elder Brother Zhao from the Black Sieve Sect. A smile covered his face. At his side was the coquettish woman, who was surnamed Xue. Together, they pursued Xu Qing in a leisurely fashion.

“Junior Sister Xu, you were able to get away last time because you got lucky,” he said. He was quite handsome, this young man named Zhao. “This time, however, I paid off Elder Brother Xie. He issued a secret order for any disciple who caught sight of you to notify me. Look, we’ve only been here for a couple hours and I already found you.” He laughed, and the sound of his voice rang into Xu Qing’s ears, causing her face to grow even more pale. She gritted her teeth tightly. She said nothing, instead shooting forward as fast as possible. However, it didn’t really matter how fast she went. Zhao was a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, and there was really nothing she could do to evade him.

“Junior Sister Xu, you’re lucky to have Elder Brother Zhao take a fancy to you. When it happened to me, I didn’t like either, but things are fine now. Just give in, and everything will be fine.” The coquettish woman did nothing as the young man named Zhao rubbed his hands across her body. She laughed.

“I don’t want to make it hard on you,” said Zhao, the fire in his eyes growing stronger. “I just want your cherry. I have a Foundation Establishment Pill that I can offer in trade. It’s a fair price, but you just keep refusing me. You can’t blame me for taking it by force.” He lifted a finger on his right hand.

The finger sent a stiff breeze flowing. It rushed past Xu Qing, causing her robes to lift up and reveal quite a bit of skin. Xu Qing trembled a bit, and some blood seeped out of the corners of her mouth. And yet, she just clenched her jaw and kept moving forward.

The young man named Zhao just laughed a few times. His eyes burned as he lifted his hand again.

Chapter 149: Killing Intent!

Meng Hao stood on the top of the hill, calmly watching the violet-robed youth charging toward him. As he approached, he kicked up a wind, and the seven or eight tentacle-like vines expanded to the size of pythons. At their ends were wide mouths filled with sharp teeth.

“Mid Foundation Establishment stage,” said Meng Hao calmly, his face not changing in the slightest. He himself was only at the early Foundation Establishment stage, but he had a Perfect Foundation. He might not know any techniques from the Foundation Establishment stage, but he had the boundless Core sea from when he was at Qi Condensation, thanks to the Sublime Spirit Scripture. Also, he had reached Foundation Establishment after having achieved the great circle of Qi Condensation.

He was equipped with all of this when he experienced his explosive growth during the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament. The battle prowess of his Cultivation base was at such high level that

he was able to go up against a Dao Child of the Li Clan, Li Daoyi. Although he had not achieved victory, he had severed his opponent's arm. If it had been a Cultivator who was not a Dao Child, Meng Hao could have killed him easily.

After reaching the mid Foundation Establishment stage, he would definitely be able to hold his own against the Dao Children of the various Sects and Clans.

So, there is no need to even mention a mere Chosen of the mid Foundation Establishment stage.

The violet-robed youth approached with a cold smile and powerful killing intent. Meng Hao stood there, framed by the dark night, the moonlight shining down on him. His expression was as calm as ever as he lifted his hand, using his fingernail to slice open the skin on his finger. He stepped forward casually, and the instant the violet-robed youth arrived, waved his finger in a seemingly random fashion.

As the finger descended, a great wind sprang up. In response, the violet-robed youth's expression changed. His pupils constricted, and his eyes filled with disbelief. Suddenly, his vision turned red; this was not an illusion, it was real.

Everything was red, and there was only a solitary finger, covered with fresh blood. It shot toward him.

The vines wrapped around his arms had been viciously writhing forward with open mouths ready to devour; but suddenly they began to emit miserable shrieks. They quivered, and before they were even thirty meters from Meng Hao, had collapsed into blood.

The blood transformed into a shield which surrounded the violet-robed young man. All of this takes some time to describe, but happened in time it takes for a spark to fly off of a piece of flint.

The violet-robed youth began to scream. He no longer charged forward, but tried to move backward in retreat. Meng Hao sprang into action.

He took a step and then flew into the air toward the violet-robed young man. He lifted his hand and touched the blood shield with his index finger.

“Break.” He said the word lightly, and then an explosion filled the air.

The blood shield collapsed, and the vines on the young man's arms broke to pieces. Only the violet-golden fruit rippled with signs of life. It seemed to be begging for mercy.

"You..." The violet-robed youth's face was pale and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. His eyes were filled with intense fear. This was the first time he had even shown fear; he was a Chosen of the Black Sieve Sect, and a violet-robed disciple at that. His position in the Inner Sect was very high, and he had never been defeated with battle magic. Usually people sought him out because of his popularity. But now, seeing the expressionless Meng Hao in front of him, he was filled with an unprecedented feeling of life-or-death danger.

At this critical juncture, the violet-robed youth lifted his hands and flashed an incantation gesture, then swiped his palm forward seven or eight times in succession. Each swipe sent ripples out, which then congealed into a massive, black-colored hand that faced up against Meng Hao.

Meng Hao, expression calm, opened his mouth and spat out the lightning mist. The mist slammed into the hand, and a boom filled the air.

The violet-robed young man's expression filled with despair. He was about to make another incantation gesture when Meng Hao arrived in front of him. Meng Hao's knee flew into the air, slamming directly into the young man's neck, whose head filled with a buzzing sound, and then an intense pain. The hand which had been making an incantation sign went limp, and his entire body bent to the side.

All of the blood in his body rushed to his head, making his once handsome face a dark reddish purple color. He opened his mouth to speak, his expression fearful and his body trembling. One can only imagine what he wished to say as he faced death.

He never spoke the words. Meng Hao stretched out his hand and used his fingernail to slice open the skin between the young man's eyebrows. His hand then made a strange gesture, and he pushed down.

A boom could be heard, and the young man's body flew backward like a kite with its string cut. All of the blood in his body, which had already gathered in his head, began to fountain out of the cut on his face. He couldn't even cry out. All he could see was blood, shooting out like a geyser from between his eyebrows. His pale body slammed into the ground and twitched a few times before lying still in death.

The blood that had shot out of his body seemed to be burning; it turned into a mist which then congealed into a drop the size of a fingernail. The drop of blood shot toward Meng Hao, who snatched it out of the air into his hand.

“Three generations of blood can form a small body; six generations of blood can form a full body, nine generations is called a Blood Spirit, or, death.” Meng Hao spoke the words coolly. What he had just used on the violet-robed youth was none other than the Spirit Devouring Scripture.

“This violet robe indicates that he was a Chosen of the Black Sieve Sect. As a Chosen, he must have a powerful bloodline. He lifted up the blood and looked at it for a moment before putting it away. Then he looked down at the young man’s corpse. He picked up the bag of holding, as well as the violet-golden fruit which had been begging for mercy just now.

The violet-golden fruit quivered in Meng Hao’s hand as if it were alive and pleading for forgiveness.

“Meng Hao does not keep useless objects. What can you do? Show me.” He tossed the violet-gold fruit onto the ground. It immediately began to wriggle. Vines sprang out of it, quickly growing in length. In the space of about ten breaths, there were ten or more vines, all of them thirty meters in length. They burrowed partly into the ground and then stretched up into the air, swaying back and forth, filling the area. It was quite awe-inspiring.

“Not good enough,” said Meng Hao, shaking his head.

The tentacle vines trembled. Suddenly they bent, shooting toward the corpse of the violet-robed youth. Shockingly, it began to rip the corpse apart like a melon and swallow it down!

Meng Hao frowned as the vines consumed the body within the space of a few breaths. Then, each of the tentacles began to tremble and suddenly, leaves with glowing magical symbols began to sprout out. Meng Hao was quite shocked.

Not much time passed, and soon nearly one hundred leaves had appeared. The magical symbols drifted off of the vines and floated toward Meng Hao. They began to merge together to form a book of leaves!

Meng Hao took the book and flipped through it. His eyes filled with a bright light. The magical symbols were filled with the power of something similar to Spiritual Sense. After examining them closely, he realized that they described a technique.

It was called the Nineteen Black Cloud Strikes, and was the magical technique that the violet-robed young man had just now used to attempt to fight him.

Unfortunately, it wasn't complete. Only five of the strikes were described, whereas the rest were incomplete, missing various mnemonics. Perhaps the young man hadn't completely mastered the technique. Meng Hao studied it for a moment, his eyes narrowing. With his Perfect Dao Pillar, it wasn't difficult to deduce how to use the technique. After a while, he realized that the reason the manual wasn't complete was because the violet-gold vines were not powerful enough.

That having been said, he was still quite excited. He looked at the vines; if he allowed them to continue to develop, things would be different. He put away the book of leaves and nodded his head. He waved his sleeve, and a drop of blood flew out to descend onto the vines, branding them deeply. This blood seal was one of the random techniques that Meng Hao had acquired from the Blood Immortal Legacy.

The vines began to shake, and their color slowly changed. Soon, they were dark red, looking somewhat Demonic as they swayed in the air around Meng Hao. A Demonic aura drifted up from them, although it was almost impossible to detect.

Meng Hao looked at the vines thoughtfully for some time, and then glanced back at the ruins up ahead of him. Taking up the violet-robed youth's bag of holding, he examined its contents. Amongst several jade slips was one that attracted his notice.

It was pure white, and after casting his Spiritual Sense into it, a map appeared in Meng Hao's mind. On the map were many white dots, all of which were moving....

In addition to the white dots, there were about two hundred gray dots, most of which were also moving.

"This is...." He observed the map for a bit before he was able to determine his location. Then, his attention was drawn to a place not far away from where he was. There, he could see three white dots, one in front, two in pursuit. The person in front was being chased!

He frowned, and his heart began to pound. He sent his Spiritual Sense into the first of the three glowing lights, and an image appeared in his mind.

The image was none other than pale-faced Xu Qing. She was biting her lower lip and speeding forward as fast as possible.

In that instant, Meng Hao's killing intent rocketed to the sky. Studying the images of the two figures pursuing Xu Qing, he saw that one was the coquettish woman. She was being held by the playful looking young man named Zhao.

As soon as he saw this, a cold air began to emanate from Meng Hao's body, and his eyes shined brightly. The vines around him sensed his killing intent, and began to radiate the same aura of death.

Without the slightest hesitation, Meng Hao transformed into a beam of colorful light that shot toward Xu Qing's location. The swaying, red-colored vines followed, burrowing along underneath the ground.

Chapter 150: Simple and Uncomplicated

Zhao Shanhe was quite proud of himself. He held Xue Yuncui in one arm as he shot in pursuit of tender Xu Qing. A smile covered his face, filled with lechery.

He lifted his hand, sending a wind blowing past Xu Qing, lifting up her garments. He laughed loudly.

Seeing Xu Qing so stubborn and yet so weak filled him with excitement. He continued to send wind shooting over her, which caused more and more damage to her garments. She bit her lip as she fled. Soon, a feeling of desperation began to well up within her.

The fawning of Xue Yuncui coupled with the occasional vicious remarks uttered by Xu Qing caused Zhao Shanhe's eyes to shine even more brightly.

Yet, he wasn't in a hurry. It didn't seem to him that Xu Qing would fall into any good fortune like last time. She couldn't escape him, so he would enjoy the process of capturing her. That was what he liked the most. The weaker his prey, the more exciting it was. The more she struggled, the crueler he would be.

"Xu Qing, I've had my eye on you from the year you entered the Black Sieve Sect. I even spread the word about it. Why do you think no one has bothered you all these years? And yet, you continue to refuse my goodwill! You really don't know how to appreciate favors. You can't blame me for being ruthless." He let out a hearty laugh. Were he in the Sect, he would have more qualms about

breaking Sect rules, especially because there were so many people around. However, in this place, he didn't have anything to be scared of.

Furthermore, he was a Conclave disciple of the Black Sieve Sect, which was a position even higher than the Inner Sect. He could really call the wind and summon rain among his fellow disciples.

In addition to all that, one of the Patriarchs of his Zhao Clan was an Elder of the Black Sieve Sect. Plus, several hundred years ago, a Zhao Clan member had reached the Nascent Soul stage and become a Sect Patriarch, then went into secluded meditation and still hadn't emerged. Because of that Nascent Soul Patriarch, the Zhao Clan was deeply entrenched within the Black Sieve Sect.

Actually, despite being a Conclave disciple, Zhao Shanhe did not have extraordinary latent talent. No other person in the Sect with his latent talent would ever have been able to reach Foundation Establishment. However, with the support and direction of a Core Formation Patriarch, along with multiple Foundation Establishment Pills, he was finally able to do it.

After becoming a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, Zhao Shanhe was quite pleased with himself. He had grown up in the Sect, and other than a few people who could not be provoked, everyone must bend to his will. If he wanted wind, it was windy. If he wanted rain, it was rainy.

Within the Zhao Clan, there were two sons of the current generation. One was him, the other was from another branch of the Zhao Clan, his cousin, Zhao Binwu.

Like him, Zhao Binwu was a Conclave disciple. In terms of latent talent, his was above and beyond Zhao Shanhe, and he was viewed as an important member of the Clan to be nurtured. Zhao Shanhe was well aware of this, of course, and didn't get involved with rivalries with him. Instead, he immersed himself in pleasure. Normally, if he fancied a female disciple in the Sect, she wouldn't refuse him. After all, even if she wasn't willing, refusing him was useless.

The Patriarchs didn't pay attention to such matters. If anything, he could expand the clan. In any case, if a female disciple really did get pregnant, she would instantly be in a much higher position than before.

Due to a variety of lucky circumstances, Zhao Shanhe was like a spoiled rich kid within the Sect. He wasn't very well known in the outside world, but within the Sect he was quite infamous.

“Look, the stars are out. It’s almost time. We can use the stars as our wedding candles, and this place will serve as nuptial chamber. What do you say?” He laughed again, lifting a finger to send another blast of wind at Xu Qing.

Her body trembled and blood seeped from her mouth. Actually, Zhao Shanhe had to carefully control the spiritual energy he used, otherwise it would kill her.

As her body quivered, the colorful cloud beneath her feet suddenly fell apart. Xu Qing fell down to the ground. Laughing melodically, Xue Yuncui shot forward and grabbed her, shoving her down into the dirt. Xu Qing couldn’t even struggle.

Her face was pale, and her features somewhat wan. However coldness filled her eyes as she watched Zhao Shanhe walking over, untying his robe as he came. A look of desperation filled her, and she tried to bit off her tongue, but Xue Yuncui restrained her jaw.

“Now now, Junior Sister Xu, you can’t do that. If you really want to kill yourself, you’ll have to wait until Elder Brother Zhao is done having fun.” Xue Yuncui laughed. Her words were spoken tenderly, but were filled with sinister viciousness.

“Excellent, excellent,” laughed Zhao Shanhe, looking appreciatively at Xue Yuncui. He stroked her face, which caused her eyes to shine. It seemed his approval was very stimulating to her.

Zhao Shanhe looked at Xu Qing, who was helplessly pinned against the ground by Xue Yuncui. His gaze roved over her lithe curves, and he laughed.

“If I gave you some medicinal pills,” he said, “then I wouldn’t be able to enjoy the struggle. So of course I won’t give you any.” His robe was now completely untied.

Xu Qing’s body quivered, and tears seeped out of her eyes. She couldn’t struggle. Xue Yuncui’s Cultivation base was higher than hers. Plus, she was exhausted from fleeing, and was being held down tightly. There was no way to flee.

The coldness on her face dissipated, replaced with bitterness and desperation. Her eyes emptied. Suddenly, it seemed she could see the Reliance Sect, and Meng Hao, standing on the East Mountain. She thought of Mount Daqing, and the young scholar stooping down and tossing a rattan vine over a cliff.

She remembered the first time she saw Meng Hao. She had been standing behind him as he searched for rattan vines. She watched him throw the vine down the cliff, and had heard him talking about Immortals to the people below.

At that time, she'd thought that this mortal scholar was very interesting. Thus, she'd taken him with her.

She thought about the stares of the crowd when Meng Hao had offered her the medicinal pill... And she thought about how he had gazed back at her right before he entered the black door.

"It's all over..." The streaming tears made her face seem very bleak. She couldn't stop herself from shaking. She was scared. From the day she had left the Reliance Sect until now, she had not experienced any happiness. And now, it seemed everything was coming to an end.

When she was a little girl, she had realized that she wasn't very intelligent, and in fact, sometimes very foolish. Therefore, she had mastered the ability to cover it up with a cold smile. She used coldness and silence to conceal her lack of intelligence, and to make the world a bit simpler.

She didn't like complicated things, because she often didn't understand them. She liked peace and quiet. She liked to practice Cultivation by herself. As she did so, she watched the years pass, observed the ebb and flow of life, and recalled beautiful memories from the past.

This was her. Xu Qing. A cold exterior, and a simple heart.

She tried hard not to cry. Her body shook, and she closed her eyes. She didn't want to look at Zhao Shanhe and his overwhelming strength. She was simply a Qi Condensation Cultivator in a Sect where happiness was unachievable. She had no strength to resist... nor even the ability to die.

As she closed her eyes, Xue Yuncui laughed and then spoke into her ear, her voice cool and complex. "Hey, you can't fight back, so just close your eyes. That's what I did all those years back. If you want to blame something, blame your aloofness, and blame your Cultivation base. You're just too weak..."

Zhao Shanhe's laughter echoed out. He waved his right hand, and a pink glow spread out. It enveloped the entire area within a thirty meter radius, creating a glimmering, pink shield that concealed everything within. The three of them were completely hidden. From the outside, the area didn't look unusual at all.

At the same time that the cloaking shield went up, a fiery beam of light shot across the sky nearby. It screamed through the air, a cold-faced Meng Hao in its middle.

He arrived in the blink of an eye, his gaze sweeping the land. He frowned. There didn't seem to be anything unusual at all in the area. He was about to leave, when his eyes flashed. He took out the jade slip and examined it. It was then that he noticed that the white dot representing Xu Qing, as well as the two others, had vanished.

He wasn't sure why, but a feeling of deep unrest rose up in his heart. He looked down at the ground, and then waved his hand. As he did, a thirty meter long Flame Dragon roared out, shooting downward. A boom sounded out, and dust rose up from the ground.

However, there was one area, about thirty meters in diameter, from which no dust rose up whatsoever. It was clearly different from its surroundings.

Zhao Shanhe was concealed inside the shield, looking pleased. He licked his lips and his eyes shone as he prepared to throw himself upon Xu Qing. Suddenly, a boom could be heard from outside. He frowned, looking up, his pupils constricting.

Xue Yuncui also looked up in astonishment. She reacted to the situation quickly. Almost reflexively, she pulled out a sharp sword and placed it against Xu Qing's neck.

This was because she had seen a young man outside wearing a black scholar's robe. His eyes glowed with killing intent, and as he lifted his hand, she could see that one of his fingers was coated with blood. He touched the surface of the shield, and an explosion shook everything. He opened his mouth, and a mist of lightning roiled out, slamming into the pink shield.

Another explosion rocked the earth and sky, echoing out. The shield couldn't withstand the power, and collapsed in a boom. In the midst of her despair, Xu Qing opened her eyes. She stared blankly as the shield disintegrated. Beyond where the shield was breaking apart, she saw a person. Killing intent and murder boiled off of him. Behind his body writhed a mass of dark red vines!

He looked like a Death Immortal who had just emerged from the yellow springs of the underworld, filled with rage and insanity. As he approached, a massive wind kicked up that shook everything.

“Are you two ... looking to die?!?!” It didn’t seem possible for Meng Hao’s voice to contain more fury than it did. It came out as a roar that filled their ears, as if it had been transmitted from hell itself!

“Meng Hao....” said Xu Qing, smiling. Her smile was beautiful, and didn’t contain any of her usual coldness. It was a simple smile.

Simple and happy.