

The Heavens 1451

Chapter 1451: Han Beis Secret!

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The techniques of the Vast Expanse School were many and varied, and could be said to be all-encompassing. However, in terms of fundamentals, they were different than the magical techniques of the Mountain and Sea Realm. Instead of being driven by the energy of Heaven and Earth, they were driven by the energy of the Vast Expanse.

Cultivation in the Vast Expanse involved breathing techniques to absorb its energy, and resulted in forming a unique great Dao.

After he became an Inner Sect disciple, Meng Hao's seven-year-old clone resided in a special residence set aside for him by the sect. He rarely left his home, and as such, didn't know much about the outside world.

But that changed after a year passed. After only one year of practicing cultivation, Tribulation Lightning descended on Meng Hao's residence. It destroyed the house and shattered the courtyard, and caused widespread shock among the surrounding disciples of the Ninth Sect.

Even some of the old-timers were astonished by the 9 successive bolts of lightning which fell from the sky. Afterward, a young boy emerged from the wreckage of the courtyard residence.

Shockingly, he was accompanied by... the aura of Foundation Establishment!

Foundation Establishment in and of itself wasn't anything spectacular. However, the Tribulation Lightning was a bit of a surprise, and then some of the disciples realized that it was Meng Hao who had appeared from within it.

"If I remember correctly... he joined the sect last year, as a mortal..."

"How is that even possible? One year? One year!? He... he reached Foundation Establishment that quickly?"

“What’s his name again? Oh right, Fang Mu. His name is Fang Mu!”

Meng Hao’s clone Fang Mu experienced nine bolts of Tribulation Lightning, and reached Foundation Establishment. The news caused a small-scale stir, but the sect as a whole was huge, and Meng Hao was merely an Inner Sect disciple in one of many subdivisions.

Normally speaking, it was a matter that would quickly become forgotten. Meng Hao might have extraordinary latent talent, and might have reached Foundation Establishment in only a year, but Foundation Establishment didn’t count for much in the Ninth Sect as a whole. The number of Foundation Establishment cultivators in the sect was impossible to even count.

Even within that subdivision, they were as numerous as the hairs on an ox.

But... something happened a year later, in the same residence. Tribulation Lightning struck again, but this time, in greater number. 99 bolts of lightning fell onto the residence. Rumbling echoed out, and the residence and courtyard were destroyed. When Meng Hao emerged, he no longer emitted the aura of Foundation Establishment, but rather... Core Formation!!

The entire subdivision was thrown into a commotion that far exceeded that of the previous year. Countless people were completely shocked, even the Elders. The Subdivision Head personally came to investigate, and was astonished.

There were still plenty of people who were more powerful than him, but what was most shocking was the speed of his progress. To many people, such a thing was almost impossible to believe.

“Foundation Establishment in one year? Then Core Formation in another year? Don’t tell me... he’s going to reach Nascent Soul in a year too?”

“What type of latent talent does he have?”

By now, more and more people were talking about this Fang Mu. In fact, word was spreading outside his subdivision and into other subdivisions.

Then... the third year passed. 999 bolts of Tribulation Lightning descended, and Meng Hao reached Nascent Soul!

In the fifth year, he reached Spirit Severing, and 9,999 lightning bolts fell. All subdivisions of the Ninth Sect were completely shaken. The rainstorm-like hail of Tribulation Lightning shook the whole Ninth Sect, and Fang Mu's name was the subject of countless conversations.

In the seventh year, his moment of reaching Dao Seeking was a grand occasion for vast numbers of cultivators in the Ninth Sect. Numerous cultivators watched as a tempest of Tribulation Lightning bolts descended, only one lightning bolt short of 100,000. It was a power of Tribulation that very few Dao Seeking cultivators could fight back against. It was as if Heaven and Earth, as if the Vast Expanse, were trying to completely wipe Meng Hao's clone out of existence!

However, as the lightning fell onto the clone, his eyes shone brightly. It was as if... he was directly opposing the Vast Expanse!

The lightning fell for ten days, after which Meng Hao's clone was in Dao Seeking!

Time flew. The tenth year arrived.

Ten years ago, Meng Hao's clone had been nothing more than a weak child. But now, ten years later, he was a handsome and extraordinary young man. He stood tall and straight atop one of the mountains in the Ninth Sect, looking up into the sky, which rumbled as Tribulation Lightning began to build up.

It was... Immortal Tribulation!

In ten short years, Meng Hao's clone had created a legend on Planet Vast Expanse, even a myth!

In ten years, he went from being a mortal, to reaching Foundation Establishment, Core Formation, Nascent Soul, Spirit Severing, Dao Seeking, and Immortal Ascension!

That was a process that some people never completed within their whole lifetime, and yet Meng Hao's clone did it in ten years. The entire Ninth Sect was shaken, as was the Vast Expanse School as a whole. Even Paragons got wind of it.

The Immortal Tribulation was even more stunning than the tribulations from before it. 1,000,000 lightning bolts descended onto the ninth continent, causing all the lands to shake. People flew up into the air from all the other sects that were part of the Vast Expanse School, all to watch the Immortal Tribulation.

The Ninth Sect was very excited, and even sent someone out to act as Dharma Protector for their number one Chosen.

That person was a Dao Sovereign, a woman of extraordinary beauty. She sat on the Ninth Sect's Dao mountain, looking up into the sky with a look of surprise.

“This is a mere Immortal Tribulation, and yet the Vast Expanse sends Tribulation Lightning like this? It's almost as if there's a Heavenly Dao or a magical law of nature intent on preventing lightning that exceeds his cultivation base from descending. Were it not for that, the Vast Expanse would wipe him out in body and mind.” The Dao Sovereign found it very strange, especially when she realized that she could sense... fluctuations of fear.

“Fear?” she thought, shaking her head and wondering if she was mistaken. “The Vast Expanse is boundless and majestic. Even if it really does have a will of its own, how could it fear a trifling Immortal Realm cultivator?”

The Immortal Tribulation lasted for three whole months before it faded away. During that entire time, Meng Hao's clone proudly closed his eyes and allowed himself to be bathed by the Tribulation Lightning.

He didn't fight back or resist it. He allowed the lightning to strike him. It was like a baptism in which he didn't move an inch. That, of course, led to widespread shock.

When the last bit of the Immortal Tribulation was about to fade away, Meng Hao's eyes suddenly opened, and he reached out, pointing his finger up at the Heavens.

He did not speak, but the gesture of pointing his finger caused colors to flash, and a gale-force wind to scream. The entire sky seemed to tremble, and countless Tribulation Lightning bolts shattered, transforming into motes of light that drifted out. At this point, the Immortal Tribulation ended, and Meng Hao's clone began to emanate Immortal qi.

But then, the sky shook, and a red bolt of lightning suddenly formed, shooting down toward Fang Mu. It was backed by a shocking will, and unexpectedly radiated the might of the Dao Realm.

Even as the red bolt of lightning descended, a red cloud appeared up above, and red rain began to fall. It was a sight shocking to all, that caused even the female Dao Sovereign's face to fall.

“The blood of the Heavens! That means... the Dao of the Vast Expanse Society is violating its own magical laws, paying the highest price to eliminate this young man by sending Tribulation Lightning against him that exceeds the Immortal Realm!” The Dao Sovereign was just about to do something when, all of a sudden, the red bolt of lightning lurched to a halt about 300 meters away from Fang Mu’s head. There it remained in midair, completely unmoving.

An incredible pressure suddenly filled the entire continent. At some point, a person had appeared in the air. It was a young man wearing a black robe, with long violet hair. As he floated there, he radiated a supremely domineering aura, as if he were the most important entity in existence!

Boundless coldness roiled off of him, and a red, Demonic glow could be seen in his eyes. On his forehead was a long violet mark that was apparently a closed third eye!

“Ninth Paragon!!” blurted the female Dao Sovereign. Trembling, she dropped to her knees to kowtow. In that same moment, countless cultivators in the vast area that made up the Ninth Sect, regardless of the levels of their cultivation base, dropped trembling to the ground.

“We offer respectful greetings, Ninth Paragon!”

“We offer respectful greetings, Ninth Paragon!!”

The sounds echoed out, causing everything to shake. To the cultivators in the Ninth Sect, the Ninth Paragon was their lord, their spirit, and their leader, the most ultimate of monarchs.

This was none other than Meng Hao’s true self!

As soon as he realized that there was something out of the ordinary with this bolt of Tribulation Lightning, he came as his true self. As soon as he appeared, he reached out and grabbed the bolt of red lightning, then crushed it in his hand.

A boom rang out as the lightning bolt shattered. The cloud layers up above roiled, and a faint roar of rage could be heard.

Meng Hao’s true self looked up into the sky, eyes glowing red.

“Scram!” he said, flicking his sleeve. Then, a massive blast of energy exploded out as he flew up toward the clouds.

At the same time, his clone stood on the mountain, looking up into the sky, his eyes glowing without the slightest hint of red. They only contained pure, Immortal light.

The Heavens trembled, and the clouds ceased to seethe. In fact, they collapsed, and their redness faded away. The sky went dark, and outside of Planet Vast Expanse, boundless ripples spread out into the Vast Expanse for a long moment before everything finally went still.

Having accomplished these things, he prepared to vanish. But then, he looked out into the void and saw something far off in the distance that made him stop.

His glance caused the void to vibrate, as if someone were out there, reeling in shock. Suddenly, Han Bei stumbled out into the open, mixed emotions on her face, including shock as she looked at Meng Hao’s true self, and his clone.

A tremor ran through her, and without the slightest hesitation, she began to back up. However, even as she did, Meng Hao reached out and made a grasping motion.

The entire world seemed to freeze in place as a tremendous power rumbled out. Even as that power was about to sweep over Han Bei, fluctuations suddenly began to emanate out from her that Meng Hao recognized!

It was... the aura of Allheaven! The aura of a Demon!!

Chapter 1452: Leverage!

The aura was obscure. In the moment that it exploded out, it transformed into a teleportation power which whisked Han Bei away, right out from Meng Hao’s grasp.

When she reappeared, she was back in the First Sect of the Vast Expanse School, in her secluded meditation facilities. Blood immediately began to ooze out of her mouth, but it was without the slightest hesitation that she produced an ancient Feng Shui compass from her bag of holding, which she then placed onto the ground in front of her.

Ripples immediately began to spread out, filling the area and protecting her within their range.

Han Bei was shivering, her breath coming in rapid pants, her face covered with a look of disbelief.

Her mind had been thrown into chaos thanks to Meng Hao's sudden appearance. Earlier, she had felt the tug of memory after hearing the name Fang Mu, which was why she had gone to take a look. How could she ever have imagined what would result?

"Meng Hao, Fang Mu...." She took a deep breath, performing a double-handed incantation gesture to strengthen the power of the Feng Shui compass.

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The way Han Bei had suddenly escaped was strange to say the least, and in fact, other than Meng Hao, no one on Planet Vast Expanse even noticed her.

Meng Hao's true self looked at the spot where she had disappeared, eyes glittering.

"Han Bei.... I can't believe she's here!" He couldn't help but think back to when he had seen her on the enormous God corpse. Then he recalled all her unusual behavior back on Planet South Heaven. Of course, a thorough analysis couldn't leave out the fact that his earliest dealings with her stretched back to the Black Sieve Sect's Blessed Land!

That was where he had found the meat jelly, and also where the Lightning Cauldron came from. Furthermore, sealed inside that land had also been... the soul of Han Bei's ancestor!

Meng Hao's eyes shone with bright light. If he had seen Han Bei in this situation before going to the necropolis, his analysis of the situation would still have occupied him, but the conclusions he would have arrived at would be far different than the truth that presented itself now. After his visit to the necropolis, though, he had learned much about many things. Because of that, he knew that Han Bei's method of escape contained a bit of the aura of Allheaven, as well as some Demonic power. That left him completely convinced...

That Han Bei had something to do with Allheaven!

Cold light flickered in Meng Hao's eyes as he suddenly flickered into motion and vanished.

Meng Hao's clone was still on top of the mountain, looking up into the sky in the direction of where Han Bei had appeared. His eyes were narrowed, but after a moment they returned to normal.

Meanwhile, Han Bei was still ashen-faced after being teleported back from the Ninth Sect. Her heart was filled with an uneasy premonition, as if a great disaster were heading her way. Deep within her, a sensation of imminent crisis was building up.

People on Planet Vast Expanse believed her to be from what was known as an ancient cultivator clan. After joining the sect, the cultivation base power she revealed was that of the peak of the Immortal Realm.

However, after seeing Meng Hao and his clone, she felt something threatening looming behind her like a razor-sharp needle.

“What are you doing on Planet Vast Expanse? I can't believe... that you're the Ninth Paragon? How is that even possible!?” Han Bei's face was completely ashen. Her secluded meditation facilities were surrounded by countless restrictive spells, and yet that didn't leave her feeling safe at all. During the clone's Tribulation, Meng Hao's true self had looked at her, and although his gaze was calm, it was filled with a brilliance that struck her heart with dread.

And in fact, to feel dread was the correct response. After all, it wasn't very long after she returned to her secluded meditation facilities that rumbling sounds filled the air outside.

The sounds were intense, but apparently, they were being restricted to a small area, making it impossible for anyone outside to hear. However, the area where Han Bei was located was shaking so hard that mountains were rocking back and forth, and buildings were collapsing. However, the Feng Shui compass shone with brilliant light, blocking that force. If not, she would have been immediately engulfed in the destructive power that was buckling the surrounding area.

Han Bei then looked up to see Meng Hao's true self standing there outside her secluded meditation facilities, prevented from entering by the Feng Shui compass shield.

He wore a black robe, and his expression was cold and icy. His hair floated in the wind, and a violet third eye could be seen on his forehead. Although it was closed, it still radiated majestic power.

“It's always nice to reunite with old friends,” he said coolly. “Why are you so afraid of me, Han Bei?”

Han Bei shivered as she looked at Meng Hao, her expression filled with mixed emotions. She couldn't stop from shaking; she knew that her sudden appearance would be a big shock to Meng Hao, mainly because of the destruction of the Mountain and Sea Realm. Everyone else was back on the Mountain and Sea Butterfly, so why... was she here, having assumed the identity of a Holy Daughter-designate of the Vast Expanse School?

Han Bei took a deep breath and put a calm expression on her face. She was an adept schemer, but this turn of events had been too sudden, which caused her to panic. However, now her mind had settled down and she rose to her feet, eyes flickering. She gave Meng Hao a curtsying bow, clasped hands and said, "Han Bei offers greetings, Ninth Paragon."

Then she looked up calmly into Meng Hao's eyes. "However, this is Junior's first time meeting the exalted Paragon. When you say 'old friends,' what exactly is it that you mean?"

Meng Hao looked back at her, seemingly unfazed by her behavior. In fact, it corresponded exactly to the old Han Bei that he remembered. He suddenly smiled, although it was an icy cold smile.

Then his gaze came to rest on the ancient Feng Shui compass, upon which he could sense... the aura of Allheaven.

"I would never have been able to guess that you actually have something to do with Allheaven," he said. He shook his head and flicked his sleeve. "Well, it doesn't matter. Since you don't want to admit it, then I presume you must have some leverage to rely on, right? I'm curious to see what it is. By the way... as long as you're on Planet Vast Expanse, it doesn't matter what identity you assume, finding you would be as easy as flipping over my hand." With that, he paid her no more heed, vanishing back to Ninth Paragon City.

His purpose in coming had been to confirm his suspicions. After laying eyes on the Feng Shui compass, he was now absolutely certain and didn't need any further confirmation.

After Meng Hao left, Han Bei virtually collapsed, gasping for breath. After a long moment, she gritted her teeth.

"Thankfully I prepared that life-saving backup plan all those years ago. It seems that now... is the time to enact that plan." With that, she reached up and gently tapped her forehead. Her forehead then split apart, revealing a swath of pitch blackness, within which floated... a soul!

It was not Han Bei's soul, but closer inspection revealed that it was indeed a woman. Her eyes were closed, as if she were sleeping, but if Meng Hao were here, he would recognize her in an instant. Unexpectedly, it was the soul of... Chu Yuyan!

Years ago, when Chu Yuyan withered away into death, her soul dispersed. Meng Hao fought his way into the Eighth Mountain and Sea to search for her, but the only thing he ever found was a tiny sliver of her soul.

Back then, the clues had seemed to indicate that the rest of Chu Yuyan's soul had vanished into the starry sky. He thought that the problem was that he couldn't find it, but the truth was that Han Bei had secretly interfered and captured the soul. From then on, it became a life-saving measure for future use.

In order to ensure that Chu Yuyan's soul didn't fade away into complete death, Han Bei had merged some of her own life soul into it, creating a sort of symbiotic state of existence between them.

After many years of feeding Chu Yuyan's soul in such a way, it had become thoroughly intertwined with Han Bei's. Only someone with the power of Transcendence could ever separate them. That meant that if Han Bei died, Chu Yuyan's soul would well and truly disperse.

Han Bei sat there silently, mixed emotions on her face. She thought back to everything which had occurred between her and Meng Hao, and sighed softly. Finally, she gritted her teeth.

"We have different standpoints, and different missions. You want to see what my leverage is, well I'll show you." She waved her hand, sending Chu Yuyan's soul flying out, where it vanished into Heaven and Earth.

In the moment that the soul flew out, Meng Hao's true self locked onto it with divine sense. After realizing who it was, a tremor ran through him, and he felt as if countless lightning bolts were striking his mind.

His eyes suddenly snapped shut, and a powerful force like a windstorm raged up from him. It swept out to cover all of Ninth Paragon City, then the entire half-planet, then all of its starry sky, and then the lands up above on Planet Vast Expanse. Soon, all of Planet Vast Expanse was shaking violently.

The other Paragons were shocked. The Sect Leader opened his eyes and looked out in astonishment. Of course, Jin Yunshan and Sha Jiudong and the others were equally stunned by Meng Hao's unleashing of energy.

“What is that psycho doing?!” Jin Yunshan thought, shivering. He quickly unleashed his cultivation base defensively, worried that Meng Hao was in a bad mood and might be looking to start a fight.

Han Bei was also trembling inwardly, and yet, continued to smile as calmly as ever.

“As long as you care, that’s enough,” she murmured to herself.

The tempest lasted for only a moment before it vanished. Back in Ninth Paragon City, Meng Hao rose to his feet, eyes filled with reminiscence, grief, and other mixed emotions as he looked at the soul using his divine sense.

“Chu Yuyan...” he murmured hoarsely. He followed her with his divine sense as she flew into the ninth continent, into the mortal world. She eventually entered the womb of a woman... as she began the cycle of reincarnation, to become a person once again.

After a long moment, Meng Hao retracted his divine sense. How could he not have noticed that Chu Yuyan’s soul was intermixed with some of Han Bei’s life soul? Although Chu Yuyan was independent, they existed symbiotically.

“Well that... is some good leverage.” He finally closed his eyes, almost as if he had forgotten about Han Bei.

Time passed. The Immortal Tribulation of Meng Hao’s clone rocked all of the Vast Expanse School. Even the other Paragons of similar rank to Meng Hao had taken note.

From that day on, the name Fang Mu became well-known in the Vast Expanse School. In ten years, he went from mortal to Immortal. He shook the Ninth Sect, rocked the Vast Expanse School, and word about him even spread throughout Planet Vast Expanse.

Everyone learned that an incredible Chosen had appeared in the Ninth Sect!

At the same time, many disciples of the Vast Expanse School began to pay close attention to Meng Hao’s clone. That was especially true of the blazing suns among the Chosen, who came to view him as a formidable opponent.

However, some of the Chosen disdained him, being of the belief that in terms of cultivation base, they were far beyond him.

“Who cares if you reach Immortal Ascension in ten years? Don’t tell me he’s going to reach the Ancient Realm in ten years too?” Talk like that became the norm.

“He’s a trifling Immortal Realm member of the Junior generation, that’s all. He might have nice latent talent, but so what?! All nine sects of the Vast Expanse School have a Vast Expanse Shrine, and only by getting your name listed there are you truly a Chosen!”

“After the Vast Expanse Shrine is the Transcendence Path. Only those who walk the Transcendence Path are the true blazing suns. Other than the Ninth Paragon, which Paragon is there who hasn’t left their footprint there!?”

“The path of cultivation is a long one. Rising up too quickly is a bad thing. This kid isn’t that smart, is he? He’ll definitely pay some painful consequences later.”

Chapter 1453: Enjoy Yourself, Prince!

Few people knew exactly how many Immortal meridians Meng Hao’s clone opened after his Immortal Tribulation. He didn’t go on to make a big show of things, but instead, went back into secluded meditation to practice cultivation.

However, his heart was very unsettled because of the matter of Chu Yuyan.

“Han Bei planned things out years and years in advance. She fused her own life soul with Chu Yuyan, creating a symbiosis.... Excellent leverage.” After a long moment, he sighed.

It took three days for him to settle his mind and heart. Afterward, he left for a time, and when he returned, he had the mastiff with him. Then, both of them went into meditative trances, continuing their cultivation in seclusion.

Time passed. Another ten years went by in the blink of an eye. During that time, Meng Hao’s clone didn’t leave the Ninth Sect. He stayed confined in meditation.

Because he stayed out of the public eye, no one knew the level of his cultivation base, or his progress. After the ten years passed, no Tribulation Lightning descended, so people stopped

worrying about whether or not he was Chosen, and in fact many people even forgot about him. Those who did remember him did so with scorn.

He had no friends, nor any dealings with anyone. He remained in his subdivision of the Ninth Sect, focused completely on cultivation. To remain completely separated from the sect was an uncommon thing. Only people with a special status could do something like that. After all, Fang Mu was nothing more than an Inner Sect disciple.

However... the Ninth Sect belonged to Meng Hao. All it took was a single word from his true self to that one particular Dao Sovereign, indicating that Fang Mu was important and wasn't to be disturbed, and the matter was handled.

Because of that, no one bothered his clone during those ten years. The only company he had was the mastiff.

Actually, Meng Hao's true self spent those ten years in much the same way. He focused completely on gaining full enlightenment of all his Hexing Essences. With such a deep focus only on cultivation, his twenty years of work left him significantly more powerful than when he had entered the necropolis.

Preparations for the second trip into the necropolis were still being made by the Sect Leader. Apparently, he wanted to be completely and utterly prepared. Obviously, he was completely intent on reaching the second land mass in this trip.

During the ten years, news spread that Han Bei had broken through from the Immortal Realm. Now that she was in the Ancient Realm, she was no longer a Holy Daughter-designate. Somehow, she manipulated her way into becoming one of the Vast Expanse School's nine Holy Daughters.

The Sect Leader, despite being wrapped up in preparations for the necropolis, found time to provide some assistance and advice to Han Bei, who was very important to him.

As for exactly what went on, Meng Hao didn't pay close attention.

Another year passed, whereupon Meng Hao's clone emerged from secluded meditation and left the Ninth Sect. No one interfered with him; most people only had a vague impression of who he was.

Both he and the mastiff transformed into beams of light that shot off into the distance. A few days later, they appeared in a small town in the mortal world.

It wasn't very large, but it was a bustling place. The streets were packed with people who scurried about doing all sorts of things. Meng Hao walked slowly through the town, wearing a green robe and looking every bit the scholar. Eventually, he came to a stop in front of the house of an average family.

A warm look could be seen in his eyes as he looked at a group of youngsters playing outside the main gate. One of them was an eleven-year-old girl, who wore a shy smile on her face as she played with her companions.

His gaze seemed to stretch back hundreds of years into the past, recalling numerous events which had occurred once upon a time. It was currently autumn, and a crisp wind sent fallen leaves tumbling down the street. The setting sun was deep red color, filling the world with its warmth, and casting Meng Hao's shadow long and far across the ground....

The girl suddenly sensed that she was being watched, and she looked up at Meng Hao. She seemed a bit scared, and quickly averted her eyes. A moment passed, and he was still looking at her, making her even more frightened. She whispered something to her friends, then ran back into her house.

Meng Hao laughed spontaneously, then took a deep breath, his eyes gleaming with reminiscence.

"In your last life, I owed you...." he said softly. "In this life, I'll pay that debt." Straightening his clothes, he walked up to the house and knocked on the gate. After a long moment, the gate opened, and he entered.

There was no need for complicated formalities. On Planet Vast Expanse, even mortals were aware of the existence of Immortal beings, and treated them with the utmost respect and veneration.

Meng Hao mentioned that he wished to take this girl, whose name was Yan'er, as an apprentice. He demonstrated some magical techniques to the girl's parents, who didn't hesitate for even a moment to give their assent. They looked very excited.

A few days later, Meng Hao left, followed by a sad-looking girl, and the mastiff.

After a while, she couldn't hold back from asking, "Master... you... you really aren't a fraud?"

In response to her question, Meng Hao bopped her on the top of her head with his palm. It hurt a little, but before she could say anything, her body was suddenly lifted up into the air. Wind blasted into her face, and when she looked down, she saw vast lands stretching out in all directions. Everything grew smaller and smaller, and her eyes grew wider and wider.

After some time passed, she saw a boundless stretch of mountains, covered by countless buildings and structures. It was none other than... the Ninth Sect.

Suddenly, Meng Hao's soft voice could be heard in her ears, "From now on, you are the apprentice of Fang Mu. The one and only apprentice."

From that day on, a girl lived in Fang Mu's secluded meditation facilities in his subdivision of the Ninth Sect. With her there, things were no longer so peaceful and quiet.

She was naturally gifted when it came to cultivation, but most of that seemed focused on alchemy. Meng Hao also spent time teaching her other cultivation methods, as well as some of his own alchemy techniques.

The girl's personality was very different from Meng Hao's. She enjoyed exploring the Ninth Sect, and liked making friends. Soon, just about everyone in the subdivision knew that the Fang Mu, who had put on such a spectacular display about ten years ago, had taken on an apprentice.

Seven years passed. By now, it had been eighteen years since Fang Mu's Immortal Tribulation, and it was also the year that his apprentice Yan'er turned eighteen.

She was a slender and elegant teenager. As she matured, she became more and more beautiful, and soon began to distinguish herself among the other female disciples of the sect. Because of her natural gift for cultivation, especially when it came to alchemy, she was already in late Foundation Establishment, just half a step away from Core Formation.

Her Dao of alchemy was boundless and profound, enough to shake even some of the Elders of the subdivision.

Because of all of that, quite a few male disciples began to pursue the young Yan'er. Of course, her personality was a bit more like a boy's; she was definitely not the graceful and subdued type. The only time she would pout and act like a girl was in front of Meng Hao.

“Master, can I go, please? I’ve... I’ve been waiting for this day forever!”

“Master, look, don’t worry. Nothing’s going to happen. Lots of my Elder Brothers and Sisters from the sect are going to be there. We’ll all be going together.”

Yan’er was currently standing in front of Meng Hao making a request. She started out begging, but in the end, when he simply sat there in meditation, ignoring her, she started to get a bit irritated.

“Aiya! You old fogey! Are you gonna let me go or not!?”

“How impudent!” Meng Hao said, opening his eyes to glare at her. Yan’er had become somewhat of a headache in recent years. In the beginning, she had treated him with awe and reverence. But that attitude had slowly faded away until it was now gone.

Yan’er was clearly not afraid of her Master’s glare. Smiling broadly, she hurried over and started to massage his shoulders. Eyes wide, she quietly began to plead again, in a very sweet and fawning voice.

“Master, everybody’s saying that it’s not just people from our subdivision who will be going to the bazaar. The whole sect will be there. In fact, people from the other continents will be coming too. The Vast Expanse School’s First Sect, Second Sect, I mean, basically all of the nine sects are going to be there.

“It’s going to be so exciting! Elder Brother Bi Yun is also going.... I heard that his name is in the top 100 of the Vast Expanse Shrine....” When Yan’er mentioned Elder Brother Bi Yun, her eyes suddenly grew very bright.

Meng Hao frowned, then sighed, aware that the reason his apprentice wanted to go to the bazaar was not merely the simple task of buying medicinal plants. Like most female disciples, she viewed the Chosen members of the sect with awe. Bi Yun, who was one of the blazing suns of the Ninth Sect, was a good example.

Unable to deal with her coaxing and prodding, he finally nodded and said, “Fine, fine, go ahead.”

Yan’er was immediately delighted, and even leaned forward and hugged him. Seeing her so delighted, Meng Hao’s gaze softened a bit, and he thought about Chu Yuyan.

In his last life, he had owed Chu Yuyan a debt of emotion. Unfortunately, in this life, his heart was already dead, and all he could give her was the relationship of a Master and apprentice.

Yan'er left. The next day at dawn, she was in very high spirits as she met up with some of the other disciples of the subdivision, after which they all left together toward the grand bazaar which was held every few years on the ninth continent.

Meng Hao stayed in secluded meditation. His cultivation base was at a critical juncture, and he could make a breakthrough into the Ancient Realm at almost any time. Although he had remained in the Immortal Realm for quite some time, causing many people to forget about him, the reason was because of something that no one but him was aware of. When he had opened his Immortal meridians, he actually exceeded the number previously reached by his true self, placing him at a terrifying level that nobody had ever reached before, not even in ancient times.

That was why his progress in the Immortal Realm had been so slow.

“Because of my successive breakthroughs, the Ninth Hex is getting closer to completion. However, why is it that what I used to believe was perfect in the past, now seems somewhat incomplete...?” Frowning, he proceeded with his cultivation.

Even as he was focusing on cultivation, Yan'er and her Elder Brothers and Sisters had left the Ninth Sect and run into a group of disciples from the Eighth Sect.

There were a dozen or so of them, all in the Immortal Realm. One of them was a handsome young man wearing very extravagant clothing. His friends clustered around him, and yet, within his eyes could be seen a licentious gleam. He seemed like nothing more than a carefree young man, but the truth was that he had a unique position within the Eighth Sect. That was especially evident considering that he was being shadowed by a middle-aged cultivator who was obviously his Dao Protector. The man made it seem as if his cultivation base were in the Immortal Realm, but he was actually a powerful Dao Realm expert.

Almost as soon as the two groups met, the young man took note of Yan'er, and his eyes shone with both excitement and nefariousness.

“What a wonderful looking cultivation vessel....” he said, grinning. His Dao Protector also smiled. He was well aware of the proclivities of this young Prince of his clan. Furthermore, the young man had a very high and important standing within the Eighth Sect, and even within the Vast Expanse School as a whole, there were few people who could compare. However, the Dao Protector was also careful; whenever the Prince took a liking to a girl, he would always check her background. If he

discovered any girl who had connections in the sect, he would advise the young man to abandon any pursuit. However, when it came to ordinary disciples, there were plenty of ways to make sure that no problems resulted.

The Dao Protector pulled out a jade slip, examined it for a moment, then relaxed.

“Her background is known, and she has no connections,” he said. “She joined the sect a few years ago as the apprentice of someone named Fang Mu. Fang Mu went from being mortal to Immortal in only ten years, and made somewhat of a stir at that time. However, even he doesn’t have any connections. He’s a small-time figure, nothing more than an Inner Sect disciple from a subdivision of the Ninth Sect.

“Enjoy yourself, Prince!”

Chapter 1454: You Screwed Us Over....

In response to the Dao Protector’s words, a radiant smile broke out on the young man’s face. As the grandson of Patriarch Chi Feng of the Eighth Sect, he had free reign to do anything he wished in his sect.

After the Eighth Sect’s 9-Essences Paragon perished, Patriarch Chi Feng had returned from the excursion to the necropolis and worked hard at cultivation until he was on the verge of a breakthrough. He was the most powerful expert in the Eighth Sect, and if he broke through to the 9-Essences level, he would become the official leader of the Eighth Sect, and would also become one of the nine great Paragons of the Vast Expanse School.

People like that were truly at the pinnacle of the Vast Expanse School, and that was one of the reasons why this young man could have his pick of almost any female cultivator he wanted to use as a cultivation vessel.

Of course, he was very careful. If a girl had connections or a powerful background, then he would give up any notions of even so much as touching her. Because of that, Patriarch Chi Feng, despite being aware of the situation, felt that the young man was still relatively dependable, and wouldn’t do something that made him a liability.

Smiling in response to the Dao Protector’s words, the young man said, “Well, there’s no hurry. A cultivation vessel like that is a rare thing in the Eighth Sect nowadays. Who would have thought that I would get something so wonderful here? Excellent, excellent.

“Unfortunately, we’re still in the Ninth Sect, and the Patriarch reminded me before that I can’t act presumptuously here....

“Ah well, it doesn’t matter. I’ll just figure out a way to get this cultivation vessel back to the Eighth Sect.” The licentious gleam once again flickered in his eyes.

Over the following few days, Yan’er and her companions traveled with the group from the Eighth Sect. They came to realize what a high position the young man held, and treated him with the utmost respect. Eventually, they reached the location of the bazaar, and arranged for their accommodations. On the night of the first day, Yan’er was filled with excitement and anticipation for the following days. Just as she was about to slip into a trance to do some meditation, a vortex suddenly sprang up around her. It happened without any sound or warning, and before Yan’er was even aware of what had happened, it was on the verge of swallowing her up.

In that moment, a howl rose up in the air outside of the bazaar. It was none other than the mastiff, who Meng Hao had arranged to secretly guard Yan’er on her trip.

The mastiff’s eyes flickered with killing intent as it transformed into a beam of red light that flew into the air at high speed.

At the same time, in a valley about 500 kilometers outside of the bazaar, Patriarch Chi Feng’s grandson was standing there looking at a vortex spinning in front of him. His Dao Protector, the middle-aged cultivator in the Dao Realm, stepped out holding an unconscious girl, who was none other than Yan’er.

When the young man saw Yan’er, he smiled and reached out to grab her, the carnal gleam in his eyes growing stronger.

The Dao Protector’s expression softened. This sort of thing was a simple matter for him, and something he had done on numerous occasions. He cleared his throat, and was just about to say something, when a sudden howl ripped through the valley.

The abruptness of the sound caused the Dao Protector’s face to fall. Even as he turned, a red streak of light shot toward him.

Rumbling sounds echoed out, and the entire valley began to collapse. The Dao Protector coughed up a mouthful of blood as he was sent tumbling off into the distance, seriously injured. An

expression of astonishment filled his face at the sight of the large crimson dog which had just appeared.

“Th-that’s... a Dao Realm beast!!

“Dammit, how could there be a Dao Realm beast here!?!?” The young man was so terrified he was shaking. Grabbing Yan’er, he shot backward. By this point, she had regained consciousness, and it took only a moment for her confusion to fade, whereupon she began to scream.

“Shut up!” the young man bellowed. Even as the words left his mouth, the mastiff’s eyes blazed with killing intent, and it began to speed in his direction.

“It’s... it’s after the girl!” The Dao Protector was shaken. How could he ever have imagined that grabbing a young girl in the Foundation Establishment stage would attract the attention of a Dao Realm beast?

“Prince, get out of here. Something’s off here! Something’s not right!” The Dao Protector had no time to think about the matter. However, he could tell that there was something very strange about what was happening. Almost as soon as the words left his mouth, the young man pulled out a jade pendant that had been hanging around his neck, and crushed it.

Instantly, a powerful teleportation force erupted out. However, it didn’t seem fast enough to get him away from the dog. The young man’s eyes suddenly flared with a vicious gleam. He might seem like a carefree young man, but he wasn’t stupid. His hand clamped around Yan’er’s neck, and he glared at the mastiff.

“If you take one more step, I’ll kill her!” he screamed. The mastiff stopped in place, and in that moment, the power of teleportation exploded out. The young man and Yan’er vanished in the blink of an eye. In that same instant, the mastiff howled and unleashed an attack, causing a huge crater to appear in the spot where the young man had just been standing.

The Dao Protector’s scalp was tingling, but it was without any hesitation that he sped backward. His mind was in complete chaos; this Dao Realm beast had obviously been tamed, and anyone who could tame a Dao Realm beast would clearly have an incredible cultivation base.

Seeing Yan’er disappear caused the mastiff to throw its head back and let out an astonishing roar. It erupted with energy as its body grew larger, and it transformed into a beam of blood-colored light

which sped toward the middle-aged Dao Protector. Before the man could even react, the mastiff chewed him up and swallowed him down.

Only a bloodcurdling scream lingered behind. Even in the last moment before his death, he couldn't fathom how a little Foundation Establishment cultivator could have caused such a disaster.

Of course, he had no way to know that the catastrophe resulting from what he and the young man had done, was only the beginning. As for the person he thought was a nobody in the sect, a trifling Inner Sect disciple named Fang Mu, even in death, he would never be able to guess his true identity.

As Yan'er faded away, the mastiff howled.

Deep within Planet Vast Expanse, on the half-planet, was Ninth Paragon City.

There, Meng Hao's true self suddenly opened his eyes, and they shone with unprecedented coldness. Dragons usually have one weak scale on their bodies. People likewise have weak spots. For Meng Hao, it was the Mountain and Sea Realm, his family, and his friends. Originally, he had no such weakness now that he was living on Planet Vast Expanse.

But when Chu Yuyan appeared, Meng Hao knew... that she was his weak spot!

Anyone who touched her was prodding the most sensitive part of Meng Hao!

Touching that weak spot would provoke wrath that could shake Heaven and Earth, and even the Vast Expanse!

The clouds in the sky above Planet Vast Expanse were churning. Lightning crackled, and strange colors flashed in the sky. The wind screamed, and countless individuals on the surface of the planet looked up in shock.

At the same time, all of Ninth Paragon City, all of the half-planet, all of the inner starry sky, and all of Planet Vast Expanse itself filled with rumbling sounds.

This was the second time that such a thing had happened, the first being when Meng Hao had initially caught sight of Chu Yuyan's soul. Now... for the second time, a towering murderous aura erupted out, causing everyone on Planet Vast Expanse, even the Paragons, to be shaken inwardly.

Jin Yunshan, Sha Jiudong, and the Sect Leader were all in shock as they saw Meng Hao's true self step out into the open.

"That murderous aura," said Jin Yunshan with a gasp. "He's... he's going to kill someone!!" After sensing Meng Hao's aura, his eyes filled with vigilance.

Sha Jiudong had the same reaction, and as for the Sect Leader, he immediately left his meditation facilities. Other Paragons, both 8-Essences and 9-Essences, were all shaken.

Patriarch Chi Feng in the Eighth Sect was equally shaken. When he detected Meng Hao's aura, he thought about how he had mercilessly cut down the Eighth Paragon years ago in the necropolis.

"I wonder what unlucky fellow managed to provoke that jinx...." he murmured. Then he paid the matter no more heed, and closed his eyes in meditation.

Meanwhile, on the eighth continent, in the Eighth Sect, teleportation light twinkled. Patriarch Chi Feng's grandson, the young man, emerged with Yan'er. His face was pale, and he looked as if he had been roughed up, but his eyes glittered with viciousness.

"Dammit. Dammit!" he roared. "Who is it that dares to provoke me, the Prince!?!?"

"That was some trifling Dao Realm beast, nothing more. I'm gonna kill it. I'm gonna... I'm gonna eat it!"

"I don't care who owns it. Anybody that provokes me will have their whole clan wiped out!!" He looked down at Yan'er, whose face was ashen and filled with terror.

"W-what... what are you going to do to me?" she stammered. "My Master won't let you get away with this. He--"

"Shut up! Who's your master? Fang Mu? A measly Inner Sect disciple? He's a nobody that doesn't even qualify to shine my shoes!" With that, the young man lifted his hand up and slapped Yan'er right across the face. Her cheek instantly swelled up, and blood oozed out of the corners of her mouth. She began to tremble, and a look of complete terror could be seen on her face.

Her entire life had been one free from care or worry, so what was happening now made her realize how fragile life really was. She felt helpless, as though she were about to be completely consumed by terror.

“Master... Master....” She began to weep in fear. She wanted to see her family, her Master, but instead, everything around her was strange. She wasn’t sure what was going to happen to her, and it left her shaking in fear.

The young man’s expression was cruel as he threw his head back and roared, “Men, come!!

“Someone’s trying to kill me! Patriarch, save me!!” As the boy’s words echoed out, the Eighth Sect was thrown into an uproar. Countless figures emerged, and when they saw Yan’er, they frowned, but didn’t say anything.

“Someone’s trying to kill me!!” he bellowed.

The young man’s shouting provoked a response, not from Chi Feng, but from a Dao Sovereign who flew out from within the Eighth Sect. “Who’s trying to kill you? I thought you just went to the ninth continent?”

As soon as he appeared, everyone clasped hands respectfully.

“Dad, I was on the ninth continent when I took a liking to this cultivation vessel. Then a Dao Realm beast... tried to kill me! It really tried to kill me!” Considering his quavering voice, and the way his clothes were ripped and torn, it was obvious that he had been fleeing for his life, and had used the teleportation device given him by the Patriarch.

Chapter 1455: The Ninth Paragon Arrives!

The Dao Sovereign frowned, looking over at the bruises on the young man’s neck, which were clearly caused by the anxious way he had ripped the jade pendant off his neck.

He was the son of Patriarch Chi Feng, and had a cultivation base at the 6-Essences Dao Sovereign level. In the Vast Expanse School, he was at the peak of power when it came to people under the Paragon level. Normally speaking, he was the kind of person who would kill with decisiveness. Couple that with the fact that his father was likely to become the next Eighth Paragon, and it ensured that his status was constantly on the rise, and his cultivation experienced constant progress.

People in the Eighth Sect had even begun to refer to the father and son team as collective Paragon. Although the young grandson had never earned much respect, he was of the same bloodline. Therefore, if his Dao Sovereign father wished to punish him, or even kill him, no one would say anything. However, if someone struck his son with a blow, it was the same thing as striking him, or even Patriarch Chi Feng.

That was especially the case considering that Patriarch Chi Feng had reached a critical juncture in his cultivation. To the Dao Sovereign, the fact that someone had done something like this to his son was a likely indication that a competing force was trying to make a move, although with what goal, he wasn't sure.

However, he didn't need to be sure.

“It doesn't matter who did this, whoever dared to provoke my bloodline will be exterminated!” The Dao Sovereign snorted coldly and waved his sleeve. His murderous aura surged, rippling out into the area, causing the hearts of the nearby cultivators of the Eighth Sect to grow cold with fear. They were all well-aware that the bloodline of Patriarch Chi Feng were now preparing to go on a killing spree.

“What a pity. A Dao Realm beast, huh...? This girl must have some connections in her sect. But unfortunately for her, in the Vast Expanse School, power and influence are what really matter.

“It would be easier to find a phoenix feather or a qilin horn than to find someone on Planet Vast Expanse who could compare to Patriarch Chi Feng...” Those were the thoughts running through the heads of most of the people present, and there were some who even began to radiate their own killing intent, indicating that they wished to join the Dao Sovereign in whatever action he was about to take.

The Dao Sovereign seemed pleased with this. Glaring over at the young man, he said, “What are you standing around for? Take me to see whoever it was that had the gall to send a beast like that to harm a disciple of my Vast Expanse School!”

As for Yan'er, he didn't even bother to look at her. He was aware of his son's vices, and although they caused him a bit of a headache sometimes, he had the same attitude as Patriarch Chi Feng. In his view, the young man was always careful, and to cultivators, being careful was the same as being dependable.

Considering the girl had a Dao Realm beast protecting her, she clearly had some connections in the sect. But to Chi Feng, such connections weren't even worth paying attention to.

All the other cultivators in the crowd felt the same as the Dao Sovereign, that it really would be easier to find a phoenix feather or a qilin horn than to find someone who could strike fear into the hearts of the members of this bloodline.

The Dao Sovereign simply couldn't believe that in his son's journey outside of the sect, he could possibly have provoked one of those existences that they did not dare to provoke.

Even as he spoke, the Dao Sovereign's energy rose up, causing everything else in the area to shake.

The young man's eyes went wide with delight. In his entire life, he had never been more scared than he had been earlier that day. He had been so close to dying that he had almost collapsed mentally.

Laughing heartily, he looked over at the terrified Yan'er, eyes flickering with a depraved gleam.

"Hey gorgeous, you know that dog of yours? I'm going to boil him right in front of you and then eat him. Don't worry, I'll give you a few bites to try."

Shaking, Yan'er bit her lip. By this point, her heart was completely overwhelmed with terror and fear. She felt alone, helpless and hopeless, and she suddenly missed her Master more than ever.

"Master..." she whimpered, shivering. "Master..."

"Did you just say something about your Master? Hahaha! I don't care what your Master has to do with your pet. He dared to provoke me, he WILL die. And before he dies, I'll make him act like a dog!" Viciousness gleamed in the young man's eyes as his laughter rang out into the air. He was just about to lead the group off when suddenly a cold snort ripped through the killing intent of the surrounding group of cultivators. It was like a clap of thunder that caused everything to tremble on the verge of exploding.

Lands quaked, and floor tiles were transformed into ash. A tempest sprang up that instantly spread out to cover the entire Eighth Sect.

The Eighth Sect was huge, but even if it were larger than it was, the tempest would still fill it. At the same time, it was as if an enormous, invisible foot had stamped down onto the ground. A huge

shockwave spread out, filling the Eighth Sect, causing all mountains, buildings, and lands to shake violently.

In addition to the physical effects on the surroundings, all cultivators in the Eighth Sect, regardless of the level of their cultivation base or what they were doing at the moment... began to tremble. It was as if mountains were crushing down onto them, causing blood to spray out of their mouths. To their astonishment, they suddenly realized that... they couldn't move a muscle.

A roar of rage filled the world with indescribable pressure, crushing down onto the entire Eighth Sect!

All cultivators were completely and utterly shocked. Their hearts filled with terror, and their minds spun. Then, off in the distance, a person approached... it was a young man in a black robe, with violet hair, who seemed to carry with him all the darkness and coldness in the world.

Behind him, the Heavens trembled as if they were about to shatter. His gaze caused the air to distort, as if it were making a path for him, and beneath him, the lands shook as if they were kowtowing in worship!

One person suppressed Heaven and shook the Earth. Everything twisted and distorted. This young man became the center of all attention... a figure who would stand for all eternity!

Even as he appeared, a cold voice echoed out that seemed to carry infinite rage and killing intent. It echoed like a thousand thunders, shaking everything. "Who dared to harm one of the disciples of my Ninth Sect?"

His voice caused countless mountains to crumble, and numerous buildings to fall. The cultivators of the Eighth Sect once again coughed up mouthfuls of blood.

When an ordinary man is enraged, blood can be spattered everywhere. When a Paragon is enraged, Heaven and Earth weep!

These people from the Eighth Sect had poked Meng Hao in his sensitive weak spot, enraging him. And when Meng Hao was enraged, instead of saying that Heaven and Earth were weeping, it would be better to say that the Vast Expanse was being buried!

As soon as the voice rang out, colors flashed and the wind screamed. Mountains collapsed and buildings toppled. The cultivation bases of all cultivators in the Eighth Sect became unstable, and blood oozed out of their eyes, ears, noses, and mouths.

“Ninth.... Ninth P-P... Ninth Paragon!!” The young man’s father, the Dao Sovereign, couldn’t stop his eyes from bulging in disbelief. Blood sprayed out of his mouth, and although he couldn’t actually move, he was trembling, all the way down to his very soul.

All of that was because of... a single sentence!

It was as if Meng Hao represented the might of Heaven, and his word was Heavenly Dao and magical law alike!

The sky above the eighth continent went dark, and the cultivators of the Eighth Sect, including their Paragons, were all trembling. Patriarch Chi Feng was also shaking, and when he looked out from his secluded meditation chamber, an expression of disbelief washed over his face as he realized he was looking at that most terrifying of figures, the person who struck fear into his heart more than anything after the trip to the necropolis.

“The Ninth Paragon.... What... what is he doing here? Dammit, who provoked a terrifying jinx like that!?!?!?” Patriarch Chi Feng’s eyes were already bloodshot.

Everyone was trembling, except for Yan’er. She looked up, and through the tears streaming down her face, she could see someone approaching. Although she couldn’t make out his features clearly, he seemed familiar, and she couldn’t hold back from saying, “Master....”

As soon as the words left her mouth, all the cultivators in the area, including the young man and the Dao Sovereign, gasped as if they had been struck by lightning.

That was especially true of the young man. He sagged in place as though his bones had turned to mush. His mind reeled as the word she had just uttered echoed out.

“The vessel I took a liking to is... the apprentice of the Ninth Paragon?” The young man suddenly wanted to laugh. It was almost like he was hearing the funniest joke he had ever heard in his entire life. And yet, at the bottom of his heart, he was trembling with insanity.

As his mind reeled, his entire world was destroyed; the light left it, leaving nothing but darkness.

He wasn't the only one to have such a reaction. His father, the Dao Sovereign, was normally a high and mighty figure. Within the Eighth Sect, innumerable people treated him with fear and dignity. But now, in front of Meng Hao, he was trembling like a stray dog. He was gasping for breath, staring in shock, his eyes bloodshot as he turned to look at his son. If he could kill anyone at this moment, he would most definitely... tear this unfilial son to shreds!

"You damned son of a bitch!" he bellowed. "Y-y-you... you screwed us all over!!"

Everyone in the crowd was shaking, especially the ones who had expressed their desire to join Chi Feng's bloodline in wiping out the enemy. Looks of shock and disbelief appeared on their faces, and suddenly they felt a bit bad for Chi Feng's bloodline.

Apparently... they had the audacious gall and courage to dare to provoke one of the nine great Paragons of the Vast Expanse School.

Everything was deathly silent, as people stood there in fear.

Meng Hao's true self walked into the Eighth Sect, past the crowds of people, until he was standing in front of Yan'er. As soon as his gaze came to rest on her, his eyes turned soft and warm.

"I'm not your Master," he said slowly. "But... any cultivator in the Ninth Sect could be considered my apprentice."

Everyone present breathed a sigh of relief, especially the Dao Sovereign. As long as they weren't really Master and apprentice, then everything should be fine....

Yan'er looked at Meng Hao, and although he didn't look exactly like her Master, for some reason he seemed very familiar. The warmth in his words, and everything else, filled her with the intense sensation that she really was standing in front of her Master.

That feeling of familiarity caused tears to stream down her cheeks. She rushed forward and wrapped her arms around his chest, wailing. It was as if her tears could release all of the humiliation, fear, and terror that she had just experienced.

The Eighth Sect was completely silent. Everyone stood there trembling, looking at that most powerful of entities gently holding a young girl in his arms. When Meng Hao looked up again, his eyes were so ice cold that they seemed capable of extinguishing the light of the sun and moon.

As Yan'er wept in his arms, everyone looked on, shaking. Then, within the silence that filled the Eighth Sect, Meng Hao looked down at Yan'er's cheek.

There... was a distinct hand print!

Chapter 1456: Who Else?

It was the swollen mark left behind by a vicious slap to the face. When Meng Hao saw it there on Yan'er's face, he said nothing. However, the coldness radiating off of his body grew with explosive intensity, filling the entire area. It was as if Heaven and Earth were furious, as if the entire world were trembling with rage.

Cracking sounds echoed out as the ground shattered. The mountains which had previously collapsed were seemingly erased out of existence, transformed into nothing more than ash as an intense, indescribable pressure weighed down.

Blood sprayed out of the young man's mouth as he was sent tumbling backward. The Dao Sovereign also coughed up blood, and his legs trembled so hard that it seemed as if his kneecaps would shatter. The crushing pressure forced him to kneel down onto the ground, as did all of the other cultivators in the area.

They were incapable of standing up to the pressure, to the rage of Heaven and Earth, to the icy coldness radiating out of Meng Hao.

The pressure was such that they felt they couldn't hold on for very much longer. Even Patriarch Chi Feng, an 8-Essences Paragon on the verge of breaking through to 9-Essences, had the same reaction.

It was as if... an enormous hand had descended from up above... a hand to return the slap which had been inflicted onto Yan'er. Apparently, Meng Hao didn't have to make an actual move at all: that pressure alone was enough to wipe the Eighth Sect completely off of Planet Vast Expanse.

"Exalted... exalted Ninth Paragon..." the Dao Sovereign stammered. He had no choice but to speak. If he didn't, he would be wiped out of existence by that incredible pressure.

Even as the words left his mouth, colors flashed in the sky as numerous beams of light flew through the air at incredible speed. A moment later the Sect Leader appeared, along with the other 9-Essences Paragons.

Even Jin Yunshan and Sha Jiudong appeared, to hover there in midair, looking down. None of them spoke.

Even the Sect Leader was unsure of whether Meng Hao intended to actually destroy the entire Eighth Sect.

Some of them looked over at Yan'er, eyes glittering thoughtfully.

Meng Hao didn't seem to care at all that the group of 9-Essences Paragons had arrived. He had long since thought the matter through clearly. As of now, he was harboring no secrets. If people knew about Yan'er, fine. If they didn't, it was also fine. In his current state of mind, he truly didn't care what people thought.

"Who hit you?" he asked, looking over at Yan'er. Before she could even respond, his gaze fell upon the young man. "Was it him?"

As the words left the mouth, power from seemingly nowhere crushed down onto the young man. He screamed and struggled to back up, blood spurting out of wounds all over his body.

"I didn't do it on purpose!" he cried in a pleading voice. "I... I didn't know, I... I..." He was trembling from fear, true fear that had reached the pinnacle. He was even more scared than Yan'er had been only moments ago.

Even in his wildest dreams, he would never have imagined that a simple outing in which he took a liking to a cultivation vessel, would result in something like this. It was something he had done many times in the past, but this time... unexpectedly... he had provoked a disaster.

As of this moment, hatred for his Dao Protector burned all the way down to his bones. He wished he could rip the man to shreds. After all, it was impossible to forget how the Dao Protector had told him... to enjoy himself with the girl.

Without the Dao Protector's assurances, the young man would never have touched a girl with such incredibly high connections.

Furthermore, deep in his heart, he almost found it too fantastic to believe, this Yan'er had such a background, and yet... Why the hell didn't you say anything? If you had said something, I would've at least confirmed it, even if I didn't believe you. The worst thing is, you're backed by someone so powerful he can kill us all with a single word, and yet... you didn't say anything!!

The young man felt as if he had been deceived, wronged. However, before he could say another word, Yan'er glared at him and said in a loud voice: "Yeah, it was him!!"

Her words were like a death sentence. The young man's vision turned dark as Meng Hao waved his finger, sending killing intent speeding toward his forehead.

A pop could be heard as the boy's head exploded into a cloud of blood and gore, killing him instantly.

Meng Hao slaughtered him as easily as if he had popped the neck of a baby chicken. However, his rage was not sated.

"And him!" Yan'er cried, pointing at the Dao Sovereign. "He... he just said that he was going to go cause trouble for my Master!" Shock filled the Dao Sovereign's face, and a sensation of deadly crisis exploded within him. His hatred for his own son was no less than the son's hatred for his Dao Protector.

"Dammit! DAMMIT!" A tremor ran through him, and he was just about to say something in his defense when Meng Hao's eyes flickered coldly. He waved his right finger, and the Dao Sovereign's head exploded, killing him just as his son had been killed.

Before dying, the Dao Sovereign's venomous hatred rose to intense heights. Strangely, he didn't hate Meng Hao so much as he hated his unfilial son. He could never have imagined that all the honor and glory he had built up in his lifetime would be wiped away by someone his own son had provoked.

Everyone in the area was trembling.

“And those people too!” Yan’er said through gritted teeth, pointing out at the crowd. “All of them wanted to go cause trouble for my Master too!” Although it was impossible to tell exactly who she was pointing at, as her finger swept out over the crowd, they felt as if the gaze of the underworld were boring into their hearts.

“Him?” Meng Hao asked, pointing out an old man from Chi Feng’s bloodline, who had been coldly preparing to go to the ninth continent. The man trembled, and before he could even speak a word, his head exploded.

“And him?”

“Him too?”

“What about him?”

Meng Hao’s voice was cool. Every time he spoke, Yan’er would nod, and heads would explode. None of them even had a chance to cry out.

Soon, the ground was awash with blood. Meng Hao had killed dozens of people with brutal efficiency, all of whom had been preparing to join Chi Feng’s bloodline to go to the ninth continent.

As for the ones who had been hesitating earlier, Meng Hao didn’t ask about any of them.

There were some people who had been preparing to join Chi Feng’s bloodline who stood there ashen-faced as they waited for Yan’er to call them out. However, because of some bit of confusion on her part, she shook her head when it came to them. Tears streamed out of the eyes of those cultivators as they realized that they had just narrowly escaped death. Their gratitude toward Yan’er simply couldn’t be expressed in words.

The entire Eighth Sect was as silent as death. Everyone was on their knees, trembling, as Meng Hao gave vent to his rage like a spirit of death.

It was at this point that the Sect Leader cleared his throat.

“Ninth Paragon, calm down... the punishment has been carried out. You’re not really going to wipe out the entire Eighth Sect are you?”

Meng Hao looked over at the Sect Leader and asked, "I couldn't possibly wipe out the entire sect. However, don't think things are over yet."

With that, he looked into the depths of the Eighth Sect, and spoke out in a voice that crashed like thunder.

"Chi Feng, get the hell out here!" He flicked his sleeve, causing rumbling sounds to fill Heaven and Earth. Patriarch Chi Feng emerged from the depths of the sect, his heart filled with hatred toward his son and grandson. His face was taut with bitterness, and as pale as death. Inwardly, he was roaring in rage, although not toward Meng Hao, but rather, toward his son and grandson.

To him, not even death could expunge the deeds committed by those two, which had sucked him into a catastrophe....

Without the slightest hesitation, he flew through the air to appear directly in front of Meng Hao.

Instantly, he clasped hands and bowed deeply.

"Chi Feng... offers greetings... greetings to the exalted Ninth Paragon." His heart trembled as he completely ignored the corpses of his son and grandson. If he could, he would have killed them himself.

Other people might not know what it was like to face an enraged Meng Hao, but how could he not know? He had personally witnessed Meng Hao cut down the Eighth Paragon in the necropolis, and had also watched his battle with Jin Yunshan. He was well aware that Meng Hao was invincible when inside the necropolis, and was a figure of incomparable terror.

Chi Feng gritted his teeth. He knew full well that because of what had occurred today, he had to offer compensation, otherwise he would be killed. To the masses, he was a preeminent 8-Essences Paragon, someone who would soon reach the 9-Essences level and become the ruler of the Eighth Sect.

However, he knew that even if he became the new Eighth Paragon, he would still have to bow his head to the Ninth Paragon. He couldn't simply wait for Meng Hao to demand compensation for what had happened. He had to admit fault and take responsibility. Therefore, he quickly lifted his hand up and smashed his palm onto his forehead.

A boom rang out, and he shivered as a rift tore open on his forehead, from within which blood sprayed like a fountain. His body then exploded.

His soul flew out, trembling and clasping hands toward Meng Hao.

“Ninth Paragon, please calm your wrath....” he said, prostrating himself.

The surrounding cultivators gasped in response to what they were seeing. Everyone in the Eighth Sect was paying rapt attention, and now their hearts trembled with fear and awe as they looked over at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao eyed Chi Feng’s soul, and calmed down somewhat. If Chi Feng hadn’t been so straightforward, if he had waited for Meng Hao to speak, then he might not have ended up dead, but he would have been forever cut off from the 9-Essences level.

Now, his fleshly body was destroyed, which would be a big setback, but wouldn’t prevent him from obtaining his ninth Essence.

Meng Hao looked deeply at Patriarch Chi Feng, then turned away, taking Yan’er with him as he left the eighth continent.

Along with his departure, the intense pressure weighing down on the Eighth Sect faded away. Everyone breathed sighs of relief. This day was one the cultivators of the Eighth Sect would never be able to forget.

Chapter 1457: Vast Expanse Shrine!

Meng Hao did not exterminate the Eighth Sect. He did not take the grief for the Mountain and Sea Realm that lurked in his heart and vent it upon the world. He was not young anymore. He had practiced cultivation and experienced the transformations of time. He had long since lost track of how many years it had actually been.

The debt which he owed to Chu Yuyan still had to be paid. And yet, because his heart had been taken away along with the Mountain and Sea Butterfly, in his mind, the only thing that he could give as payment was the relationship between a Master and an apprentice.

For Chu Yuyan, he could hold back from investigating Han Bei.

For Chu Yuyan, he could allow his clone, who was at a critical juncture of gaining enlightenment of the Ninth Hex, to take up the responsibility of caring for her.

Because of Chu Yuyan, his lonely existence in the Vast Expanse School... now contained something warm and familiar, something that he would not allow others to interfere with. It was a simple desire... to protect her.

Chu Yuyan had lost her memories of her previous life, but not necessarily forever. Her memories were still in Meng Hao's possession; he just wasn't sure whether or not he should return them to her.

However, he was still willing to allow her to be his weak spot. That weak spot had been prodded, and thus was birthed his rage toward the Eighth Sect. He had not held back, but neither had he gone on a mindless massacre. He had killed the culprits and the accomplices, as well as those who intended to be accomplices.

By his actions, he issued a warning to all cultivators on Planet Vast Expanse, including Han Bei. No one... was to trifle with Yan'er. If they did, then Meng Hao would appear, and his rage would shock Heaven and Earth.

Along with that rage... rivers of blood would flow.

Because of what had occurred, some people now realized there was a connection between him and Fang Mu. However, Meng Hao didn't care.

In all of the Vast Expanse School, only a few people would possibly be able to guess what that connection was. Furthermore, Meng Hao now had some new ideas regarding the path to be tread by his clone.

Currently, Meng Hao's true self was taking Chu Yuyan back to the ninth continent and the Ninth Sect. There, in a certain mountain range, were his clone's secluded meditation facilities. His clone slowly opened his eyes, and they shone with an icy light, as though a detached coldness were brewing inside of him.

“I’ve been in seclusion for too long,” thought Meng Hao. “Apparently, people think that anyone can provoke me. I’m still Meng Hao, but there are still things... that only my true self can accomplish. It’s a bit embarrassing.” This was Meng Hao’s clone, but it was still Meng Hao. He rose to his feet, not to leave the Ninth Sect, but rather, to head to a certain mountain peak within the sect.

At the top of that mountain was a high tower that was called... the Vast Expanse Shrine!

In the Ninth Sect, all disciples could challenge the Vast Expanse Shrine, with the results determining their standing in the rankings. It was a place that the entire Ninth Sect always paid close attention to.

All of the sects in the Vast Expanse School had a tower like this. There were nine of them, and anyone who could take first place in the rankings on one of them, would rock all of Planet Vast Expanse, and would become a Vast Expanse Chosen!

It was a completely different matter than the stir caused by Fang Mu’s Immortal Tribulation.

In fact, it wasn’t even necessary to take first place. Anyone who entered the top 100 would be considered one of the true Chosen of the nine sects. If Meng Hao’s clone could get into the top 100 in the Vast Expanse Shrine, then he would rise from being an Inner Sect disciple in his subdivision, to being an Inner Sect disciple of the Ninth Sect’s main division.

If he could enter the top 30, then he would become... a Conclave disciple!

Then there were the top 3 spots, which came with the title of Legacy disciple of the entire Ninth Sect!

Meng Hao was already walking on the path leading to the mountain, his expression calm. The other disciples he passed would look over at him in surprise. At first, most people didn’t recognize him, but after a moment they would recall events from the past, and scorn would then appear in their eyes.

“Isn’t that Junior Brother Fang Mu, who went from mortal to Immortal in ten years?” someone asked. “What’s he doing here?”

“He’s a real weirdo,” replied a friend of his. “He pretty much never comes out in public. His apprentice Yan’er is a real beauty though.” It was in that moment that Meng Hao suddenly turned back to look at the man.

The gaze was nothing out of the ordinary, but for some reason, it caused the man to tremble, and his mind to become a complete blank. Without even thinking about it, he backed up a few paces. By the time he regained his composure, Meng Hao was far off in the distance.

The man hesitated, and was thinking of making another comment, but his gut told him that now was the time to keep quiet. Taking a deep breath, he said nothing further.

The Vast Expanse Shrine of the Ninth Sect was located on the highest point of the highest mountain in the sect, in the very middle of the sect. Meng Hao’s expression was calm as he continued to pass more and more fellow disciples.

Most of the people were unfamiliar with him, but after he passed them, they would recall his previous actions in the sect.

The majority made joking comments as he passed them by and continued on. As he proceeded, he encountered more and more disciples.

“Isn’t that Fang Mu? This is the first time I’ve seen him here. Could it be that he’s about to have a cultivation base breakthrough?”

“Is he heading toward the Vast Expanse Shrine? How amusing. Does he really think so much of himself that he thinks he qualifies to challenge the Vast Expanse Shrine?”

Meng Hao could hear the things people were saying, but his expression was the same as ever as he proceeded onward.

Soon, he reached the foot of the mountain. When he looked up, he saw a stone stele about thirty meters tall, upon which were lines of script, which were names.

These names were the top 3,000 cultivators from the Ninth Sect who had participated in the trial by fire of the Vast Expanse Shrine.

Although everyone on the list were extraordinary individuals, only those in the top 1,000 could be considered blazing suns. The top 100 were officially Chosen.

Meng Hao scanned the list, then looked back toward the peak of the mountain.

The mountaintop pierced through the clouds, and had a staircase winding up it into the sky.

Meng Hao didn't know much about the Vast Expanse Shrine, only what he had heard from Yan'er.

He knew that the trial by fire of the Vast Expanse Shrine didn't just refer to the tower at the top of the mountain. It also included the staircase which started at the foot of the mountain.

The people who were able to make it all the way to the tower itself would make it into the top 100. Furthermore, one's progress didn't have much to do with one's cultivation base, but rather, one's relative battle prowess and potential.

"I've been hiding away for too long," he thought. "When people heard that Yan'er's Master was Fang Mu, it didn't mean much, and my true self had to handle the situation." He shook his head.

"Well then, it's time to make a scene. Yan'er deserves a master who has taken 1st place on the Ninth Sect's Vast Expanse Shrine. That will make the little girl happy.

"If it's not enough, then I'll just have to take 1st place on all nine Vast Expanse Shrines. If that's not enough, then I might just have to try out the Transcendence Path." Meng Hao smiled, and his eyes glittered brightly. Within the Vast Expanse School, there were more than enough locations to earn rankings of some sort or another. However, there were only two locations which people throughout the sects, and even the Paragons, took very seriously.

One was the location to test potential and latent talent, which was... the Vast Expanse Shrine. The other was the Vast Expanse School's one and only... Transcendence Path!

It bore the name Transcendence, but the truth was... although Transcendence was a possibility, what was more likely was that those who walked it would benefit from the Baptism. According to the legends, if you could reach a certain point on the Transcendence Path, you would receive a Baptism, and thus, good fortune!

As for how far the Transcendence Path stretched, no one knew. However, it was well known that the person who had walked the furthest along it was not the Sect Leader, but rather, a woman by the name of Bai Wuchen.

She was also commonly known as Immortal Bai Wuchen!

However, not even she had reached the end of the path. Perhaps the difficulty level of that path was why the Sect Leader and the others placed their hope in the necropolis.

Meng Hao gathered his thoughts, then calmly took a step forward onto the first step of the staircase.

1 step. 2 steps. 3 steps....

No one paid him much attention. In fact, few people would pay attention to anyone in the starting stages of the Vast Expanse Shrine. Meng Hao walked along, climbing up the stairs, facing increasing levels of pressure. To some people, taking even half a step would be difficult. But to Meng Hao, it was like strolling along a level path. He didn't seem pressured at all, and maintained the same speed the entire time as he continued upward.

10 steps. 30 steps. 50 steps. 80 steps. 100 steps....

Meng Hao wasn't the only person climbing the steps. Ahead of him were a few hundred people who had been in the process of climbing during recent days. It was a difficult process, and many of them would occasionally rest before struggling onward. To these disciples, this mountain was their hope of making a name for themselves.

Some people would even sit cross-legged to cultivate. However, when someone reached their limit, they would be teleported away. That was generally the only way people would leave.

There were quite a few people on the mountain who suddenly saw Fang Mu pass by. When they realized how casually he was walking along, and how he didn't seem to have any difficulty whatsoever in climbing the stairs, their jaws dropped.

They saw him proceed along rapidly, leaving all the other disciples behind, and soon, a bit of an uproar ensued.

“Hey... who’s that?!?!”

“How can he be walking so fast?!?! This is 300 stairs in, and the pressure is intense. He... he isn’t even pausing at all!!”

“How is that even possible...? Could it be... could it be that he’s one of the blazing suns!?!?” The cultivators on the mountain looked on with reeling minds, and soon the sounds of their exclamations echoed out.

That sound grew louder as Meng Hao passed one Ninth Sect cultivator after another. There were some who, upon seeing him pass them so casually, mistakenly believed that the pressure from the trial by fire had suddenly disappeared. They then subconsciously stepped out, only to be slammed down into the ground or even ejected from the mountain.

“Who is that? He... he’s already reached the 700th stair!!”

“Heavens! He’s almost past 800 stairs! Whenever someone reaches the 1000th stair, a bell tolls, shaking the whole sect!!” More and more conversations broke out on the mountain. Meanwhile, Meng Hao’s true self had arrived with Yan’er.

“You... you really aren’t my Master?” she asked as they landed outside Fang Mu’s residence. When she looked at the majestic and supreme Ninth Paragon, she didn’t feel any fear or reverence at all. In fact, she somehow felt familiar with him, which left her very confused.

Almost as soon as the words left her mouth, an ancient-sounding bell tolled out from the Vast Expanse Shrine, filling the Ninth Sect.

Dong....

The sound was clear, ancient, and sonorous, and it instantly attracted the attention of the disciples of the Ninth Sect. The sound of discussions rose up, and Meng Hao’s true self smiled and tousled Yan’er’s hair.

“Your Master is challenging the Vast Expanse Shrine. Why don’t you go cheer him on?” With that, Meng Hao’s true self turned and vanished.

Yan'er was left gaping in shock. Then, she seemed to recall something in particular, and turned to look toward the Mount Vast Expanse.

“Huh? The old fogey is challenging the Vast Expanse Shrine? Um... isn't that something for young people to do to make a name for themselves? Elite disciples like Elder Brother Bi Yun?” Eyes flickering with disbelief, and heart pounding, she took to flight toward the mountain and the Vast Expanse Shrine.

Chapter 1458: The Long and Broad View

The ancient sound of the bell echoed out through the Ninth Sect. It was like a gust of wind from ancient times, filling the sect, causing the eyes of countless disciples to go wide as they looked in the direction of the mountain peak where the Vast Expanse Shrine was located.

“Someone challenging the Vast Expanse Shrine actually... passed 1,000 stairs!!”

“That's not very common. In the past several years, only a few people have done it.”

“I wonder who it is? The 1,000 stair bell can lead to a Baptism which gives good fortune. But it will only toll the first time someone reaches that many steps. Therefore, the bell can't be tolling for a current Chosen, only someone new!”

The buzz of conversation rose up everywhere, and yet, it wasn't filled with the sound of shock. After all... it was only a mere 1,000 stairs. Most people were simply curious as to who was making a name for the first time in the sect.

The curiosity soon faded, and everything went quiet. In fact, no one even flew over to the Vast Expanse Shrine to check out the situation other than the few hundred people who were already nearby. And in the Ninth Sect, which had tens of millions of members, a few hundred people... was like nothing.

However, all of the disciples who were below the 1,000 stair mark were completely shocked. All of them had watched as Meng Hao walked past them onto the steps they had been unable to reach. And then the bell tolled, and they all gasped.

They had no time to wonder who he was, but all of them had the intense premonition that this person... was completely exceptional!!

“He’s going too fast!!”

“I remember watching Elder Brother Bi Yun and some of the others, and they were agile too, but... but they were all people who made it to the top 1,000. Some of them even reached the top 100!!”

“This guy... might be able to make it into the top 10,000 in the rankings!!” While everyone was shaking in astonishment, Meng Hao calmly continued on one step at a time. As he moved, he maintained the same pace, moving neither faster nor slower.

1,200 steps. 1,500 steps. He continued to pass other disciples, all of whom stared in shock as he casually walked by.

His relaxed appearance and way of walking caused more gasps to rise up.

1,800 steps.... Soon, he was approaching the 1,999th step!

On that step was a middle-aged cultivator, who stood there, eyes bloodshot, panting. His body trembled as he lifted his foot into the air, using all the strength he could muster, the full power of his cultivation base, to take that next step onto the 2,000th stair.

“You can do it, Xu Liu!” he growled to himself. “All you have to do is step down. Then the bell will toll, and you’ll receive the Baptism. Your cultivation base will make some progress, and you’ll finally be able to make a name for yourself in the sect!!” However, there was a power that seemed to rise up from the ground, making it impossible for him to lower his foot.

At this moment of incredible difficulty, he suddenly realized that there was a young man behind him. He was handsome, and seemed to have no trouble at all as he walked up. He even looked over with a smile.

The middle-aged man stared in shock. Feeling somewhat muddled, he had no chance to even react before Meng Hao walked past him, stepping onto the 2,000th step and then beyond.

“Impossible!!” the man thought, his mind reeling, his face filling with astonishment and shock. He looked at Meng Hao, and then at his own foot. To him, that step was one of incredible difficulty, and yet this young man had just walked on past it as if it were level ground. The man almost couldn’t believe what he had just seen.

Rumbling filled his mind, and his thoughts were thrown into chaos. A massive force pushed against him, making it impossible to make that final step. He staggered backward, looking up at Meng Hao's retreating back.

It was then that the bell tolled out yet again, this time, twice.

Dong, dong....

The sound echoed out from the Vast Expanse Shrine to fill the entire Ninth Sect, causing widespread astonishment.

The main reason for that was because the time between the first tolling of the bell and the second had been too short, less time than it takes an incense stick to burn!

“What’s going on today? How funny. First someone reached the 1,000th step, and then right after that, someone reached 2,000 steps.”

“Interesting, interesting. I wonder if someone will reach 3,000 steps next?” Countless people in the Ninth Sect were surprised, but then began to laugh and joke about it. It wasn’t that people didn’t think about the possibility of a single person causing the bell to toll twice. But when they realized that only enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, they dismissed any such notions.

It seemed to be a complete impossibility. Unless... someone was walking up the steps who qualified to be in the top 1,000 of the Vast Expanse Shrine.

Even Yan’er was shocked as she flew through the air toward the Vast Expanse Shrine. Suddenly, keen anticipation rose up in her heart.

“Could it be... could it be that Master has something to do with the tolling of the bell?” Earlier, she would probably have taken that to be impossible. But now she couldn’t shake the feeling that the Ninth Paragon and her Master were very similar. It wasn’t that their facial features were exactly the same, but there was something about them, something about their auras, that was almost the same.

Yan’er’s heart began to pound. She took out a medicinal pill and consumed it, causing her cultivation base to surge and giving her an added burst of speed.

The two bell tolls caused more disciples to gather. Before, there had been a few hundred, but now there were over a thousand, all of whom were looking up with interest at the Vast Expanse Shrine.

“It’s too bad we can’t see who it is that passed 1,000 steps, or whoever it was that passed 2,000 steps.... Maybe it’s Elder Brother Xu Liu. I remember that, years ago, he got stuck at the 1,999th step!”

“The Vast Expanse Shrine has a total of 100,000 steps. In the first 10,000, a bell will toll for every thousand steps. After that, the bell tolls every 10,000 steps. Then, once you reach 80,000 steps, you’ll be listed in the top 3,000, and your name will appear on the Vast Expanse Stele.”

“I’m actually hoping to hear that third tolling of the bell.” Everyone was talking and laughing, but no one really expected that a third bell toll would occur. But then....

The Vast Expanse Shrine shook, and the mountain shook as a third tolling of the bell... filled the air!

Dong, dong, dong!!

A series of three tolls echoed out, along with an ancient aura that buffeted the faces of the onlookers. The surrounding disciples cried out in astonishment, and their eyes went wide. Gasps could be heard as everyone looked up at the Vast Expanse Shrine.

It wasn’t just that small group. More disciples in the Ninth Sect turned in their astonishment to look in the direction of the Vast Expanse Shrine.

“A third tolling of the bell!!”

“Not even enough time passed for an incense stick to burn!!”

“Who could this tolling be for...? How shocking! Three people caused the bell to toll today, one for 1,000 steps, one for 2,000 and one for 3,000....”

In sharp contrast, all of the disciples on the mountain below the 3,000 step mark were certain of what was happening. Their minds reeled, for they knew that it wasn't three people who had caused the bell tolls, it was... a single individual!

In less time than it takes three incense sticks to burn, he passed everyone. He was the one... to cause three tolls of the bell!

“How is this even possible? One incense stick's worth of time, one thousand steps...”

“Something big is happening today!!” None of these people felt much like climbing the stairs any more. They were panting as they looked up the staircase, almost as if they could see Meng Hao... causally climbing up one step after another.

To Meng Hao, it really was a casual thing. At this point, he had already climbed 3,500 stairs, and so far, hadn't felt any pressure at all. Furthermore, the three tolls of the bell left him tingling with traces of Baptism.

Unfortunately, it was always an incomplete feeling, as if the tolling of the bell hadn't reached the point where it could thoroughly Baptise him.

“Interesting,” he thought. “It seems you need multiple tolls of the bell. The best would be to make sure they keep tolling constantly.” He moved forward again, but instead of stepping up by a single step, he started taking them three at a time!

His speed tripled, and soon he reached the 3,700th step . Then 3,800. 3,900. 4,000!!

He whizzed past all of the cultivators who were between the 3,000th and 4,000th steps. They could hardly believe what they were seeing as a blurred figure raced past them, kicking up a wind.

“Who... who is that?”

Everyone was left with minds spinning as the fourth tolling of the bell rang out!!

The sound shook the entire Ninth Sect. More and more cultivators were converging near the mountain. By now, there were several thousand, and the sound of their conversations rose up into the air.

However... before much conversation could take place, a fifth tolling of the bell rang out!!

Meng Hao had increased his speed again! Instead of walking up the stairs three at a time, he was taking them ten at a time! Because of that increased speed, the sixth tolling of the bell rang out, and moments later, the seventh! They were tolling together!

Before the sound of the seventh tolling of the bell faded away, the eighth tolling began.... What a shocking turn of events! Next was the ninth tolling, which shook the whole sect. Then the tenth.... Everyone was staring with wide eyes and slack jaws.

Chapter 1459: You're Fang Mu!

Dong, dong, dong, dong.... Dong, dong, dong, dong.... Dong, dong, dong, dong.... The sonorous tolling bell represented something holy, something that would attract widespread envy, and yet at the moment the sound was ringing out as though a mortal were simply pounding on a drum... and doing it as many times as he felt like.

To hear the bell tolling in this fashion was something that had never occurred in the history of the Ninth Sect. Throughout all the years, never had it sounded out so many times in such a short period of time....

“What... what... what is happening? What’s going on?! How many people are there causing the bell to toll so many times?”

“But... but how come it seems like it’s actually being caused by one person? Otherwise, it would be far too coincidental.... But if it’s a single person, that would simply be a violation of common sense. It would make more sense for it to be a coincidence than for it to be caused by one person.”

The Ninth Sect was completely and utterly stirred up by what was happening. Virtually all of its cultivators were in flight toward the mountain, whether they were in the Immortal Realm or even the Ancient Realm.

People crowded around, millions of them, even tens of millions. They came from all directions to gather around the Vast Expanse Shrine. Some of them didn’t fly over, but sent divine sense out to lock down onto the mountain.

Up in midair, Yan'er looked on with wide eyes. She heard the bell tolling, and saw countless cultivators flying up into the air, and was a bit taken aback. She almost couldn't believe that this was being caused by her Master.

Even more shocked than everyone else were the cultivators beneath 10,000 steps in the trial by fire. They were completely and utterly astonished as they stared up the mountain peak, the sound of the bell ringing in their ears. Their minds were total blanks, and the very same types of questions were buzzing in all of their heads.

“Who is this guy?!”

“He seemed familiar, but I can't seem to place exactly who he is!”

Most people were completely shocked, but there were certain individuals within the Ninth Sect who didn't have much of a reaction at all. Of course, the Elders and the Dao Realm experts weren't surprised, but there was an additional group who were similarly ambivalent. They were the blazing suns of the Ninth Sect, the weakest of whom had placed in the top 10,000 names on the Vast Expanse Shrine.

They didn't care much at all about the commotion. Unless they felt a threat from Fang Mu, to them, it was all just a big ruckus.

“Whether it's a single person, or a group, it doesn't matter until they pass 50,000 steps. Before then, it's mostly meaningless.”

“Anyone who passes 50,000 steps can be listed in the top 10,000. Likewise, 80,000 steps puts you in the top 3,000.”

“Mount Vast Expanse itself doesn't count for much. It's only when you reach the Vast Expanse Shrine itself that you truly count as Chosen, and can be listed in the top 100!” All of those people had incredible natural talent, and back when they challenged the Vast Expanse Shrine, had caused huge commotions. As such, they took the matter in stride, and in fact, didn't even care.

However, there were a few of them who were slightly curious, so they flew over and began to climb up the mountain. There were actually a few thousand people who did so, their goal being, not to challenge the Vast Expanse Shrine, but to see who exactly it was that was causing the tolling of the bell. Was it a group, or was it... an individual!?

If a group was involved, then it wouldn't matter much. However, if it was an individual, that would be a different story...

Many of the people who had stepped onto the path just now had previously reached a location somewhere beneath 50,000 steps. In their minds, catching up with either a group or an individual would be a simple task.

Meng Hao was now standing on the 10,000th step, his eyes closed. As the bell tolled out, he experienced a Baptism. To most people, that was a process that would take quite some time, but for him, it only took about ten breaths of time.

After all, he was already equipped with incredible latent talent, so the Baptism was almost like a decoration on something that was already perfect. Although it did benefit him, it wasn't fundamentally shocking.

"Not bad," Meng Hao thought. "It seems I underestimated this Vast Expanse Shrine." His eyes flickered with anticipation regarding the upcoming bell tolls.

"Well, I should probably move a bit faster then." Smiling, he flickered into motion, this time, each stride took him... 100 steps!!

Ten paces, 1,000 steps. Soon, he reached 11,000 steps. 13,000 steps. 15,000 steps. 18,000 steps. And then... 20,000 steps!

To Meng Hao, 10,000 steps was only 100 paces. However, to the cultivators who were actually participating in that part of the trial by fire, it was like a blast of wind had just swept past them....

When Meng Hao stepped onto the 20,000th step, two bell tolls could be heard. However, they were different than before, deeper, more ancient, more shocking!

As soon as the sound echoed out, people outside the mountain were astounded.

Of the people charging up the mountain to try to catch up and glimpse the person causing the bell to toll, the fastest was still 10,000 steps away from Meng Hao. All of those people were shaken, and their eyes were wide with disbelief.

“20,000... 20,000 steps!!”

“That was faster than it takes an incense stick to burn! That was... a few dozen breaths of time. How could the bell already be tolling for the 20,000th step!?!?!?”

Numerous such cries rose up from the crowd outside the mountain, creating a sound wave that surged out in all directions.

As for Meng Hao, he was shaking a bit because of the Baptism from the bell toll. His eyes were shining as he sensed that his cultivation base was on the verge of a breakthrough.

He smiled, striding forward once again. 23,000 steps. 27,000 steps. Eventually... 30,000 steps!!

The bell tolled, leading to widespread astonishment and shock.

“What... what is going on today? There are so many people making breakthroughs! Hahaha. Ha ha.... How strange....”

The discussion and outcry soon died down, until silence prevailed among the countless cultivators watching the mountain.

They would have to be much more stupid than they were to not understand by this point that it was not a group doing this, but rather... a single individual!!

And yet, no one dared to ponder the matter. If the bell really was tolling for a single person, then... that would be a mind-blowing turn of events.

From the beginning until this moment, only enough time had passed for a few incense sticks to burn. If it was a single person, he had used that much time to go from the first step all the way to... step number 30,000! If anyone spoke the words aloud, it would be almost impossible to believe. In the history of the Ninth Sect, it was something that had never happened.

“Maybe it’s a mistake. Maybe... something’s wrong with the mountain?”

“Perhaps it’s just a big coincidence, and not a single person....”

The onlookers didn’t have to wait for long before the fourth tolling could be heard. Everyone was astonished, and the tolling of the bell caused them to literally shake. Strange gleams could be seen in their eyes, and their minds spun. Yan’er finally arrived at the mountain, her eyes wide and her heart racing.

The tolling for the 40,000th stair echoed out in all directions. The people who had begun to climb the steps in the hope of catching up were now completely dumbfounded, and gave up. By now, their question had been answered.

However, there was one person among that group who didn’t give up! Gritting his teeth, he pressed forward.

His speed was actually a bit greater than Meng Hao’s. By the time Meng Hao reached 45,000 steps, he was at step number 40,000. He was huffing and puffing, for although his limit was somewhere between 45,000 and 48,000 stairs, to speed up 40,000 steps in one shot was not an easy task by any stretch of the imagination.

As of this point, he could just barely make out the image of... a single person about 5,000 steps beyond him. That was absolute confirmation that it wasn’t a group who was causing this scene!

When he saw that it was indeed a single person, he gasped, and his mind reeled. Although he, like many of the others racing up the mountain, had asked some of the fellow disciples along the way, and had already been told the truth, he was still left shaken.

To verify the matter with his own eyes left his heart battered with waves of shock. Even as he proceeded onward to try to get a closer look, Meng Hao passed step number 47,000. Then, ten more paces brought him to 48,000 steps. Another ten paces, and he was at 49,000.

“This... this....” gasped the cultivator behind him, completely shocked. Considering how fast Meng Hao was going, and how relaxed he seemed, this man had the strong premonition that... the Ninth Sect would soon have a heretofore-unheard of Chosen!

“Who are you?!?!” he yelled at the top of his lungs.

Meng Hao stopped in place and looked back, a quizzical expression on his face. Although he didn't say anything, the cultivator got a clear view of his face.

When that happened, a tremor ran through the man. Although other people didn't have a very strong impression of Fang Mu, this particular man had been watching when he passed his Tribulation, and as such, he definitely recognized him.

“Fang Mu... you're Fang Mu!!” The shock was so great that his heart trembled and his cultivation base grew unstable. He couldn't keep moving, and rumbling sounds echoed out as he was teleported off of the mountain.

As soon as he appeared outside, he shouted out as loud as he could, in a voice that all of the countless cultivators outside of the mountain could hear.

“I saw him. It's one person, not a group. It's... Fang Mu! He's the one who only took ten years to go from mortal to Immortal... Fang Mu! He just went from the first step all the way to step number 50,000, in almost no time at all!”

The man's voice rang out for everyone to hear.

Everyone was nearly struck dumb with shock, even Yan'er. Everyone was now thinking of the name Fang Mu.

Countless gasps could be heard, and after a moment, a huge commotion broke out. It was then that... the fifth tolling of the bell could be heard!!

Dong, Dong, Dong, Dong, Dong....

Ancient, sonorous, without compare. The bell was shocking to the extreme, and as it echoed out into the sect, and into the hearts of all, it merged with the name they were thinking about, transforming into something beyond incredible!

Chapter 1460: A Smile From the Peak!

By the time the echoing toll of the bell faded away, everyone outside of the mountain was profoundly and deeply shaken by the name Fang Mu.

“Fang Mu, who went from mortal to Immortal in ten years! The one whose Immortal Tribulation was so shocking that even the Ninth Paragon appeared? That... Fang Mu?”

“I can’t believe it’s him. After he went from mortal to Immortal in only ten years, he vanished without a trace. He hasn’t been seen at all in the sect. It’s actually him!!”

“Back then, people took him to be an incredible Chosen. Now, after twenty years, he appears again! Could it be that he had a cultivation base breakthrough and is in the Ancient Realm now!?!?”

Everyone was in an uproar as they suddenly recalled Fang Mu. All the shocking things he had done back then overlapped with what was happening now, leaving everyone completely shocked.

Even back then, there had been many people who had looked down on him. But now, such derision was pale and feeble, and couldn’t stand up at all to the tolling of the bell for the 50,000th step.

In all of the Ninth Sect, there were only about 10,000 who could reach 50,000 steps. That didn’t necessarily indicate that their cultivation bases were extremely high; the Vast Expanse Shrine tested a person’s potential and overall power. Cultivation base wasn’t really important.

In response to the tolling of the bell, Yan’er began to pant, and stare over at the Vast Expanse Shrine, mind a blank. Almost immediately, the cultivators in the area recognized her as Fang Mu’s apprentice.

One by one they began to look over, and although their expressions seemed the same as they had been moments before, deep within their eyes could be seen flickers of envy and awe. Awe of Yan’er’s Master!

Anybody could see that, considering his momentum, Fang Mu wouldn’t be stopping at 50,000 steps. As for how far he would go in the end... no one could say at the moment.

Even as the bell tolled for the 50,000th step, many cultivators who occupied the top 10,000 spots in the Ninth Sect emerged from secluded meditation and headed toward the mountain.

Before reaching the 50,000th stair, Fang Mu was on a lower level than them. But now, they could sense a threat, and thus, a stream of people began to arrive.

“Look, it’s Elder Brother Chen Zhan! He’s in the top 10,000!”

“Elder Brother Liu Yun is here!”

“It’s Elder Sister Sun Luo...” Everyone in the area was buzzing with conversation regarding the numerous extraordinary and illustrious figures from the Ninth Sect who were showing up.

As they appeared, the surrounding cultivators would back away to give them space, making them very easy to spot within the crowd.

At the same time, Meng Hao stood on the stairs on the mountain, well aware of the commotion that must be underway outside. Smiling, and not caring a bit, he immersed himself in the Baptism from the tolling of the bell. Inside of him, his cultivation base was now only a hair away from a breakthrough.

However, that was of only secondary importance. Of even greater significance was that the sealing mark of the Ninth Hex, which he had been working on from his first day in the sect, was becoming clearer and clearer.

After ten breaths of time passed, he opened his eyes and proceeded along. This time, he moved even faster than before, as if the pressure from the mountain wasn’t affecting him at all.

55,000 steps. 58,000 steps. Then, he passed 60,000, and without even a pause, he flew like the wind until he reached 62,000 steps. He whistled along, getting higher and higher. By the time the bell began to toll for the 60,000th stair, he was at the 63,000th stair. As he began to vibrate inwardly, he chuckled and increased his speed. Soon he was on the 67,000th stair, and then a huge leap took him directly to... the 70,000th stair.

It was only when he landed on that stair that the bell from the 60,000th stair ended, followed immediately by the bell for the 70,000th stair, creating a combined thirteen tolls of the bell. The entire Ninth Sect was shaken, and even the blazing suns of the sect who were in the audience wore expressions of utter astonishment.

It must be stated that when the tolling bells from the later 10,000 stairs combined, it was completely different from the combined tolling of bells in the first 10,000 set of stairs. The difference was like the difference between Heaven and Earth!

As the bell tolls combined, everyone was shaken, and not just the people in the vicinity of the mountain itself. All of the Chosen who had a spot in the top 3,000 on the Vast Expanse Shrine were astonished. Everyone began to rush over to the mountain, even Dao Realm cultivators. The only exceptions were the people in the top 100.

More people streamed over to the vicinity of the Vast Expanse Shrine, where a hubbub of conversation rose up into the sky.

“I can’t believe this Fang Mu is so inhuman! He actually connected the tolling of the bells!!”

“How did he even do it? There are 10,000 steps between the 60,000 and 70,000 mark. That level of speed is unbelievable.”

Even as the sound of shocked conversations rose up, the stone stele at the bottom of the mountain glittered with bright light. Everyone looked over with mixed expressions as the very last name, the name in the 3,000th spot, was wiped away, vanishing forever... to be replaced by another name!

The 3,000th place was now occupied by Fang Mu!

Although the name was small, and in very last place, the fact that it was even there led to a huge commotion.

Yan’er was trembling, her eyes shining with delight. When she saw her Master’s name on the stone stele, she began to dance with joy. As far as she could remember, this was the happiest moment in her life, and the most exciting, exceeding even the moment in which she had been saved by the Ninth Paragon.

By now, she had almost forgotten about Elder Brother Bi Yun.

Yan’er’s eyes shone with anticipation, and her mood soared. “Who cares about the top 3,000? My Master can definitely get into the top 100!”

At the same time, more and more people were arriving in the area. They looked at the stone stele, then up at the Vast Expanse Shrine. These were all Chosen whose names were listed on the stone stele, and their appearance on the scene caused the other cultivators in the vicinity of the mountain to become even more excited than before.

“Gu Tianyi. Shao Minghao. Guo Tenglong. Han Ruonan....”

“I can’t believe they’re all here....”

Even as everyone made shocked exclamations, a handsome young man in a green robe appeared. His expression was cold, and his appearance perfect in every aspect.

The young female disciples in the area were instantly thrown into excitement.

“Elder Brother Bi Yun!”

This young man was extremely famous in the Ninth Sect. He had climbed all of the steps on the mountain, and had even entered the Vast Expanse Shrine itself.... Bi Yun.

Even Yan’er suddenly started to feel conflicted.

Meng Hao didn’t care about what was happening outside the mountain. His expression was calm as he proceeded onward. Furthermore, his speed didn’t reduce at all. He went even faster than before!

The pressure was increasing compared to below, but to Meng Hao, it was negligible. Now, instead of taking the steps 100 at a time, it was 500!

One pace, three paces, ten paces... twenty paces!

The next spot he appeared was at the 80,000th step. The bell tolled again, and yet Meng Hao didn’t stop moving. Now, a single pace carried him 1,000 steps. Ten paces later, he was on the 90,000th step.

From there, he could look down at the entirety of the Ninth Sect and its swirling clouds. The pressure here was intense, to the point where Meng Hao was finally feeling some of its effects.

There was even a bit of sweat visible on his forehead.

“Now this is more like it,” he said, smiling. “Otherwise it would have been too simple. Meaningless really.” His eyes shone with a bright gleam. As the bell tolled, he took a deep breath, and once again increased his speed. One pace took him 2,000 steps!

He was flying upward!

Rumbling could be heard with each step. 92,000 steps. Another pace, and he was at 94,000. The Baptism from the tolling bell continued, and the fluctuations of his cultivation base grew more intense. A third pace put him at 96,000 steps.

Another step, and he was at 98,000....

Meng Hao was now only 2,000 steps from the top of the mountain. He could see the enormous tower that was the Vast Expanse Shrine, and he could see the sky stretching out above it. Below, the other mountains in the sect almost looked small. At the same time, the sealing mark of the Seal the Heavens Hex was becoming more complete.

“After these final 2,000 steps, will I qualify to enter the Vast Expanse Shrine?” His expression was calm as he lifted his foot up. When he put it down, he had crossed the final 2,000 steps, and was at the peak of the mountain!

100,000 steps!

Meng Hao’s trip from the 1st step to the 100,000th was an unprecedented miracle in the Ninth Sect. Furthermore, the total amount of time he used didn’t even exceed five incense sticks’ worth of time!

It was at this point that Fang Mu’s name rose rapidly up the stone stele. It went from 3,000th place to 2,500. Then 2,000. Then 1,000. Then 500, 400, 300, 200....

In the end, it appeared in... 100th place!

The speed with which it rose ensured that Fang Mu was now a legend!

The bell tolled, shaking Heaven and Earth. The Baptism effect on him was intense, filling his body. Also, for the first time, the group outside the mountain could actually see Meng Hao standing there outside the Vast Expanse Shrine.

He wore a long robe, which fluttered in the mountain breeze along with his hair. He seemed to have his eyes closed, and he looked every bit like an Immortal!

There was no hubbub of conversation, no cries of shock. There were only gasps as countless eyes... came to focus on that figure atop the mountain.

Meng Hao was now someone who would exist eternally within the memories of the people from the Ninth Sect.

Finally, the Baptism was over, and he opened his eyes. He looked down at the crowd which had gathered, and apparently he saw Yan'er. Even as she stood there in her excitement, Meng Hao's gaze softened. Smiling warmly, he waved at her.

His gaze, his smile, and his wave, were things that everyone in the crowd could see. Almost instantly, all eyes shifted from Meng Hao to Yan'er.

Her face flushed a bit. This was the first time she had ever been stared at by so many people, and it caused her heart to begin to thump. At the same time, an unfamiliar emotion rose up inside of her, almost like something which had existed in a previous life that was now awakening.

A strange look could be seen in her eyes as she looked at Meng Hao, an indescribable brightness. At the same time, her heart began to pound even faster.

After a long moment, she cleared her throat. Face red, she muttered to herself, "Er, the old fogey sure doesn't act like an old man at all. He really knows how to please the girls."

The sun shone radiantly, and when it combined with Meng Hao's gaze, it became...

A warmth which could pierce through to previous lives.