

The Heavens 1441

Chapter 1441: Transcendence Dais!

After a quiet moment, Meng Hao put the bracelet away, and slowly, his killing intent faded. Everyone breathed sighs of relief. Jin Yunshan's expression was very unsightly, but contained no hatred. He silently made his way a bit off into the distance, where he sat down cross-legged to meditate.

Sha Jiudong and the Sect Leader shared a hesitant look, then headed over to Jin Yunshan's side, where they also sat down. It appeared as if they were there to offer protection, but even Jin Yunshan knew that they were also there to keep him in check if necessary.

They would protect him if Meng Hao's killing intent suddenly ignited again, but they would likewise make sure that Jin Yunshan didn't do anything to the detriment of Meng Hao.

The fight just now proved that Meng Hao had the right to be one of the Potentates, and neither Sha Jiudong nor the Sect Leader had any desire for anymore negative repercussions. The best thing was that the matter be dropped.

The ghosts didn't disperse. After Meng Hao closed his third eye, they remained floating in the area, seemingly ready to spring into action the moment Meng Hao called them again.

"Fellow Daoist Ninth Paragon," said the Sect Leader, "this matter stemmed from Fellow Daoist Jin's hot-headedness. That's true of both the incident on the bridge, and what happened here.

"However, he wasn't completely in the wrong. There's been a bit of a misunderstanding here. Even I was able to sense that there is a certain lingering will within the world of the necropolis. I personally do not think that it is the will of Patriarch Vast Expanse, but Fellow Daoist Jin was convinced that it was.

"Fellow Daoist Ninth, I think it's safe to assume that you sense it too. It's a killing intent that is directed at you....

"That is one of the reasons why Fellow Daoist Jin attacked you. He was under the belief that the will of Patriarch Vast Expanse wanted you dead. He believed that by killing you, he could please

the Patriarch, and perhaps be benefited in the seeking of enlightenment.” It was in this manner that the Sect Leader explained why exactly Jin Yunshan had attacked Meng Hao.

Meng Hao’s expression flickered upon hearing the explanation. After a moment of thought, he sent some divine sense into the land. Then, he nodded thoughtfully, although he declined to comment.

The Sect Leader didn’t seem to want to discuss the matter further. Changing topics, he pointed at the altar.

“Fellow Daoist Ninth Paragon,” he said with a smile, “this altar is the location of Transcendence here in the necropolis. There are nine lands here, each one of which has an altar just like this one.

“Supposedly, the altars are connected to Patriarch Vast Expanse, and were actually created by him countless years in the past. As for the specific details of the matter, even after combing through the ancient records, I wasn’t able to find many clues.

“However, Transcendence is definitely possible here. Before you arrived just now, Fellow Daoists Jin, Sha and myself managed to acquire a bit of enlightenment. However, we’re still quite a ways away from a breakthrough.” As he spoke, he approached Meng Hao, seeming very much at ease. It was a sharp contrast from only a few moments before.

Although he had treated Meng Hao well in the past, he now viewed him as more of an equal, and his tone of voice was far more sincere than before.

“Time is very limited right now. Fellow Daoist Ninth paragon, why don’t you try to gain some enlightenment from the altar? It’s impossible to say how lucky you will get, but you should try. As for the other Fellow Daoists, if you don’t mind, I hope... that you can allow them to step onto the altar as well, to try to reach enlightenment. After all... we don’t have much time.” With that, the Sect Leader clasped hands and bowed. Meng Hao thought for a moment, then nodded.

“That will be fine,” he said with a slight smile. Waving his sleeve, he flew over to the altar. He immediately noticed how that there were certain strange properties to the altar, something he hadn’t taken note of before. Without any hesitation, he sat down cross-legged in the very middle.

Even as he did, the other cultivators from the Vast Expanse School took deep breaths and followed. They looked beyond excited at their chance. Before, they had only been able to wait outside of the altar as they stood as Dharma Protectors for the three Potentates. At that time, they hadn’t been permitted to even get close, but now, they had their chance to step onto it. Although Meng Hao was

there on the altar, none of them had offended him, so as long as they acted respectfully, they would not incite any of his killing intent.

One by one they flew over. After clasping hands and bowing to Meng Hao, they all chose locations to sit down cross-legged and meditate. In addition to Shangguan Hong and the other 9-Essences Paragons, there were the subordinates, the 8-Essences Paragons. All of them came, even Meng Hao's two 8-Essences subordinates.

His two subordinates had a bit of a different standing now. As the subordinates of the Ninth Paragon, they felt the least pressure of anyone. They sat down cross-legged on either side of Meng Hao, to stand as Dharma Protectors as he sought enlightenment.

The Sect Leader's expression was very solemn as he sat down cross-legged between Jin Yunshan and the altar. Although it seemed like a random position, both Meng Hao and Jin Yunshan could read between the lines.

He was demanding stability, and no fighting!

Jin Yunshan sighed inwardly. Actually, he had long since quelled any notions of trying to fight Meng Hao. The ghosts still existed, and he knew that if he made a move, he would most likely be killed in body and spirit.

"I wonder how many days this Meng Hao will be able to continue to seek enlightenment on the altar," he thought. "This place is not as simple as it appears on the surface. The longer you sustain the effort of seeking enlightenment, the more you will gain. However, everyone has their limit. He might hold the higher ground in terms of fighting, but the altar requires personal enlightenment and good fortune. It has a lot to do with cultivation base level as well. I bet Meng Hao... will last no more than five days!" He snorted coldly. He himself had lasted for seven days on the altar before reaching his limit. Even if Meng Hao hadn't appeared when he did, he would still have awoken from his seeking of enlightenment.

The Sect Leader and Sha Jiudong had lasted for similar lengths of time, seven days. At the moment, Jin Yunshan wasn't the only one who was pondering how long Meng Hao might last. Sha Jiudong was thinking about the same thing.

Even the Sect Leader was contemplating the matter. Although his expression was placid, his eyes gleamed with thought as he looked over at Meng Hao.

The altar was completely silent as dozens of people sat down cross-legged and closed their eyes to seek enlightenment.

As soon as Meng Hao's eyes closed, rumbling sounds filled his mind as he was connected to the altar.

He instantly sensed his thought processes speeding up, whereas his qi and blood began to slow. Even his cultivation base became extremely calm. However, his divine sense and his mental faculties all began to spin at ten times their normal speed.

Apparently, meditating on this altar focused one's power in a way that made it easier to grope for understanding regarding Transcendence.

It was as if he were gazing at the starry sky, at the heavenly bodies, at the transformations of the world, at the flow of time, at the beginning and end of all living things. He was looking at everything.

It was his first time experiencing visions such as these, but it was not his first time experiencing such a mental journey. Actually, this experience was very much like what he had gone through when looking at the frescoes in the tunnel!

The Hexing magics inside of him, which were in the midst of turning into Essences, experienced a sudden acceleration in the process. After a long moment passed, Meng Hao reigned his thought processes in. Inwardly, he was shaken.

"This altar serves to bless the power of one's enlightenment. It can be used to propel one from eight Essences to nine, and can also aid in moving from 9-Essences into Transcendence.... At the moment, the most important thing for me is not Transcendence, but rather, the creation of my Ninth Hex, and subsequently, my ninth Essence!

"I will use this altar to... gain enlightenment of my Ninth Hex!" Rumbling filled his mind as he focused his thoughts, cast aside any distractions, and focused completely on seeking enlightenment of the Ninth Hex!

This was not his first time contemplating that particular Hex. Quite the contrary, he had long since begun to make preparations for it!

“My Ninth Hex... will be... molded upon the Seal the Heavens Incantation. It will form... the Seal the Heavens Hex!” Meng Hao felt as if thunder were crashing inside of his mind. As his thoughts focused, the aura of Transcendence rose up within him. Gradually, a wind sprang up, which began to swirl around him.

His mind was completely occupied with seeking enlightenment regarding the Seal the Heavens Hex. He would take the Seal the Heavens Incantation and elevate it from being a magical technique or divine ability, into being a Hexing magic. Once that was branded into his soul, it would become... the Ninth Demon Sealing Hex!

Normally speaking, if he wanted to successfully accomplish such a task, it would take a very long time. However, with this altar, he could increase that speed exponentially.

Time passed. After the first day went by, different fluctuations were emanating off of different cultivators. The 8-Essences Paragons were radiating auras of the 9-Essences level, and the 9-Essences Paragons were emanating a feeling of Transcendence.

Various expressions were flashing across their faces. Some people seemed enraptured, some confused, some regretful, some grim.

On the second day, some of the 8-Essences Paragons began to tremble and sweat profusely. Pained expressions could be seen on their faces, but they held on bitterly.

On the third day, all of the 8-Essences Paragons were clearly on the verge of giving up. Only the 9-Essences Paragons were still completely focused on enlightenment.

On the evening of the third day, one of the 8-Essences Paragons opened his eyes, and blood oozed out of his mouth as he flew off the altar. He looked back at everyone else on the altar, his expression conflicted as he sighed inwardly. However, after a moment, his eyes gleamed. Having endured for three days, his gains were significant.

Soon more 8-Essences Paragons opened their eyes and then flew off of the altar, blood oozing out of their mouths. After enduring until they couldn't do so anymore, they had no choice but to remove themselves from the area of the altar.

By midnight on that third day, all of the 8-Essences Paragons had awoken from their trances and left the altar.

Left behind were only seven people: Meng Hao, and the other 9-Essences Paragons of the Vast Expanse School.

Jin Yunshan's face was calm, but inwardly he was laughing coldly. "He'll hold out for two more days at the most. As for everyone else, they'll awaken tomorrow."

Chapter 1442: He Won't Last Five Days!

Jin Yunshan was definitely not the only person paying close attention to what was happening on the altar. The Sect Leader and Sha Jiudong were similarly focused.

The surrounding 8-Essences Paragons were also paying close attention, with occasional looks of envy flickering across their faces, as well as anticipation.

"The Ninth Paragon is definitely going to hold on for the longest. I just wonder how many days that will be...."

Time proceeded to flow onward. By the time the fourth day arrived, three of the group of seven were trembling, clearly on the verge of opening their eyes. Whether or not they were willing, the aura of awakening grew more and more intense upon them.

"The Seventh, Fifth, and Fourth Paragons have cultivation bases slightly weaker than the others. I'm afraid they won't last for longer than four days." Whispered conversations were taking place among the surrounding audience.

Meng Hao's expression was calm, but in his mind, the enlightenment regarding the Seal the Heavens Hex had placed him into a very perilous situation. Thanks to the increased power of enlightenment, he now fully comprehended the Seal the Heavens Incantation. If anyone were able to see inside of him, they would see a shocking sealing mark gradually forming.

Surrounding that sealing mark were eight other magical symbols that looked very similar to it. Those were the other Demon Sealing Hexes. From the look of it, the Ninth Hex was now about seventy percent complete.

There were threads that snaked out from that ninth sealing mark, which spread out to fill Meng Hao's body. As they did, they made contact with... strands of Immortal qi within him that had been severed during the process of being defiled and becoming the Demon.

Every thread that spread out from the sealing mark completed one of those threads of Immortal qi. The more Immortal qi that filled him, the stronger the sensation of Transcendence grew.

Apparently, the appearance of the Ninth Hex could help Meng Hao to proceed along the path of Immortality which had previously vanished!

The mark of the Ninth Hex gradually caused more and more Immortal qi to converge, causing him to radiate the air of an Immortal!

Time passed by, hour by hour. Soon, half of the fourth day was gone, and the three trembling 9-Essences Paragons slowly opened their eyes. After exchanging mutual glances, they sighed and removed themselves from the altar.

They had made various gains, but were the first among the 9-Essences Paragons to have to leave the altar. Although that lost them a bit of face, there was nothing they could do about it. Outside of the altar, they sat down cross-legged and continued to observe the other four who had remained behind.

Of those four, three were trembling, with Meng Hao being the only person who looked the same as before.

As the fourth day ended, and the fifth day approached, another of the 9-Essences Paragons opened his eyes. At first, a blank look could be seen, but soon he sighed and left the altar.

In almost that exact moment... the fifth day arrived.

As of this moment there were only three people left on the altar, including Meng Hao!

Among the nine Paragons, the Second and Third Paragons were second in power only to the Sect Leader. The fifth day had arrived, and they might be trembling, but having reached this point in their search for enlightenment, their auras of Transcendence were strong.

“The fifth day has arrived!! There are only three left. I wonder which one will last the longest!”

“The Sect Leader lasted for seven days, as did Fellow Daoists Jin and Sha. Seven days is the limit.”

“I’d be willing to bet that the Second and Third Paragons both awaken today. As for the Ninth Paragon... he might last for six days. In fact, seven days isn’t necessarily an impossibility!” Even as everyone discussed the matter, Meng Hao suddenly trembled visibly.

Although the movement was slight, everyone was paying close attention, and instantly noticed.

“What? Could it be that the Ninth Paragon is going to awaken now?!?! B-but... it’s only been five days!”

“His fight with Fellow Daoist Jin proved that he qualifies to be one of the Potentates. How could he awaken after only five days?” Everyone seemed shocked, but Jin Yunshan’s lips were turned up in a cold smile. He was certain of his judgement in the matter. After reviewing his battle with Meng Hao over the course of the past few days, he was more convinced than ever that there was something very strange about Meng Hao’s cultivation base.

That strange aspect was that he didn’t seem to truly have nine Essences. If he did, Jin Yunshan was confident that he would have been able to force him to use it.

“Perhaps he simply used some special technique to unleash the battle prowess of the 9-Essences level,” he thought, “but in reality, his cultivation base is only at the 8-Essences level! If that’s true, then he doesn’t qualify to be one of the Potentates!” Jin Yunshan’s eyes flickered, and his cold smile grew wider.

Sha Jiudong and the Sect Leader also had strange expressions on their faces as they studied Meng Hao. They were quite shocked that he was already showing signs of awakening even though it was only the fifth day.

Time passed. Soon, half of the fifth day had gone by. The Third Paragon coughed up a mouthful of blood, and then opened his eyes. After a moment passed, he shook his head, and yet his expression was one of excitement as he rose to his feet and left the altar.

Not long after that, the Second Paragon sagged listlessly. His body was extremely withered, and the aura of awakening upon him was strong, and yet unexpectedly... he calmly continued.

That caused a buzz of conversation among the onlookers, especially when they realized that Meng Hao was trembling even more than the Second Paragon was, and the aura of awakening upon him seemed to surpass the air of Transcendence. Strange looks appeared on their faces.

“What’s going on? The Ninth Paragon can’t even hold on for five days?”

“Could it be... could it be because he sustained internal injuries?”

“There’s another possibility. What if the reason he never used his ninth Essence is because... he doesn’t actually have a ninth Essence?!” Everyone present was a Paragon, adept at analysis and skilled in scheming. It wasn’t long before everyone was contemplating the matter in such a way.

If Meng Hao really did awaken on the fifth day, then his newly-acquired qualification to be one of the Potentates would become a matter of skepticism. Although no one would say anything out loud, once he got back to the sect, he would be faced with many difficulties.

It was at this point that Meng Hao began to tremble even harder than before, and the aura of awakening grew stronger and clearer. Even his mind was battered with waves of shock.

“Why is this happening?!?!” he roared inwardly. “This is impossible!!” His divine sense was completely converged onto the sealing mark of the Ninth Hex. That mark had come to be ninety-nine percent complete on the previous day, and the threads spreading out from it had filled his body. The Ninth Hex was almost complete, and his cultivation base was poised on the brink of rising.

However, even in that moment of keen anticipation, the sealing mark of the Ninth Hex unexpectedly... began to break apart!!

Closer examination confirmed that it was true. The sealing mark really was breaking apart, without any warning or indication as to why. Over the course of a few hours, more than half of it collapsed, causing rumbling sounds to fill Meng Hao.

That was the reason why he was shaking; at the same time, a powerful force was apparently attempting to wrench him out of his state of enlightenment.

Meng Hao’s reserves of power ran deep. He had Shui Dongliu’s legacy, and even more importantly, the bronze lamp. As that powerful force attempted to force him out of enlightenment and into

awakening, the bronze lamp began to emit a soft glow, which negated that power. However, he continued to tremble, and blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth.

Everyone watched as this happened. Meng Hao shook violently, and in the end, blood began to drip down off of his chin.

It was in that moment that the Second Paragon suddenly coughed up a mouthful of blood and shivered. As the blood oozed down, he sat there for a moment, then struggled to his feet. However, instead of looking as though he had been defeated, he threw his head back and laughed uproariously. As he stepped off of the altar, astonishingly, he emanated... the aura of the peak of 9-Essences!

That aura instantly attracted the shocked attention of everyone in the area.

The Sect Leader, Sha Jiudong, and Jin Yunshan all looked over. The Second Paragon truly had acquired good fortune from the altar. Although he hadn't reached Transcendence, his cultivation base had advanced by half a step, placing him at the peak of the 9-Essences level.

Instantly, expressions of congratulations began to ring out. The Sect Leader smiled and clasped hands meaningfully.

The excited Second Paragon took a deep breath, then suddenly looked back over at Meng Hao, and within his eyes flickered the desire to do battle. If Meng Hao could become one of the five Potentates, then he was confident that he could do the same.

That was especially true considering the fact that despite Meng Hao being the only person left on the altar, he was shaking visibly. That was the source of the Second Paragon's confidence, and was also why everyone else was paying such close attention to what was happening.

Jin Yunshan suddenly chuckled.

"He won't be able to last longer than five days," he said. "We're only a few hours from being finished here." As his voice echoed out, Sha Jiudong frowned, and a look of doubt appeared in the Sect Leader's eyes.

Everyone looked on silently, unwilling to speak. All eyes were focused on Meng Hao. Time passed.

Meng Hao's mind was in chaos. He glared at the motes of light which were the shattered bits of his Ninth Hex, as they slowly floated out into his body. After some thought, he began to calm his thoughts.

“There were no faults in either my plan or how I carried it out. Transforming the Seal the Heavens Incantation into my Ninth Hex was the right decision.

“Furthermore, during the process of enlightenment, my understanding of the Seal the Heavens Incantation went far past the previous level. I even managed to converge the Hex smoothly. So why did I fail in the end?

“I need to try again, and determine the reason. What caused the conversion of my Ninth Hex to fail!?” Having made his determination, he didn't hesitate to start gathering together motes of light that were the Ninth Hex, simultaneously drawing upon the power of the altar to speed up the enlightenment process.

As the motes of light gathered, the sealing mark of the Ninth Hex gradually began to re-form. This time, Meng Hao went about the process with more caution. Every breath of time that passed, he was completely focused, and made sure to avoid any mistakes. After reaching various levels of enlightenment, he used the resulting knowledge in the creation of the Ninth Hex.

Time passed. Two hours. Four hours.... Rumbling could be heard inside of him, and once again he began to tremble. It was then that... the fifth day ended!

Chapter 1443: Difficulty Completing the Ninth Hex!

When the fifth day passed, Jin Yunshan did not look happy at all. In fact, it was almost as if he had just been slapped by an invisible hand.

A few hours before, he had boldly asserted that Meng Hao wouldn't last for five days. But here Meng Hao was, still sitting there, and calmly at that, with no more trembling.

The scene left him very grim-faced. As for everyone else present, strange expressions could be seen on their faces.

Regardless, the suspicions people had regarding Meng Hao were now deeply rooted within them; even if he lasted for six days, they would still have their misgivings.

Unless... he could pull off a miracle, something so astonishing that it would drive away any lingering suspicions. If Meng Hao did so, then his status and grandeur would reach an unimaginable level.

“Six days is his limit!” Jin Yunshan growled. His words were met with silence as everyone focused on watching Meng Hao.

Two hours passed. Four hours. Six hours.... Ten hours. Twelve hours. As the fourteenth hour passed, the grimness in Jin Yunshan’s face deepened. Everyone else had strange expressions as they watched Meng Hao. What was happening with his ninth Essence left many of them rattled.

Soon, sixteen hours had passed. Then eighteen. Finally... twenty-four hours went by. A collective gasp could be heard.

“Seven days!!”

“Something strange is going on with the Ninth Paragon. He was clearly on the verge of waking up, but then he lasted for an entire additional day!”

“True, but seven days is probably his limit.”

As people discussed the matter, Jin Yunshan’s face was as pale as ash. He couldn’t feel more gloomy. He had openly said five days was Meng Hao’s limit, only to have him last six days. Then he said six days was the limit, and he lasted for seven.

He also noticed people glancing furtively at him, causing rage to explode up in his heart.

“Seven days! That’s definitely his limit!” he growled through gritted teeth.

Everyone seemed to agree with him. Although no one said so out loud, the consensus was that Meng Hao would last for seven days.

Even the Sect Leader seemed to hold the same opinion. As for Sha Jiudong, he closed his eyes and stopped watching. Instead, he inwardly pondered whether or not Meng Hao... really had a ninth Essence.

Everyone continued to wait. Ten hours passed. Then sixteen hours. It didn't take long for twenty hours to go by. By this point, Jin Yunshan couldn't remain seated. He rose to his feet, an expression of disbelief painted on his face.

He wasn't the only one. Sha Jiudong opened his eyes again, and the Sect Leader was staring. All three of the peak 9-Essences cultivators looked on with minds reeling.

If they had such a reaction, there was little need to wonder how the others were responding. Looks of astonishment could be seen on all faces.

“The seventh day is about to pass. Don't tell me... he's actually going to last for eight days!?”

“That's impossible! The Sect Leader only lasted for seven days, as did Fellow Daoists Jin and Sha!”

People were still discussing the matter when the twenty-fourth hour passed by, and... the eighth day arrived!

As of this moment, Jin Yunshan, the Sect Leader, Sha Jiudong, and everyone else were completely flabbergasted. Eight days was longer than anyone present had maintained their position on the altar.

If Meng Hao had maintained a calm disposition the entire time, it might not have been as shocking. But he had almost woken up in the middle of the process, only to continue onward resolutely. Everyone who was watching felt as if their minds were under attack by shock.

Jin Yunshan felt like he had just been slapped in the face again. His eyes went wide as the eighth day began to go by.

Six hours. Twelve hours. Eighteen hours.... Soon another twenty-four hours had passed. Meng Hao had endured for nine days!

“Impossible!!” Jin Yunshan exclaimed. The Sect Leader's eyes were as wide as saucers, and Jin Yunshan was panting. In the audience, jaws dropped in shock.

Meanwhile, inside of Meng Hao, the sealing mark of the Ninth Hex was once again ninety-nine percent complete. Vast amounts of Immortal qi were streaming out into various parts of his body, connecting them to the sealing mark. As a result, the feeling of an Immortal was growing stronger inside of him!

It was possible to imagine what would happen if he finally succeeded. When the Ninth Hex was completed, it could completely reverse Meng Hao's path, and change the Demon... back into the Immortal!

Meng Hao was so focused on the matter that he could even detect that as the Hex reached a state of completion, his cultivation base was changing. It was transforming back into what it had been in the Mountain and Sea Realm, what he had cultivated all along... the path of Immortality!

Forming the sealing mark was drawing fully upon Meng Hao's concentration and powers of enlightenment, and he was sure that he hadn't made any mistakes.

The aura of a ninth Essence also appeared, merging with the other eight Hexes, which made Meng Hao even more certain in his judgement.

Without any hesitation, he proceeded to make his attempt at completing that final bit. Rumbling could be heard as the sealing mark of the Ninth Hex... unexpectedly collapsed again!!

A tremor ran through Meng Hao, and blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth. The same power which had exploded out before once again appeared, except with even more intensity than before.

The bronze lamp flickered, and blood sprayed out of Meng Hao's mouth. It took supreme effort, but he managed to force himself to remain in the state of seeking enlightenment. His mind felt as if it were being pounded by thunder, and inwardly, he was raging.

"Something or someone doesn't want me to complete my Ninth Hex!!" During this second attempt at finishing the Ninth Hex, he had been paying very close attention, and was now certain that, in the very moment of completion, certain fluctuations had appeared within him that would be very hard to detect unless you were looking for them.

Those fluctuations had interfered with the appearance of the fully formed Ninth Hex, and led to his second failure.

Although Meng Hao's eyes were closed, they were completely bloodshot. He gritted his teeth, and once again drew upon the power of enlightenment offered by the altar. He fully rotated his cultivation base, and the light of the bronze lamp poured energy out into all parts of his body. It was as if he had become one with the altar itself.

Rumbling sounds could be heard as the enlightenment power of the altar exploded out, filling Meng Hao. The aura of Transcendence grew stronger, like a tempest that raged around the altar.

His repeated attempts resulted from an unwillingness to fail again. However, to everyone else, what was happening was utterly shocking.

The crowd outside the altar watched the aura of Transcendence grow on Meng Hao, and could sense an intense level of pressure radiating out from him.

Everyone began to edge away, even the Sect Leader. The aura of Transcendence, and the powerful tempest, were things that could shake Heaven and Earth.

Wild colors flashed in the air, and to everyone watching, it almost seemed as if Meng Hao were in the process of Transcending.

It was a feeling that left their scalps tingling with shock.

“Impossible!!” Jin Yunshan murmured, his eyes wide.

Shock filled his person as he and everyone else waited another day. The ninth day concluded, and the tenth day began. Then... the eleventh day, and the twelfth.

“T-twelve... twelve days?”

“How inhuman can this Ninth Paragon be? How could anyone last for twelve days?!?!”

“Just what level is his cultivation base? The peak 9-Essences experts only lasted for seven days, but he actually... has lasted for twelve days!? And from the look of it, he's going to keep going!!”
Everyone was abuzz, thoroughly shaken by Meng Hao.

Of course, however shaken they were, that feeling was not going to be reduced. It was only going to grow more intense!

Thirteen days. Fourteen days. Fifteen days....

When the sixteenth day arrived, Meng Hao had surpassed all expectations and pulled off that miracle!!

He had done something that no one else could even come close to doing, something... truly miraculous!!

Whatever suspicions people had harbored regarding Meng Hao were completely and utterly dispelled. Even the Second Paragon, who had recently stepped into the peak of the 9-Essences level, was so shaken that any desire he had to challenge Meng Hao to a fight were completely gone.

Jin Yunshan refused to believe that, after enduring for sixteen days, and having begun to emit such a strong aura of Transcendence, Meng Hao didn't have a ninth Essence.

“Dammit, he was actually holding back even more than I thought in our fight!! He did it all on purpose! He was using me to establish his place, and he let me go so that he would have an excuse to kill me if I ever made another move on him!!” Having reached this conclusion, Jin Yunshan began to tremble inwardly. Finally, he forced himself to regain his composure. However, he was filled with bitterness, and couldn't help but muse about how sinister Meng Hao was.

The Sect Leader's face was unprecedentedly serious. He was completely shaken, even more so than when Meng Hao had been fighting Jin Yunshan. In fact, he was thinking exactly the same thing that Jin Yunshan was.

They weren't the only ones. Sha Jiudong had also reached this same conclusion, and his fear of Meng Hao had reached an even higher level than before.

Meng Hao had no way of knowing how frightened everyone was because of his actions. He only knew that his third attempt at forming the Ninth Hex had resulted in yet another failure.

However, this failure was met with complete calm. This time, he had not been focused on actually forming the Ninth Hex, but rather, on determining... who it was who was trying to stop him!

In the moment that the Ninth Hex collapsed, he was sitting there cross-legged on the altar, and a tremor ran through him. His eyes suddenly opened, and they were completely bloodshot as he looked up into the starry sky of the Vast Expanse. His expression was one of fury and madness as he said, "So, it turns out it was you all along!"

Chapter 1444: Swear an Oath!

Sixteen days.

The fact that Meng Hao had remained on the Transcendence Dais for sixteen days left the audience completely and utterly shaken.

Jin Yunshan. Sha Jiudong. The Sect Leader. All of them were completely jarred.

Then Meng Hao opened his eyes, radiating the aura of Transcendence, and everyone felt their hearts trembling. Those blood-colored eyes contained an unspeakable ferocity, giving them the sensation that they were looking some wild beast from ancient times.

Meng Hao had not Transcended, and in fact, his Ninth Hex had collapsed three times in a row. However, when the third collapse occurred and Meng Hao opened his eyes, his consciousness left the Transcendence Dais. At the same time, a powerful air of Transcendence filled the area, becoming a raging vortex that spun wildly around him.

The vortex rose higher and higher until it seemed to connect to the Heavens. It was a completely shocking sight.

As the boundless winds screamed, the Sect Leader's face flickered, and he fell back. Jin Yunshan and Sha Jiudong didn't hesitate to do the same, as did everyone else in the crowd. Even as everyone retreated to a position 30,000 meters away from the altar, they could feel the wild aura raging up from that location.

Rumbling echoed out in all directions as the cyclone of wind shot so high it seemed to slash into the starry sky of the Vast Expanse itself.

In the middle of the cyclone was Meng Hao, who was looking up into the Heavens, eyes wide. It was as if he could see through the Vast Expanse and beyond, as if he were staring at an entity that no one else could see.

“It was you....” he said, his eyes crimson. He had been puzzled by the first collapse of the Ninth Hex. He had been shaken by the second. But the third... had corroborated his suspicions, and provided the answer which he sought.

He had confirmed that there really was something surreptitiously interfering with his cultivation. It was like some omnipotent force which was preventing the Ninth Hex from appearing.

Perhaps the more accurate description would be to say that it was not impeding the Ninth Hex, but rather, preventing Meng Hao... from transforming from the Demon back into the Immortal.

And the reason for that was...

“Allheaven fears the Immortal,” he murmured in a grim voice. Now he understood everything. If he hadn’t passed through that tunnel, and seen all of the visions regarding Allheaven, if he hadn’t seen Allheaven destroy a world with a single finger, he would never have been able to piece together the true reason why his Ninth Hex was being interfered with.

Because he had, he was now able to determine definitively that the aura of the force preventing the completion of the Ninth Hex... and the aura he had felt when Allheaven destroyed that world in the fresco... were exactly the same.

They were exactly the same type of power.

In fact... because of the three failures of the Ninth Hex, Meng Hao had discovered something terrifying. Unexpectedly, the power of this so-called Allheaven apparently had the same origin... as the Demon.

Instead of saying that Allheaven had interfered, leading to the collapse of the Ninth Hex, it would be more accurate to say that the deed was done by both Allheaven and the Demonic power inside of him.

“Allheaven....” he murmured. He had many questions regarding Allheaven, many misgivings. And no answers. In fact, deep in his heart were many speculations which had arisen because of what he

had seen in the fresco visions. Speculations regarding the Mountain and Sea Realm, the Immortal God Continent, the Devil Realm Continent, and Planet Vast Expanse.

Unfortunately, there were no answers to the many questions he had. Nor were there even any clues or evidence to analyze. There was even a bit of disbelief within Meng Hao's heart. After all, he was no newcomer to the practice of cultivation. He was well aware that many times, the things you saw with your own eyes weren't even real.

But as of now, he was certain about the existence of Allheaven.

Within the starry sky of the Vast Expanse, there was definitely some entity with the name... Allheaven.

Furthermore, there was some connection between this entity called Allheaven, and himself. At the very least... Meng Hao was certain that there had been something pushing him along in the transformation from Immortal into Demon.

Meng Hao's eyes flickered with killing intent as he shot to his feet. In that instant, the sky filled with intense rumbling, and the cyclone began to crumble, as though some incredibly powerful destructive force were descending.

The aura of Transcendence shattered, and the altar began to shake violently. The intense pressure descending made it seem like the power of the entire starry sky of the Vast Expanse was crushing down.

Everyone from the Vast Expanse School coughed up blood, even the Sect Leader, Sha Jiudong, and Jin Yunshan. Shocked expressions could be seen on their faces as they fell back even further than 30,000 meters.

The entire first land mass seemed to be filled with an intense but soundless screaming, causing everything to shake violently.

Meng Hao stood there on the altar facing the intense pressure, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. The pressure was trying to get him to submit. It pushed down on him, causing his legs to tremble, as if it were trying to get him... to kneel to the Heavens.

But there was more to it than that. From Meng Hao's perspective, it was as if this pressure were trying to get him to swear an oath that he would never again attempt to transform from the Demon into the Immortal.

His face was extremely grim as the pressure increased. He was shaking visibly, and his bones creaked on the verge of breaking.

But then he suddenly threw his head back and laughed and laughed uproariously. His eyes glowed bright red as his Demonic qi surged.

"Threatening me?" he chuckled. His hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, and at the same time, his third eye opened. Instantly, the surrounding ghosts became completely visible.

Beneath the Heavenly pressure, the countless ghosts were trembling. And yet, expressions of insane viciousness could be seen on their faces, unyielding glares of hatred.

Even Meng Hao could sense that the aura of the pressure weighing down now was exactly the same as when Allheaven had destroyed this world. How could this host of people who had been killed by Allheaven not also detect that very same thing?

"I, Meng Hao, have practiced cultivation free from guilt my entire life. I pursued the Dao of the Mountains and Seas. Even you, Allheaven, do not qualify to levy threats against me!" Mad laughter rang out as Meng Hao waved both of his arms out in front of him.

When the surrounding ghosts sensed Meng Hao's will and determination, they threw their heads back and let out bitter howls. None of the other cultivators present could see the ghosts, but they could sense the sudden influx of intense coldness they caused.

There were so many ghosts it was impossible to tell how many there were, and they were all howling together in one unified voice which rose up into the Heavens. They didn't know why they had become ghosts after having been killed by this pressure. Nor did they understand why they were more powerful in death than in life. But they did know that, even though they had been unable to fight against this power when they were alive, now that they were dead... they would most definitely fight it!

It was impossible to say which ghost did it first, but soon, all of them were flying toward the cultivation base tempest which swirled around Meng Hao. In the blink of an eye, countless ghosts were flying through the air toward him, causing the tempest to become bigger and stronger.

Vast, uncountable numbers of ghosts surged forth, causing the tempest to rapidly expand. 300 meters. 3,000 meters. 30,000 meters. 300,000 meters. 3,000,000 meters. 30,000,000 meters....

It spread out seemingly without end, with the altar at its center. Eventually, it covered the entirety of the first land mass, creating an indescribable cyclone.

The enormous cyclone swept across the lands, causing mountains to tremble and rivers to seethe.

The cultivators from the Vast Expanse School were there within the raging winds, trembling, looking around in astonishment at what was happening. They were even able to make out faint screams echoing about.

“Revenge. Revenge!”

“We were killed by Allheaven’s finger, so in death, we shall exterminate Allheaven!”

“The vengeance of the Vast Expanse Continent is like a flame that not even the Heavens can extinguish.” Countless voices rang out, a cacophony like the voices of an entire world, causing a huge sound wave to surge within the windstorm. Then, Meng Hao raised his hands and pointed up toward the Heavens. In response, the windstorm, along with the countless howling ghosts, began to rise up into the air.

They were like a magnificent army charging toward the Heavens, a sight no one would ever be able to forget.

The combined forces of an entire land mass, of all the ghosts that existed there, charged up as if to vanquish the Vast Expanse. Then, as everyone watched, the sky up above was torn apart by the cyclone.

The starry sky beyond was revealed, and the Vast Expanse, and yet the windstorm kept rising up. Suddenly, within the shattered dome of the Heavens, a figure appeared. He was blurry, and impossible to distinguish clearly. Formed from mist, he stood there, looking at the endless army of ghosts, then stretched out a hand in a pushing motion.

Something like an invisible barrier apparently existed in front of that figure, and deafening rumbling sounds echoed out as it began to move downward.

When the ghosts ran into the invisible barrier, they collapsed into pieces, completely incapable of doing anything against it.

The vast disparity of power was like a huge ravine which there was no hope of crossing.

“Transcendence!” said the astonished Sect Leader. “That’s... the power of Transcendence.” Everyone else was equally astonished.

Meng Hao might have emitted some of the aura of Transcendence, but that had been somewhat of a fluke. This figure, and the outstretching of its hand... caused... the true power of Transcendence to appear.

Meng Hao stood there on the altar, watching everything play out. Inwardly, he was shaken. He could also sense the power of Transcendence, and could tell that the windstorm he had created, and the countless ghosts within it, could do nothing to stop or even shake this invisible barrier.

In the blink of an eye, the barrier destroyed half of the cyclone, and continued to grind downward relentlessly. It was now getting closer and closer to Meng Hao.

To explain by means of illustration, the power of Transcendence compared to the power of a cultivator who had not Transcended, was like... a drop of water compared to fog.

No matter how much fog there was, it could do nothing to prevent that drop of water from passing through it.

In this case, the windstorm and the ghosts were the fog, and that invisible barrier was the drop of water. Not only did it pass through the fog, it crushed everything, and could not be resisted in the slightest.

Chapter 1445: One Word!!

The blurry figure behind the invisible barrier apparently had long hair and was wearing a long robe. However, no facial features were visible except for his eyes.

Those eyes were cold and merciless, as if there were no life in them at all, as if they were empty, as if this figure were nothing more than... a weapon!

A weapon!

That was the distinct feeling Meng Hao got after catching sight of the figure behind the invisible barrier.

At the same time, the barrier continued to crush down. The cyclone continued to collapse, and the countless ghosts continued to dissipate. The lands shook, and crevices opened up. Mountains and rivers rumbled, and everything, even the altar, began to crumble and show signs of complete collapse!

The group from the Vast Expanse School had long since reached a state of utter astonishment. All of them rotated their cultivation bases in an attempt to resist what was happening, but it did little good.

In that moment of extreme crisis, the bronze lamp inside of Meng Hao blazed brightly, as though it were building up power which would explode out at any moment.

However, before that could happen, all of a sudden... faint fluctuations began to emanate out from the distant ninth land mass, where that huge figure was seated on the enormous throne.

They were faint, but even as they appeared, Meng Hao could hear a voice coming from the ninth land mass. It was difficult to hear at first, but it only took a moment for the volume to swell. Eventually, it was possible to make out a word. Apparently it was saying...

BE!

It was only one word, apparently the word “be,” and it almost sounded like a musical note.

That one word came out from the ninth land mass, and as it passed along, it caused the eighth land mass to shake, and the light there to grow dim. Even as the eighth land mass was thrown into turmoil, the sound passed into the seventh land mass, then swept across the sixth. The sky trembled, and roaring sounds filled the lands. Everything shook in astonishing fashion. And the sound was getting closer and closer to Meng Hao....

By the time it reached the fifth land mass, the sound had apparently changed. What Meng Hao now heard sounded more like the word “gone!”

GONE!

In fact, now it almost didn't sound like two words had been spoken. Whistling screams accompanied the arrival of the sounds, and everything trembled. It passed through the fifth land mass, roared across the fourth, then shook the third and the second...

By the time it reached the first land mass, the explosive sounds had united. The word was not “be”, nor was it “gone.” It was one single word.

“BEGONE!”

“BEGONE!!”

“BEGONE!!!”

The sound echoed about endlessly. It was like an explosion that violently shook the Heavens!

Apparently, it had always been one word, but had been spoken at such a distance away, and traveled so quickly, that it had become split apart along the way. But now that it was here in the first land mass, it erupted with incredible power. That was a power which could destroy the Heavens and extinguish the Earth!

Incredible rumbling echoed out across the first land mass. Mountains and rivers were rocked, and a wind of madness swept about. Wild colors flashed about in Heaven and Earth!

It was a single word that was so domineering it caused everything to shake wildly!

One word crushed the Heavenly might. One word shocked all creation. One word caused the invisible barrier to begin to tremble, and then to be riddled with cracks. A moment later, it shattered completely!

That same word shook the Heavens, causing the blurry figure up above to distort and twist, as though it were being battered by a massive tempest. Then, it faded away.

This virtually indescribably shocking scene occurred because of only a single word!

A single word uttered by that figure on the enormous throne, one word, completely changed everything. The crushing might of Allheaven was dispersed, and the Heavens were shattered!

It was as if that word had become an enormous hand which swept across Heaven and Earth, crushing everything that was not of the necropolis. Even the will of Allheaven was incapable of staying, and had been driven out.

This sight left Meng Hao completely reeling. He turned to look over at the ninth land mass, mind rumbling with shock.

However, that voice... was something only he could hear. The Sect Leader and the others couldn't detect it at all. Of course, they were still shaken, although not by the voice itself; they mistakenly believed that everything that was happening was being caused by Meng Hao.

Meng Hao looked at the ninth land mass, and was suddenly struck with the deep desire to go there and see for himself this figure was who had just uttered that word. Who was he?

The indistinct figure had clearly emanated the power of Transcendence, and whose single uttered word seemed filled with virtually infinite power... A person like that... must be a Transcendent cultivator!!

“Was it Patriarch Vast Expanse...?” Meng Hao thought, taking a deep breath. That was the only guess he had at the moment.

After a long moment passed, Meng Hao swished his sleeve and reigned in his cultivation base power.

The sky was quiet, and the lands went still. A moment ago, a shocking tempest had been raging, but now everything was back to normal, almost as if nothing had happened at all.

Meng Hao closed his eyes, and his heart was anything but calm. Far too many shocking events had occurred, and he deeply desired to know who it was that had uttered the word “begone” just now. He wanted to know why Allheaven feared the Immortal, and he wanted to know what the arrival of the Demon meant. What did the Demon have to do with Allheaven, and why... did they have similar origins!?

Even more than all that, he wanted to know why the Mountain and Sea Realm had been fated to be destroyed. Behind the scenes, there was some entity manipulating things, and that entity was none other than... Allheaven.

In any case, the name of Allheaven was now deeply burned into Meng Hao’s mind. To him, it was a clue.

He stood there silently for a moment before opening his eyes. When he did, he saw the cultivators of the Vast Expanse School panting. Because of everything that had occurred, there was no way they could possibly maintain their calm. First was the sixteen days he had spent seeking enlightenment, then there was the aura of Transcendence shaking the Heavens. Then came the Heavenly might which had crushed down onto them. All of that left them in complete and utter fear of Meng Hao.

It took a moment for Meng Hao to compose himself, but when he did, he turned once again to gaze at the ninth land mass. Then, his third eye slowly closed. When his view returned to normal, he stepped off of the altar.

In that moment, the cultivators of the Vast Expanse School looked at him with mixed emotions.

After a moment of silence, the Sect Leader cleared his throat, and was just about to say something when, all of a sudden, the entire land mass lurched. Ripples spread out in the Heavens, and majestic light began to shine down.

That light contained boundless, indescribable heat which immediately caused the freezing coldness on the first land mass to begin to fade away.

However, that was of secondary importance. Most noticeable to Meng Hao, and to all of the cultivators from the Vast Expanse School, was that grass had sprouted from the ground beneath their feet. In the blink of an eye, everything around them was as green as jade!

Off in the distance, the ruins suddenly blurred as time seemed to flow backward, and they began to return to their original state!

A city gradually appeared, and there were some areas off in the distance where mountains and rivers could be seen....

It wasn't just in their immediate vicinity; the entire first land mass was experiencing a dramatic transformation.

This bizarre turn of events caused the Sect Leader's face to fall.

"Time is up! We cannot stay here any longer. If we do... we will all die! Meng Hao, even if you can command the ghosts here, you will still perish!!

"Go. All of you, go now!!" The Sect Leader transformed into a beam of light that streaked at top speed off into the distance.

The other Paragons seemed to be aware of what was happening. Faces flickering, all of them took to flight, including Jin Yunshan and Sha Jiudong.

Seeing such a reaction from them caused Meng Hao's eyes to flicker. At the same time, he could sense that the flame in the bronze lamp was dying down, and his strange connection to the ghosts was vanishing.

Without the slightest hesitation, he flew into the air, joining the group as they sped toward the bridge leading off of the land mass.

As they sped along, the Sect Leader explained matters to Meng Hao. "When the necropolis is opened, there is a time limit in place. If you can't reach the first land mass within ten days, then something bizarre will happen in the region outside. Once, we almost exceeded that time period and... the ruins outside of the land mass returned to their ancient state. There were even living people. But then something strange happened. They all died....

"At that time, some of our people died there too....

“The time limit once you reach the first land mass is one month. If you don’t get to the second land mass by that time, then you must leave the necropolis!

“Considering the bizarre things that happen outside of the land mass when the time limit is reached, I can only imagine what happens within the land masses.

“To say that this necropolis is one of the most dangerous places in the entire Vast Expanse is no exaggeration. It’s a restricted area even for people in the 9-Essences level.

“Right now, we have no choice but to leave. We can return in one year at the soonest, and then... hopefully we can reach the second land mass. If we can, then we should be able to stay inside a bit longer.”

Even as Meng Hao listened to the Sect Leader’s explanation, he could feel his connection to the ghosts fading away. Soon, it was gone altogether, and the bronze lamp had gone almost completely dark.

His face flickered as he turned to look behind him.

When that happened, his mind spun. He saw that all of the ruins had reverted to their previous state of glory. He saw cities that existed like mirages on the surface of the land. He saw statues suddenly appear, and he saw mountains rise up which had not been there before.

Chapter 1446: The Aura of the Copper Mirror!

[/expand]

Most astonishing of all was that he could see... countless people!!

Shockingly, there were numerous cultivators, including men and women, old people and young. Apparently, this was just an ordinary day to these people, as they went about the affairs of their daily lives.

The sound of tolling bells could be heard, and the buzz of conversation. People gave sermons on the Dao in the mountaintop sects.

There... were no mortals in this place. The entire land mass was occupied by cultivators; everyone here practiced cultivation, no matter their position.

There was something warm and genial about these people. There was nothing vicious or evil about them, and everyone seemed to be smiling and laughing. Although there might be some level of fighting and scheming, some grudges or conflicts, the overall sensation was that this place was a sublime, flourishing civilization.

There was Immortal qi, strong and abundant, and Meng Hao was even able to see one area which had been set aside to grow... the most precious of materials.

Countless Immortal creatures flew about in the sky, and the sounds of happiness filled the air. At one point, an Immortal crane flew by Meng Hao, and unexpectedly... it turned its head to look at him curiously.

That single glance left his mind reeling.

“This isn’t an illusion. What I’m seeing... isn’t a hallucination, but... real? I’m actually traveling back into ancient times with this land mass?” Even as Meng Hao was reeling in shock, the other cultivators were looking around, equally astonished.

Everything around them looked beautiful and wonderful, and yet Meng Hao could sense that within the beauty, there was immense, deadly danger!

Although he wasn’t sure what exactly was so dangerous, there was no time to ponder the matter. He took a deep breath and pushed forward even faster, flying past the 8-Essences Paragons.

Everyone was going all out with their cultivation bases, trying to build up as much speed as possible. They proceeded along for an undetermined period of time, and soon, the buildings around them were completely restored. The mountains and rivers, and in fact the entire aura of the land, was that of ancient times. All of the people were completely solid and visible to the eye. It was at this point that Meng Hao and the rest of the group spotted the border of the land mass up ahead, as well as the bridge.

Before, that bridge had been made of flesh and blood, but now, it was permeated with Immortal qi, making it an Immortal bridge. There were people on it, chatting and laughing, and when they noticed Meng Hao and the rest of the group, they stopped in place and looked over.

One of them was a young man. When he spoke, his voice was clear and filled with dignity. “Excuse me, Fellow Daoists, may I ask what has you in such a panic?”

His words caused Meng Hao’s face to turn grim. Jin Yunshan’s pupils constricted, and Sha Jiudong and the Sect Leader looked on with flickering expressions. Everyone else in the group gasped.

Although they were aware that the lands they were in appeared to have returned to ancient times, and had even seen people looking at them as they sped along, they had still harbored hope that maybe it was all just a fluke....

But now, with people actually talking to them, they realized that they really were back in ancient times.

“Ancient times.... Ancient times....” As Meng Hao looked around at everything, something suddenly occurred to him. He remembered a vision he had experienced recently, and suddenly began to pant. Then he looked up into the sky, and his face fell.

“Get out of here immediately!” he said loudly. “Do it however you can, otherwise... we’ll face deadly catastrophe!!” Even as the words left his mouth, he waved his hand, sucking his two 8-Essences Paragon subordinates into his bag of holding.

His two subordinates had never seen him act this way, and as such, didn’t refuse. After they allowed Meng Hao to place them in his bag of holding, he bit his tongue, spitting out a mouthful of blood to unleash an escape magic he had acquired from Shui Dongliu’s legacy. His speed increased dramatically, instantly placing him upon the bridge itself. A huge wind blasted out as he sped along.

Everyone else in the group was taken aback. Meng Hao’s words caused their hearts to begin to thump. There was no need for them to ponder whether he might be deceiving them. The things which were happening around them were simply too strange. They immediately unleashed divine abilities, holding nothing back in their charge toward the bridge.

The young man on the bridge frowned, then snorted coldly. He extended both hands, and was just about to prepare to block the way, when suddenly a sound like thunder echoed out in the vast blue sky up above.

The sound of the thunder instantly caused all of the cultivators’ minds to reel, and their bodies to involuntarily shiver. It was the same even with Meng Hao. His face fell as all of his doubts were

swept away. He was now absolutely certain that this was the day... that he had seen in the vision, when Allheaven's finger destroyed the world!

Only moments ago, he had sensed fluctuations coming from the ninth land mass, which indicated that someone was facing a Tribulation!!

Suddenly, colors flashed in the sky, and the sound of thunder exploded out. Heaven and Earth shook violently, and all living beings in the world looked up. The young man on the bridge ignored Meng Hao and the others as he stared up into the sky, shocked.

Meng Hao flashed past the young man like lightning, and even as he reached the end of the bridge, an icy coldness began to descend.

Without thinking about it, he looked back and saw... all of the land masses quaking. Mountains shook and rivers seethed as a gigantic finger began to descend from up above!!

The finger was so big that it filled the entire sky, and as the living beings of the world looked up, their faces were filled with complete astonishment and disbelief.

To Meng Hao, even just looking at the finger caused so much pressure to crush down on him that his head felt stabs of pain, and blood sprayed out of his mouth.

“This level of power far exceeds what I felt when I faced Allheaven earlier. Based on what I saw in the visions, this time period was when Allheaven... was at a peak level of power!!”

He coughed up another mouthful of blood and pushed forward with even greater speed. At the same time that he shot off the bridge, the Sect Leader, along with Jin Yunshan, the Second Paragon, Sha Jiudong, and everyone else, stepped onto it.

No one spoke; there was no time. They unleashed all the speed they could muster to race across the bridge and toward the exit of the necropolis.

Jin Yunshan almost immediately transformed into a golden sun, and a series of after images could be seen stretching out behind him as his speed increased dramatically. As for Sha Jiudong, his body shrank down, transforming into a stream of sand that merged with the wind and sped along at top speed.

The Sect Leader took a deep breath, then took a step forward. Although that step seemed to carry him only a few meters ahead, he actually traveled 30,000 meters! It was as if he were transforming an entire swath of land into a tiny stretch of space.

Everyone else used different, varied methods to speed through the world toward the exit. It was at this point that, behind them, the Heavenly finger which filled the sky began to descend onto the first land mass.

That finger was like a world unto itself, moving with such incredible speed that it gave birth to Heavenly fire. A sea of flames spread out starting from the fingertip, and as that happened, a howl rose up from far off in the distance.

“Allheaven!!” the voice shouted, filled with rage and pain. Even as it echoed out, the finger... made contact with the land!

The surface of the land shattered. Countless sects were crushed, and countless mountains were reduced to rubble. Cities and statues fell, rivers and vegetation were destroyed....

All of the people living on the land were killed in that same moment, unable to struggle or even fight back. Their bodies... were instantly transformed into ash.

One cultivator after another was incinerated, and in the blink of an eye, the entire first land mass... became a place of death. The Immortal creatures, the precious materials, everything vanished.

The group of people on the bridge, including that young man, were shredded to pieces. Their flesh and blood splashed about, turning the bridge red, filling it with gore....

It was as if an invisible shockwave were blasting out, destroying everything that it touched....

The shockwave continued out past the borders of the land mass, spreading out into the cities which floated on the outside. They were all transformed into ruins, and everyone who lived there was killed.

Meng Hao and the other cultivators from the Vast Expanse School were all fleeing for their lives!

One of the 8-Essences Paragons was a bit too slow, and was overtaken by the shockwave. He began to tremble, and was then transformed into ash. When the rest of the group saw this, their minds reeled. Looking back at the incoming shockwave, they pushed more power out of their cultivation bases, even detonating magical items to gain more speed.

Meng Hao's face was very grim as he sped along, the fastest of the entire group. As the exit neared, he suddenly heard another shrill cry echoing out from one of the distant land masses.

“Allheaven!!” The voice said exactly the same thing it had before, but the tone was different this time. It contained sadness, insanity, and boundless enmity. In that instant, the world was plunged into sinister coldness.

Those words filled the entire world with never-ending hatred!

Meng Hao didn't look back. He continued onward, a blur as he stepped into the exit. Even as he was about to leave the necropolis, he suddenly... sensed some very familiar fluctuations. A tremor ran through him, and he stopped in place, slowly turning his head to look behind him.

When that happened, he saw a glittering beam of light shooting out from the ninth land mass toward the enormous finger. Within that beam of light... was a copper mirror!!

Within the mirror was a cold, detached figure, a colorful parrot whose eyes blazed like lightning. It was a majestic sight as the parrot slammed head first into Allheaven's finger!

“The copper mirror...” Meng Hao thought, his mind reeling. Under no circumstances could he ever have imagined... that he would see the copper mirror in this place!

Chapter 1447: Yeah, I Am!

Meng Hao stood there, one foot in the exit, a gentle force tugging at him, as if to pull him out. However, there was absolutely no way he would let his other foot step into the exit.

Trembling, he looked back at what was happening in the distant sky. The copper mirror... was something that had changed his life. Inside that mirror was the parrot, who had become his friend, his comrade!

That made him think of the meat jelly. The parrot and the meat jelly were always at each other's throats, but... they had long since become like his family.

How could he ever forget the meat jelly's talkativeness, or the parrot's boasting? How could he forget how they had called themselves Lord Fifth and Lord Third? How could he forget the seafood song?

All of those things were there in his mind, to remain there for all time. In the end, in that critical life-or-death moment, the parrot had been willing to erase its mind for Meng Hao, and the meat jelly had sacrificed its undying life force.

In the end, one of his friend's consciousnesses was wiped out, and it was taken by those two powerful forces. The other turned into a lifeless husk which was now tucked away deep in Meng Hao's bag of holding.

"The parrot...." Meng Hao murmured. In that moment, Jin Yunshan whistled past him into the exit, and then vanished. After him was Sha Jiudong, and then the Sect Leader. All of them were rushing as fast as possible to escape.

As they left, they glanced over at Meng Hao and wondered what he was hesitating about. However, there was no time to ponder the matter, and they quickly left.

Meng Hao stood there, seemingly oblivious to the cultivators from the Vast Expanse School. As they flew past him, his eyes were glued on the copper mirror.

He saw the copper mirror slam into the finger, which trembled in response. Shockingly, the finger tilted back, and cracks began to spread out over its surface. The finger even began to tremble.

A grunt of surprise could be heard, and then the cracked finger flicked the copper mirror.

The copper mirror... shattered.

Nine shards... scattered about in all directions. Eight shards flew out into the starry sky, toward parts unknown. As for the main body of the mirror, it was not shattered, but grew dark and dull as it also flew out into the depths of the starry sky.

However... one of the shards of the mirror... landed on the third land mass....

Meng Hao saw it very clearly, and when he did, he began to shake. He was suddenly filled with the impulse to go to that third land mass and find that mirror shard!!

He had the feeling that if he could find that shard, then perhaps... he could once again sense the copper mirror. Maybe he could sense the parrot!

When the mirror shattered, the figure on the ninth land mass shot toward the finger, radiating grief and madness....

As for what happened to him, Meng Hao didn't see. He was completely focused on the third land mass. Most of the cultivators from the Vast Expanse had already escaped. However, there were two 8-Essences Paragons still rushing toward the exit. They were only about thirty meters away when they suddenly trembled and transformed into dust.

In that exact same moment, the bronze lamp inside of Meng Hao went as dim as if it had been extinguished. Meng Hao could sense that it was a moment of incredible danger, and that death was rushing toward him.

He knew that he was treading a razor-thin line between life and death, and yet he still chose to open his third eye. Using the third eye, he noted the exact location on the third land mass where the mirror shard had landed, and committed it to memory.

By that time, death was almost right in front of him, like an invisible mouth preparing to consume him. In that moment, Meng Hao threw his head back and bellowed, stepped fully into the exit, and vanished.

A moment later, the ripples of death inundated the area where he had been standing.

Back on Planet Vast Expanse, in the teleportation portal formation on the half-planet....

Meng Hao materialized, coughing up a mouthful of blood. His face was pale, and yet his eyes were blazing as if with raging flames.

Everyone else looked completely bedraggled. Of the dozens of people who had gone into the necropolis, only twenty came out alive. The rest... had perished inside.

Meng Hao looked over at the Sect Leader and asked, "When can we go back in!?"

"At minimum, one year. However, there's no guarantee we can go back that soon. Various preparations must be made, and I also need to personally go ask Immortal Bai Wuchen to come with us! With her and the Second Paragon, we will have six peak 9-Essences cultivators. With you included, I'm very confident that we can open the passageway to the second land mass." The danger they had just faced did nothing to lessen the Sect Leader's resolve, and in fact, he was even more convinced than ever that they should go back.

With the Transcendence Daises, they all had a hope of Transcending!

Meng Hao stood there silently, then looked down at the teleportation portal upon which he stood. His heart was anything but calm; he had profited to an extreme level in this trip to the necropolis, most importantly, by getting a clue regarding the copper mirror. He was more determined than ever that he had to get back in!

"If I can find that mirror shard, then perhaps I could restore my connection to the copper mirror...." Meng Hao's eyes gleamed with obsession. After a moment passed, he swished his sleeve, sending his two 8-Essences subordinates flying out, looking completely shaken. Although they had been inside Meng Hao's bag of holding, he had not sealed their ability to sense what was happening in the outside world.

When Meng Hao had stopped at the exit, the two 8-Essences Paragons had felt the extreme, deadly danger of the situation.

Meng Hao's face was grim as he stepped off of the teleportation portal. He was feeling a bit frustrated, the type that came when keen anticipation filled you, but there was no option other than to wait for what you wanted.

As he left the spell formation, Jin Yunshan was there up ahead of him. After returning to the Vast Expanse School itself, he had breathed a sigh of relief. Back in the necropolis, Meng Hao held the advantage. With countless ghosts at his beck and call, it created a deadly threat that gave Jin Yunshan no choice other than to bow his head. But now that they were back in the sect, although he wouldn't intentionally provoke Meng Hao, he could at least give him a dirty look.

It wasn't that he fundamentally had the desire to irritate Meng Hao, especially not with the oaths sworn by the Sect Leader and Sha Jiudong. However, after suppressing his feelings for so long in the necropolis, now that he was back in the Vast Expanse School, it was only natural that he would want to let off at least a little bit of steam.

Meng Hao's performance on the Transcendence Dais had been miraculous, and his battle against the Heavenly might astonishing. But Jin Yunshan was convinced that Meng Hao had done all that with the help of the ghosts. Following that line of reasoning, it meant that Meng Hao had never unleashed his ninth Essence, and Jin Yunshan... simply couldn't believe that he didn't actually have one. In his estimation, Meng Hao was keeping it hidden away as a trump card.

Therefore, he had no intention of actually fighting Meng Hao, but had no qualms about giving him a spiteful stare. And thus he did.

Meng Hao's eyes narrowed in response.

"Get out of my way," he said.

Jin Yunshan frowned. They were in a very open area, and although he really was standing in front of Meng Hao, it would be very simple for Meng Hao to simply walk around him.

"Trying to start something?" Jin Yunshan replied in a grim voice, his eyes turning even icier than before.

It was a single sentence, and a single cold look. How could Jin Yunshan have ever imagined that in response, Meng Hao's eyes would turn cold, and he would say, "Yeah, I am!"

Even as the words left Meng Hao's mouth, he lunged forward and unleashed a powerful fist strike.

That fist strike combined the powers of the Life-Extermination, Self-Immolation, God-Slaying, and Devil-Butchering fists. Lands shook and mountains were rocked. Colors flashed in the sky. It was a dazzling spectacle.

Jin Yunshan's face fell. He had sustained serious injuries in the necropolis, and was currently only capable of fighting with seventy percent of his full power. When he realized that Meng Hao was suddenly attacking him, he quickly performed an incantation gesture to counterattack. A crashing boom echoed out between the two of them.

Jin Yunshan fell back, trembling, feeling more insulted than ever. Blood sprayed out of his mouth, and his eyes gleamed with madness.

The truth of the matter was... he really had no intention of fighting with Meng Hao. In his mind, standing there as he had been was nothing excessive. All he had done was cast a dirty stare in Meng Hao's direction. He hadn't done anything deliberately provocative, only acted a bit cold.

Unfortunately for him, he had no idea what kind of a lunatic he had provoked....

He had no idea, and in fact, no one did. The Sect Leader was smiling wryly, and Sha Jiudong groaned inwardly. The Second Paragon's eyes went wide; although he was aware of how overbearing Meng Hao could be, he had never imagined that he would see something like this happening. Clearly... Meng Hao was in a bad mood, and needed to vent on someone. And that someone turned out to be Jin Yunshan....

Booming sounds rang out. Jin Yunshan felt insulted and enraged. Even as he performed an incantation gesture to unleash a divine ability, Meng Hao transformed into a huge roc. Rumbling sounds could be heard as countless feathers swirled into the air, and at the same time, his Hexing magics combined!

One boom after another rang out. Jin Yunshan was already injured, and had been cowed by Meng Hao in the necropolis. He had no desire whatsoever to fight, and as such, was beaten back no matter what he did.

The Sect Leader shook his head wryly. Finally, he and Sha Jiudong jumped in and separated Meng Hao and Jin Yunshan, who glared angrily at each other as they were pulled back.

"You psycho!" said Jin Yunshan, almost yelling. He felt more insulted and maligned than ever. "You think you can just go around hitting people because you're in a bad mood? Wasn't our grudge resolved already? I gave you that bracelet of holding!!"

When Meng Hao recalled the matter of the bracelet of holding, his expression softened, and he cleared his throat. He wanted to say something, but couldn't think of anything appropriate. In the end... it was true. Because of being in a bad mood, he had been looking for trouble.

With a cold snort, he turned and flew off toward Ninth Paragon City, where he immediately went into secluded meditation.

“Psycho! Madman!” Jin Yunshan glared at the departing Meng Hao, and vowed to himself that he would get revenge somehow. But then he thought about how Meng Hao had lasted for sixteen days on the Transcendence Dais, and about how vastly separated they were in terms of power. Meng Hao hadn’t even used his ninth Essence! Most importantly, he was essentially invincible when in the necropolis, and there were surely many more trips to the necropolis coming in the future. Finally, he gave up on the idea of getting revenge.

“Dammit. I definitely have to make sure not to stand in that psycho’s way in the future!”

Chapter 1448: A Year....

It would be easier to find a phoenix feather or a qilin horn than to find someone in the Vast Expanse School who knew about what exactly had happened in the necropolis. The group which went inside sustained serious casualties: numerous 8-Essences Paragons were killed, and the Sixth and Eighth Paragons also died.

To the Vast Expanse School, that was a huge loss. However, to the individuals who survived, the benefits were immense!

8-Essences Paragons, 9-Essences Paragons, and even the handful of peak 9-Essences Paragons all spent time on the Transcendence Dais, and gained different levels of enlightenment regarding their future path. Although the paths ahead of them were not clear, their time in the necropolis ensured that the mistiness which covered them was lifted to some degree. Each and every individual believed that if they were given the opportunity to seek further enlightenment, then... the impossibility of reaching Transcendence... might change into a distinct possibility.

Although the benefits to the 8-Essences Paragons were not as great as those received by the 9-Essences experts, they were still significant. There were even some who were already gaining an understanding of their ninth Essence, and who would surely advance by leaps and bounds.

It was possible to say that, although the Vast Expanse School had experienced significant losses, the benefits to those who had survived were worth it. All of them went into secluded meditation as soon as they returned.

Meng Hao sat in his secluded meditation temple, his expression calm. He thought back to everything which had occurred in the necropolis, and his face gradually filled with a cold, unyielding expression.

He refused to give in to the idea that he could not form the Ninth Hex.

“Allheaven fears the Immortal, and his power is of the same origin as my Demonic power. This matter... is bizarre, to say the least.” After a moment of silence, his eyes glittered, and he smiled coldly.

“I can’t use this body of mine to form the Ninth Hex. If I try, I will fail.... The Ninth Hex would transform me, causing the foundation of the Immortal to appear again, and allow me to tread that path once more.

“The thing is, I don’t care whether or not I’m the Immortal. I just care about getting stronger. Immortal? Fine. Demon? Great. I don’t care, as long as I can get that ninth Essence, as long as I can extinguish the bronze lamp, as long as I can Transcend!” His eyes shone with a thoughtful gleam. If he couldn’t personally form the Ninth Hex, then he had to find some way to get someone else to help do it for him!

“Who would have thought that turning the Seal the Heavens Incantation into the Ninth Hex would cause Immortal transformation.... I suppose I could pick something else for the Ninth Hex. Maybe that would work....” He frowned.

“But that would be such a waste.” He sighed, and then suddenly, his eyes glittered as a strange idea popped up into his mind.

“Hmm....” His eyes flickered even more brightly, until he suddenly rose to his feet and began to pace back and forth in the temple. After a moment, he stopped in place.

“If this body is not suitable to form the Ninth Hex, then... what if I create a clone without any Demonic power? He would have almost no connection to me at all. Perhaps that clone could form the Ninth Hex!!

“If a Demon cannot form the Ninth Hex, then maybe an Immortal... can successfully make the Seal the Heavens Hex!

“If the clone succeeds, and my true self merges with the clone, then... I will still get the Ninth Hex in the end!” Meng Hao’s eyes began to shine brightly.

“Although it might be a bit difficult, at least I have a direction!

“The Seal the Heavens Hex incites Immortal meridians. In that case, if my clone has a pure Immortal body, then its chances for success would increase exponentially.” The more he thought about it, the more feasible it seemed.

“This clone’s mission... will be to finish the Ninth Hex!” His eyes gleamed with determination as he thought back to all of the various cloning magics he possessed. One of them was the True Self Dao, and he also had a magical technique from Shui Dongliu’s legacy.

However, none of those cloning methods could do the job perfectly. He needed a clone with no Demonic power, that could gain enlightenment of the Ninth Hex, and that he could then re-absorb.

“It won’t work unless... that clone is truly me. Even if my true self dies, the clone can live on. That type of clone would be truly independent, and yet would still be something that could merge back with me!” With that, he reached up and pressed down onto his forehead.

Rumbling filled his mind as suddenly... three Nirvana Fruits appeared!

As the Nirvana Fruits hovered in front of him, emitting dazzling light, Meng Hao smiled.

“Seventh Year Tribulation.... If Shui Dongliu could come up with that elaborate plan for the Mountains and Seas all because of the strange factors within the Fang Clan bloodline, then naturally, I can do something similar!

“My clone will be different than any other type of clone. And that is because... he will be... my fourth life!” At this point, he closed his eyes, causing their shining brightness to disappear.

Back on Planet East Victory, his Seventh Year Tribulation had caused him to wither up, and in the process, produce a Nirvana Fruit. That had occurred twice. In the seventh year of his second life, he had withered up again, and in the process of beginning his third life, produced a second Nirvana Fruit.

In that third life, his parents had accompanied him to Planet South Heaven, where he began his whirlwind of a life, a life that had led up to this very day.

Now, he wanted to forcibly begin... his fourth life. However, he wouldn't do it with his true self, but rather, a clone. His third life and his fourth life would both exist simultaneously!

It was a situation in which the roots would be the same, but the branches would be different. Fusing would also be no problem, because the bodies would be fundamentally exactly the same! At the same time, his fourth life would be a complete separation from his third life, ensuring that no Demonic power existed on the clone.

"I can use that clone to seek enlightenment of the Ninth Hex!" He took a deep breath and sat down cross-legged. Then, he pushed down on his forehead again. Rumbling sounds began to echo out as he used his Nirvana Fruits to form the body of his fourth life.

The divine ability involved required time. As Meng Hao sat there, eyes closed, life force streamed out of the Nirvana Fruits and converged upon his forehead, where it gradually began to grow stronger.

It was only a bit of life force, like a brewing seed.

Time passed. A year went by, during which time the Sect Leader sent word to Meng Hao that the preparations to go into the necropolis again required an additional, undetermined length of time.

Although Meng Hao was anxious to get back into the necropolis, the brewing clone also needed time.

Another year passed.

Meng Hao's clone was in a constant state of growth, and was rapidly reaching the point when it could begin to live his fourth life.

There in front of Meng Hao, a blurry figure could be seen. It was impossible to make out the facial features clearly, but its aura was completely different from Meng Hao's. However, Meng Hao could sense that there was some connection between the two of them, a connection that would be extremely difficult to sever.

“Three years of refining. This clone will live my fourth life. The root is the same, but the branches are different. He doesn’t have an iota of Demonic power.... Before he turns seven, I will send him into the mortal world to experience life. Seven years later, his memories will awaken. When that happens, I will be him, and he will be me. However no one else will be able to detect the connection between us, our shared root. At that time, my clone can begin to cultivate the Ninth Hex!

“I can’t rush things. The Ninth Hex is critical for me being able to Transcend!” Meng Hao looked at the blurry figure in front of him, then waved his hand. The figure transformed into a beam of light which flew out at top speed. Flying along with it was a red beam of light which, upon closer examination, could be seen to contain a tiny mastiff.

The light flew out of the half planet’s starry sky and onto Planet Vast Expanse itself. Somewhere in the land mass that belonged to Meng Hao, it vanished.

He didn’t deign to do anything to hide the matter. After all, the only people who could detect it would be the handful of people in the peak of the 9-Essences level. None of them who were watching would pay much attention to such a thing.

To them, Meng Hao was a lunatic. And lunatics... were people to be avoided. That was especially true of this particular lunatic, who was invincible within the necropolis, and could not be provoked.

Jin Yunshan and Sha Jiudong both felt that way. As for the mysterious Immortal Bai Wuchen, she kept herself separate from worldly affairs, and had no interest in matters like that.

Deep beneath the surface of the half-planet, the Sect Leader sat on the turtle shell above the sea of flames. A profound gleam appeared in his eyes, the glow of augury. After a moment passed, he slowly lowered his head.

“What divine ability was that? How come I can’t see it clearly? This Ninth Paragon is wrapped up in too many secrets.

“Well, those things are all trivial anyway.” The Sect Leader smiled, then closed his eyes. Meng Hao was now more important than ever, considering how things had gone in the necropolis. His battle prowess placed him among the Potentates, and the Sect Leader didn’t want to incur his displeasure by being overly curious.

In the year that passed, things were quiet in the Vast Expanse School. Although Meng Hao's subordinates continued to expand his power and influence on the outside, on Planet Vast Expanse itself, everything was peaceful, and no major incidents occurred.

All of the most powerful experts were in secluded meditation.

Something else happened during that year. In the starry sky of the Vast Expanse, a young man appeared. He wore a green robe and had long white hair, and was accompanied by a gentle-looking woman. They entered the Vast Expanse from the outside, and came to a stop at a location near the Immortal God Continent. As soon as they entered, the Vast Expanse began to seethe, and threatening rumbling sounds began to echo out. Some unknown force within the Vast Expanse immediately began to try to expel the white-haired young man. Apparently, if the man were to attempt to stay here, then the entire Vast Expanse would spare no effort to eject him with all its might.

He looked at the Immortal God Continent, and mixed emotions played out on his face. After a while, he sighed. The woman standing next to him seemed unable to endure the sight, and closed her eyes.

"I severed that finger all those years ago, and starting then, it became very difficult to enter this Vast Expanse. There are so many memories tied up with that land mass. It's a good thing... it's all in the past now. Those people aren't who they used to be anyway. What use is it for them to call to me...?" The young man sighed.

"Severing that finger evoked such hatred against me... bone-deep hatred!"

"As for the Fellow Daoist still wrapped up with that same hatred... once he Transcends, he'll understand everything." The white-haired young man turned. Along with the woman, he left the Vast Expanse, after which the expelling force which had risen up slowly faded away.

Another thing happened in that year. Outside of Planet Vast Expanse was a cultivator clan which was said to have existed since ancient times. The person who had led them in their recent comeback was a female Chosen, and during that year, she joined the Vast Expanse School. After being accepted into the Sect Leader's division, the Sect Leader himself appeared, which was rare. Looking at her surname, he asked her what her given name was.

The woman smiled and replied. "Bei. Disciple Han Bei at your service."

The final event which occurred during that year occurred on the border of the ninth land mass of Planet Vast Expanse. There, a small forested mountain could be seen, beneath which flowed a river. A middle-aged scholar was sitting next to that river, reading a book. Suddenly, he looked up and saw a sleeping baby floating along above the surface of the river.

The baby had a wooden tablet lying on his chest, with a name written on it. Fang Mu. Within the baby's hand was a fruit that seemed to be made of gold or jade, and yet wasn't. An aura like that of reincarnation could be detected, as well as the Dao of Nirvana. Next to the baby was a little dog, which was happily licking the baby's cheek.

The water parted for the baby, and fish leaped up excitedly. The sunlight didn't dare to strike the baby too harshly, and the countless beasts which peeked out from within the trees of the forest wouldn't harm a hair on his head.

Chapter 1449: Haowie

On the border of the ninth continent of Planet Vast Expanse was a river which snaked back and forth to parts unknown, dotted on either side by little villages.

One of them was called Peach Blossom Village.

A few hundred people lived in the village, and generally speaking, they all got along well with each other. Supposedly, they descended from a group that migrated to this location from one of the great clans many years in the past. Exactly what happened along the way was unknown, but years later, Peach Blossom Village came to be.

Most of the people who live there made a living by hunting or fishing. In the morning, smoke would curl up from kitchen chimneys, and at night, the stars twinkled in the sky. It was a peaceful and auspicious place....

Occasionally, though, a commotion would break out, and one might even hear shouts of rage....

“Fang Mu! Haowie! When I get my hands on you I'm gonna spank that little butt of yours!”

“I don't care what you say, I've had enough. Stop right there, Fang Mu! If you try to run, I'll just have to have a word or two with that drunkard father of yours!”

“That’s my rooster! Y-y-you... you can’t take my rooster!”

On one particular morning, as smoke rose from the chimneys, cries like this echoed out in the village. The voices belonged to the elderly, the village grownups, and even children.

Meanwhile, a six-year-old boy was hiding in the bushes in a far corner of the village, looking very pleased with himself. He was handsome, with eyes that glittered like stars and skin as smooth as jade. He wore rough, hemp garments, and even had some mud smudged on his face, but that couldn’t conceal the clever, intelligent gleam in his eyes.

His hand was clasped around the throat of a chicken. At first glance, the chicken appeared to be struggling, but closer examination revealed that it was trembling. It trembled, not because of the boy, but because of the hunting dog that was stretched out on the ground off to the side.

The dog lay there lazily, and yet it emanated an invisible pressure. Whenever the chicken started to struggle, the dog would growl, and the chicken would instantly sag listlessly in fright.

Some time passed, and the village eventually quieted down. The boy licked his lips, then slowly began to tip-toe his way back through the village, chicken in hand. The hunting dog followed along, also licking its lips.

“This isn’t for you,” the boy whispered, “so don’t even think about it. This is my tuition!” He threaded his way through the village until he found himself in front of a somewhat dilapidated house, whereupon he gave the gate an urgent kick.

“Master!” he whispered. “Open up. Hurry!”

The gate opened, revealing a slovenly old man. He reached out, dragged the boy inside, then looked around to see if anyone had noticed before closing the gate.

As soon as he was inside the courtyard, the boy spoke in a loud voice, “Master, you old fogey, I brought this rooster as my tuition. I want to study Immortal magic!”

The old man wasn’t very tall, and had a hunched back. He turned and looked at the boy with narrowed eyes, then looked at the chicken, and began to salivate.

“Excellent. Excellent,” he said, sounding very serious. “Ah, you know how to bring gifts to your Master, kid, you really have potential. Alright, fine. After I deal with this evil creature, I’ll teach you some Immortal magic!

“You just wait here for a bit while I convert the wicked, shameless beast!” With that, he grabbed the chicken and took a few steps toward the house.

“Master, how are you going to convert it?” asked the boy, eyes wide with curiosity.

“No peeking,” the old man said sternly. “Master is going to be using some magic, so you’ll probably smell something strange. There’s not much spiritual energy in this remote place, plus I’m injured, so I’m counting on you to act as Dharma Protector.

“Haowie, I’m placing my life in your hands. You must do a good job as Dharma Protector.”

The young boy nodded excitedly in response.

The old man entered the house, and a few moments later, a miserable squawk could be heard. Then came the sound of feathers being plucked, and the hiss of boiling water. Before long, a fragrant aroma drifted out.

The boy was very curious, and after a bit of time, couldn’t help but ask, “Master, since this evil creature is a monster, why is it so weak? I caught it almost without even trying.”

“That’s because Master used some magic earlier to drain its power.” By this point, it sounded like someone was eating a meal inside the house.

“Master, I’ve helped you catch a lot of monsters throughout the years. In fact, the village is almost completely cleared out of the things. That’s why my dad spansks me all the time. When are we going to leave the village to kill some monsters and fiends?”

“Oh, there’s no hurry. Yesterday, I noticed a mutt in the yard of Old Zhu’s house on the west side of the village. You should bring that dog over to me for inspection. It’s also an evil creature!” The sounds of ravenous devouring could now be heard in the courtyard.

The boy looked quietly up into the sky.

“Master, my dad’s temper is really bad. A few days ago when he was spanking me, he said I was the reason he failed in the Imperial examinations.

“Oh, another thing. He said I got picked up out of the river, right?”

“I’ve been having a lot of dreams lately. I dream about weird people and strange things. I even see people flying around. Something about all of it seems really familiar. It’s almost like someone is calling out to me, as if... there are two me’s.” The boy seemed to have difficulty expressing what exactly he wanted to say, and the more he talked, the more confused he seemed.

At some point, the slovenly old man had emerged from his house, and was now standing in front of the boy, looking at him.

“Don’t let your imagination run too wild,” he said, yawning. “Two you’s? You’re talking about a clone, and only very powerful people can have clones. Yes... powerful people like your Master. Tell me, based on your feeling, where is this other version of you?”

“There...” said the boy, rising to his feet and pointing off in a certain direction, a blank look on his face. “There. Very, very far away. I dreamed about a huge temple, and lots of mountains.”

“Hahaha! Master knows exactly what place you’re talking about. That’s the Ninth Sect! The Vast Expanse School’s Ninth Sect. Now that I think about it, the Ninth Sect has been recruiting disciples in this area recently. If you serve Master well, I might be able to recommend you.” The old man chuckled. Seeing the blank look on the boy’s face, he reached out and tousled his hair.

“Alright, fine. You’ve always loved to let your imagination run wild. Poor kid. Okay, I’m going to teach you some amazing Immortal magic today. It’s a natural Heavenly Dao, something Heaven-shaking and Earth-shattering, something that ghosts and gods alike revere. We’re talking about the essence of life here, the origin of all magics, the Dao of all Daos!” The boy’s previous confusion was gone, and now he seemed excited.

“Let’s go!” said the old man, looking up at the evening sky. He led the way out of the courtyard and then down a little path behind the house. The boy followed along, as did the lazy dog.

They walked along for awhile until it was dark, whereupon they reached the back courtyard of a certain house. The old man looked this way and that, then leaped over the wall and into the

courtyard with the boy. Then, he whispered, “You’re definitely not allowed to see what will happen in a moment. Just listen. There’s going to be a sermon on the Dao, understand? Master is going to be doing some cultivating. You just stand there and watch me as I, er, I mean, you stand watch as Dharma Protector.”

The boy’s heart began to pound, and he nodded eagerly. Looking pleased, the old man walked over and entered the house. Moments later, the boy heard the voice of a woman.

“What took you so long, you old bastard?”

“I’m here now, heh heh. Alright, let’s hurry things up. I’m going to perform some magic for you....”

Soon, some very strange noises could be heard coming from inside the house. The boy’s eyes went wide. He didn’t quite understand what was happening, but he suddenly remembered that Widow Li often had male visitors coming and going, bringing her various gifts.

“So, it turns out Widow Li is a cultivator!” he murmured. He was so engrossed in listening to what was happening that he didn’t notice something behind him. At some point, a blurry figure had appeared. Of course, even if the boy hadn’t been so engrossed, he probably still wouldn’t have noticed.

It was a young man wearing a green robe. He looked like a scholar, except his expression was cold. He appeared on the scene without making the slightest sound, although his arrival caused the starlight to distort somewhat. The hunting dog shivered, and a warm look appeared in its eyes.

“Seventh Year Tribulation.... Tonight, my clone’s Seventh Year Tribulation will come.... After the tribulation, his memories will eventually return. Then, he will be me, and I will be him.” That young man was none other than Meng Hao, and this boy was the clone he had sent into the mortal world to live his fourth life. He was also the clone who would seek enlightenment of the Ninth Hex.

“It should be coming any time now,” Meng Hao said softly. In almost the exact same instant that the words left his mouth, a tremor ran through the boy, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. He let out a sudden cry as his body began to wither.

The sudden cry startled the old man, and also rang out through the quiet night to be heard by other villagers. The old man rushed out of the house, and when he saw the boy, a look of sincere concern appeared on his face. The truth was that he really did care for the child, and because of that, he quickly ran over and pushed his hand down onto his forehead. Nothing happened. The old man’s

face fell. He knew that some vile ailments were best treated by medicinal plant concoctions prepared by doctors, so he scooped the boy up in his arms and raced through the village toward the doctor's house.

It was a sleepless night for most of the villagers in Peach Blossom Village. At some point, dark, churning clouds had filled the sky, though no rain fell. Thunder boomed, and gradually a mist built up. Strangely, the mist was violet-colored, and roiled as if countless terrifying entities existed inside of it whose roars echoed out into the night.

The little boy who had somehow come to be known as Haowie lay trembling in the courtyard of the doctor's house. Many villagers were present, including the slovenly old man. There was also a middle-aged scholar who, despite wearing his scholar's robe, had a stubbly beard, and held a flagon of alcohol in his hand. His eyes were blank and unfocused.

This was the boy's father. Years ago, he hadn't been like this. However, after failing the Imperial examinations, he had abandoned himself to despair. He was as drunk as usual, and had been physically dragged over to the doctor's house by one of the other villagers.

"I can't save him," the doctor said, sighing.

When the middle-aged scholar heard that, he looked over at the boy he had picked up out of the river, who was now withered and gaunt. The scholar shivered, then raised his alcohol flagon and took a long swig.

"He's better off dead...." he murmured, sounding pained.

The other villagers in the courtyard sighed sadly. Although the boy was often a bit naughty, to see him die of illness like this was very distressing.

Meng Hao currently hovered up above, looking down silently at the events playing out. Just when he was about to reach out his hand, though, something happened.

"Who said he's better off dead! Haowie's not going to die!" The old man strode forward, eyes bloodshot as he once again took the boy into his arms.

“He’s not going to die, you hear me?!” he yelled. “He’s just sick, right? You people can’t save him, and his dad doesn’t care, but I’m his Master and I care!” With that, the old man carried the boy away.

Everyone was shocked, and instantly devolved into a hubbub of voices. Suddenly, people saw the old man erratically flying up into the air, which caused the entire village to break out into an even bigger commotion.

Meng Hao hovered there, watching thoughtfully. Gradually, he faded away. He could sense that his clone was gradually awakening, and that soon, there would truly be two versions of himself.

Chapter 1450: Joining the Sect!

“Maybe mortals can’t save him,” said the old man through gritted teeth as he floated up into the air, “but cultivators can!” His cultivation base wasn’t very high, and he had been seriously injured years ago. His longevity was nearing its end, and therefore flight was only possible for him by burning some of his life force quintessence. Even that wasn’t something he could do for extended periods of time.

He had once thought that he would simply grow old and die in Peach Blossom Village. He had never imagined that he would encounter this young boy who he now held in his arms. In fact, it wasn’t really the scholar who had raised the boy, it was this old man who had guided him through his young life.

“It’s just some illness, right?!” the old man growled. Soon, he had flown to the peak of a nearby mountain. There, he very gingerly pulled a jade slip out of his garment, an old jade slip that was worn and almost broken. After pulling it out, he looked down at it with a bit of hesitation. This was the most precious item he possessed, and even he wasn’t sure where it came from. However, he was certain that the divine ability it contained was unique and profound.

Sadly, his latent talent was only average, and he had never been able to cultivate it successfully. However, he distinctly remembered how, back in the days when he had come to acquire it, numerous cultivators had been fighting over it, all of whom had seemed very powerful to him.

Gritting his teeth, he cast aside all hesitation, and pushed his finger down onto the surface of the jade slip. Instantly, he seemed to age even more, and yet, a seal opened on the jade slip. A majestic beam of light shot up into the sky that was visible even from a vast distance away.

Obviously, the old man had unsealed the jade slip in order to attract the attention of nearby cultivators, and was planning to offer the slip itself as payment for them to save the young boy.

The old man didn't bother to ponder whether or not this course of action could potentially be dangerous. In his mind, any danger was worth braving when compared to the hope it offered. After all, he clearly remembered seeing some disciples from the Vast Expanse School flying about recently, and after a bit of calculation, was certain it was recruitment season on the Vast Expanse School's ninth continent.

In the past, the Vast Expanse School had very strict requirements for new disciples, but in recent years the Ninth Sect had been expanding. Cultivators from the Ninth Sect had been combing the continent looking for children with exceptional latent talent, and taking them back to the sect to begin practicing cultivation.

The light hadn't been shining from the jade slip for very long before a few beams of light could be seen shooting through the air toward it. Three people became visible, all of them middle-aged men. They had extraordinary cultivation bases, and after they landed and saw the jade slip, their expressions flickered.

The slovenly old man immediately clasped hands and bowed deeply.

“May I ask if you are Fellow Daoists from the Vast Expanse School? I am Sun Dalei, a humble rogue cultivator. Today, I would like to offer this treasure in exchange for help from you Fellow Daoists. Please save this young boy's life.”

The three cultivators looked at the boy, and then the leader of the small group made a grasping motion, causing the jade slip to fly over into his hand. After examining it for a moment, a smile broke out on his face.

“So, this jade slip contains a legacy.” Laughing heartily, he waved his sleeve, sending a stream of spiritual energy into the boy. Then, without another look, he turned and prepared to leave, as did his two companions, who looked just as delighted as him.

The slovenly old man was getting very nervous. The boy was still in a withered state, and didn't really look much better than before. The old man suddenly blurted, “Fellow Daoists, this boy... has uncharacteristically rare latent talent. He has an enlightened soul, spirit bones, and spirit-attuned blood vessels!”

The three cultivators stopped in their tracks. The man with the jade slip frowned. Their mission was to find disciples with exceptional latent talent, and the bizarre transformations of Heaven and Earth which had struck the nearby village was why they had come to this location in the first place. That was also why they had shown up so quickly in response to the light from the jade slip.

After hearing the old man's words, the cultivator who had taken the jade slip walked over to the boy's side and placed his hand onto his forehead. After a thorough examination, the man began to tremble.

"Junior Brothers, you take a look too!" With that, the two other cultivators came over to inspect the boy. After they did, they seemed equally moved.

"That's Superlative latent talent!"

"He really does have spirit bones, an enlightened soul, and naturally-occurring spirit-refined blood!"

"Of all the fledglings we've found recently, he's the best by far!!"

The three cultivators' eyes burned with fervor. Because of the recent expansion of the Ninth Sect, more disciples were being recruited than ever. As for these three cultivators, if they found children in the mortal world who had exceptional latent talent, and then brought them back to the sect, they would receive handsome rewards in the form of cultivation resources.

The three immediately looked over at the slovenly old man and began to ask questions.

"What's this kid's name?" said one of them.

"Fang Mu!" replied the old man.

"Are you a relative of his? He's sick, and we need to take him back to the sect to be treated. Afterward we wish for him to become a disciple of the Vast Expanse School."

The old man immediately nodded in assent. As far as he was concerned, Haowie's only chance at survival was to go to the Vast Expanse School, which was one of the sects that he believed to be trustworthy.

The three cultivators didn't say anything more. They picked the boy up, then transformed into beams of light that shot off into the distance. Soon, they reached a wide plain, in the middle of which was a teleportation portal. As was the norm, the teleportation portal was protected by a shield that would prevent anyone except cultivators of the Vast Expanse School from entering it.

The three stepped onto the teleportation portal, and moments later, glittering light rose up as they and the boy were teleported away.

Off in the distance, the slovenly old man could just barely see the light of teleportation, and he sighed. Although he didn't wish to part with the boy, an expression of anticipation could still be seen in his eyes.

He had known almost from the beginning that the boy named Fang Mu had incredible latent talent, talent that could shake Heaven and Earth. His original plan had been to wait for a few more years, then take the boy out into the world. He would call upon some of his old acquaintances in the cultivation world to get the boy a spot in a sect, and thus start him on his path of cultivation.

Even though the events of the day were somewhat coincidental, as far as the old man was concerned, Fang Mu being able to join the Vast Expanse School was a stroke of luck.

Eventually, the old man sighed and headed back to the village. As the moon shone down from above, the old man looked even older than before, and a bit more lonely.

The truth was that even if the old man hadn't brought the boy to the top of that mountain, the three cultivators from the Vast Expanse School would still have come. The transformations to Heaven and Earth that had occurred in the village had attracted them, and either way, they would have seen how special the boy was and taken him to their sect.

All of that had long since been arranged by Meng Hao.

It was the most convenient way to arrange for his clone to seek enlightenment of the Ninth Hex.

Meanwhile, a teleportation portal began to shine somewhere in the Ninth Sect. The three middle-aged cultivators appeared, carrying Meng Hao's clone. After stepping off of the teleportation portal, they headed toward the main temple of the sect.

Before long, rumbling sounds echoed out in the sect as several beams of light shot toward the temple. That attracted the attention of a lot of nearby disciples, who looked over in curiosity to see what was happening.

Inside the temple, several old men had just sat down cross-legged around Meng Hao's clone. All of them were pouring cultivation base power into his body, which was gradually recovering from its withered state.

“He really does have Superlative latent talent. In all my years, I've never seen anyone who actually has real, Superlative latent talent!”

“He even has spirit bones, an enlightened soul, and spirit-attuned blood vessels! He's not a child, he's a precious bodily treasure! I've never seen or even heard of anything like it!!”

“If this kid practices cultivation, he'll definitely make rapid progress!!”

The entire group was abuzz with conversation. Any other type of latent talent would not have provoked such a reaction. But he had Superlative latent talent, along with spirit bones, an enlightened soul, and spirit-attuned blood vessels. This clone of Meng Hao's was like a rare gem!

Soon, Meng Hao's clone was no longer withered, which the old men believed to be due to their treatment. However, he looked even thinner and weaker than he had before, and was apparently now in a very deep sleep.

“Take him to one of the side chambers and have someone look after him. When he wakes up, arrange for him to formally join the sect.” The old men were all exhausted from their efforts. After making the necessary arrangements, they looked at Meng Hao's clone, excitement glittering in their eyes. Finally, they returned to their own residences to start the breathing exercises necessary to restore their cultivation bases.

A few days later, Meng Hao's clone opened his eyes. At first he looked confused, but then his vision focused, and his eyes began to radiate bright, cold light.

It was very strange to see a look like that in the eyes of a young boy.

Soon, the coldness faded away, and his eyes returned to normal.

“I’m awake,” he murmured. He felt as if he had just woken up from a dream. He could even sense his true self, deep beneath the surface of the main planet, on that half-planet, sitting there cross-legged in the Ninth Paragon’s secluded meditation facilities.

As of this moment, Meng Hao’s true self finally breathed a sigh of relief. At long last he could focus fully on seeking enlightenment of his eight Essences.

“This clone will live my fourth life. His only mission is to successfully form the Ninth Hex!

“As for his cultivation.... Well, I created the clone’s body after carefully observing my own body, which was re-moulded by the bronze lamp. In all of Planet Vast Expanse, and in fact, in all of the Vast Expanse itself, it would be easier to find a phoenix feather or a qilin horn than it would be to find someone whose latent talent exceeds this clone’s!

“Since that’s the case, he can elevate his cultivation base much more quickly than normal. Rise to prominence in the Ninth Sect. Reach the pinnacle, step by step. It shouldn’t be difficult.

“With no Demonic power, his body is pure in every sense of the word.” A satisfied gleam appeared in Meng Hao’s eyes.

Several days later, Meng Hao became a disciple of the Vast Expanse School. His latent talent shook the entire Ninth Sect, and when the Dao Realm Patriarch heard of the matter and investigated it personally, he dispatched people to Peach Blossom Village to make further inquiries and make sure nothing was amiss. Meng Hao was then sent to one of the Ninth Sect’s numerous subdivisions, where he became an Inner Sect disciple.

This year was tenth in which Meng Hao’s true self was the Ninth Paragon.

This year, a disciple by the name of Han Bei became one of the sect’s Holy Daughter-designates.

This year, Meng Hao’s clone Fang Mu became the Inner Sect disciple one of the subdivisions of the Ninth Sect!

Neither the slovenly old man, nor the three cultivators who had brought the clone back to the sect, nor the old men who had treated his condition, nor anyone in all of Planet Vast Expanse, could ever

have imagined what a dazzling flower this Fang Mu would bloom into. Only Meng Hao's true self knew.

He might shrivel away into nothing... or perhaps, he would blossom a bloody scarlet color...