

The Heavens 1481

Chapter 1481: The Peak of the World

And that he was. His true self was already the most powerful of Paragons. As for his clone, Meng Hao was sure that if he desired to walk the Path of the Paragon, he would definitely reach the 9-Essences level.

It might take some time, but he would succeed in the end.

However, that was not what he chose to do. Having a 9-Essences Paragon clone wouldn't help him to Transcend, and therefore, his original plan had never changed.

He would Transcend with his true self, and then, with everything he had gained in recent years, with the Ninth Sect and all its power, with the ghosts of the necropolis... he would unleash deadly violence upon the Immortal God Continent and the Devil Realm Continent. And most especially... the 33 Heavens!

He would return to his home, to the Mountain and Sea Butterfly, to his family and friends. He would return to the Mountains and Seas... to get revenge!!

That was his focus, his obsession, something which could never be erased from his mind. He would reforge the Mountain and Sea Realm, he would resurrect the meat jelly, and he would call back the copper mirror. Even if that was a defiance of the Vast Expanse, he would do it.

Meng Hao stood there atop the Tenth Heaven in the First Sect. Smiling, he breathed in deeply.

Down below, the countless disciples of the First Sect looked up with mixed emotions. Their faces were devoid of blood as they stared bitterly at Meng Hao.

The Chosen of the First Sect looked on blankly. They were truly eagles, but as of this moment, they had no other choice but to admit that the generation into which they had been born contained a towering mountain.

That mountain... was something that stretched so high above them they would never be able to fly over it.

Silence prevailed. Also in the First Sect was a woman, the current Holy Daughter of the generation. She was Han Bei, and as she looked up at Meng Hao and Yan'er atop the Tenth Heaven, she felt profoundly uneasy.

Although Meng Hao hadn't caused any trouble for her throughout the years, she still feared him. The more he cared about Chu Yuyan, the safer she felt, and yet the more she felt safe, the more that sense of safety scared her.

It was a paradox that only seemed to increase in intensity, and was influencing her mission here in the Vast Expanse School.

On more than one occasion, she had considered investigating why Meng Hao had created this clone. However, she didn't dare to even get close to him, and could only manipulate things from afar. Even then, she didn't dare to push things too far, and thus was left only with speculations.

Over the years, she had come up with numerous theories, but could not confirm any of them. Sometimes, she even felt as though all of her theories were completely incorrect.

After a moment of looking at Meng Hao and Yan'er, she sighed and looked away.

The wind blew atop the Tenth Heaven. As people looked on, Yan'er's gaze fell upon her master, and her eyes shone radiantly. It was as if this Master of hers had become the most important person in her entire life.

"Master!" she said loudly.

"Yes?" Meng Hao said, smiling.

"Master!!"

"Uh, yes?" Meng Hao gaped, looking over at her.

“Master!!” she cried again.

Pretending to look very serious, Meng Hao reached out and bopped her head. She rubbed her head, looking very resentful. However, he merely smiled at her, well aware that she was completely ecstatic at the moment.

Then he looked back out at Heaven and Earth, and his eyes gleamed with anticipation.

“The Vast Expanse Shrine offers no further good fortune for me. If I want to extinguish my last ten Soul Lamps, then... the only option I have is to walk the Transcendence Path!”

In the Vast Expanse School, the two most famous trials by fire were the Vast Expanse Shrines and the Transcendence Path. Only cultivators in the Dao Realm would tread the Transcendence Path. Of course, just walking that path didn't guarantee Transcendence. However, there was still that hope.

That path was the traditional and proper way to try to Transcend, but to date, not even the Sect Leader or others of his level had been able to reach its end.

It was a very difficult path to travel, and it seemed endless. However, the Dao Realm experts of the Vast Expanse School were entranced with it, mostly because of the multitudinous good fortune therein, good fortune that could cause one's cultivation base to advance by leaps and bounds.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. He had a strong premonition that... his clone would be able to complete the first sealing mark of the Ninth Hex on the Transcendence Path.

He had further speculations regarding how to complete the full Ninth Hex, and was sure that those speculations would also be verified on the Transcendence Path.

However, now was not the time. He had the feeling... that once he headed down that path, it would be a very, very long time before he came back. In fact, it was even possible that he never would.

Besides, there were still a few matters to handle within the Vast Expanse School.

He looked over at Yan'er, and could see that because of the good fortune of the Vast Expanse Shrine, her cultivation base was thoroughly stabilized, and had even made significant progress. She was now in the mid Immortal Realm. Although she had just made that breakthrough thanks to the

Baptism of the tolling bells, Meng Hao could see that in the coming years, her cultivation base would continue to advance rapidly.

Her latent talent had been completely optimized by the Baptism, and her qi passageways, as well as any cultivation bottlenecks, had been cleared.

In the Vast Expanse School, good fortune like that was something only Yan'er could acquire.

You could even say that on her path of cultivation, she had already opened the way to a great Dao.

"Come on," Meng Hao said with a smile, "Let's go back to the Ninth Sect." They, along with the cheering disciples of the Ninth Sect, stepped back into the teleportation portal. As the First Sect disciples looked on with bitter expressions, they vanished.

The rumbling of the spell formation shook all sects from the First to the Eighth as they returned to the Ninth Sect. The cheering shouts of the Ninth Sect's disciples shook the Vast Expanse School. A legend had been established which no one would ever be able to top.

When the group appeared back in the Ninth Sect, those who had remained behind also started cheering loudly.

"They're back! Everyone's back!"

"Eldest Brother Fang Mu has returned!!"

"Eldest Brother, Eldest Brother...."

The Ninth Sect seethed with excitement. The disciples who had been too slow to join the others in stepping through the teleportation portal earlier now began to crowd around and cheer for their Eldest Brother.

On that day, a grand celebration began in the Ninth Sect.

The news of what had happened filled the other sects. For a long time to come, the disciples of the Ninth Sect would be filled with unmatched joy.

As for the disciples from the other sects who had set up camp in the Ninth Sect, they made a swift departure. None of them dared to remain behind. As for the ten years of provocation and challenges, they were now officially a thing of the past.

Only a few people were aware that what Meng Hao had done was because of a few words uttered by Yan'er. Most of the disciples thought that he had done it as a way to tell the Chosen of the other sects that if they wanted to challenge him, they could remain in their own sects to do so. There was no need for them to come to the Ninth Sect.

In order to make things easier for them, he simply put his name on their Vast Expanse Shrines....

Because of Meng Hao, the spirits of the entire Ninth Sect were instantly lifted.

Their leader was the overbearing, domineering Ninth Paragon, who was also their protector. Among their number was the ultimate Chosen, the disciple who had completely dominated the Vast Expanse School, Fang Mu!

Because of all of that, the Ninth Sect was completely different from the other sects.

The celebrations lasted for more than a month. Eventually things settled down, but deep down, the disciples of the Ninth Sect were still extremely excited. The glory and honor they felt, as well as the sense of belonging, would never be erased.

During that month, Meng Hao had no choice other than to receive the various visitors who came to offer their respects. However, after the month passed, the number of visitors didn't decrease. In fact, they increased. Finally, he was forced to close the mountain.

From then on, he never left the mountain, and politely refused to see all visitors. However, instead of going into secluded meditation, he spent time teaching cultivation techniques to Yan'er.

Time passed. Before long, three years had gone by.

During that time, Meng Hao paid little heed to his own cultivation base. He helped Yan'er to refine her Immortal meridians, benefiting her with all of his experience regarding cultivation. He helped

her gain more Dao enlightenment, holding nothing back. He spared no effort in passing on to her everything he knew.

Because of such conscientious teaching on his part, Yan'er's cultivation base rose with shocking speed, and was far more stable than anyone else in her generation.

During those years, a certain feeling slowly rose up within Yan'er. Eventually, she began to laugh less, and when she looked at Meng Hao, it was with concern, as if she couldn't bear the thought of parting with him.

After all her years of being dependent on him, she had come to be very sensitive to his personality. Based on everything that had happened during the past three years, she came to feel strongly that...

"Master is going to leave...." That scared her. No matter how many times she asked about it, Meng Hao would always just smile and decline to comment. However, whenever his gaze fell upon her, it was warmer than before, and it almost seemed like he was recalling past times.

Another ten years passed....

Yan'er's cultivation base continued to climb higher and higher. However, her heart only continued to grow more anxious. One day she saw a jade slip belonging to her Master that apparently contained information about the sect's Transcendence Path. At that point, her heart began to pound.

She knew that the Transcendence Path was something only Dao Realm cultivators were qualified to tread. Supposedly, it contained incredible good fortune, and yet few people actually dared to walk upon it.

After all, it also contained profound danger. It was not the Vast Expanse Shrine, which was located in the sect itself. It was in the outside world, located within a rift in the starry sky of the Vast Expanse.

After entering, one would be completely cut off, and would not return for dozens or even hundreds of years. It was a path that a cultivator could only step onto twice in a lifetime.

Years ago, Yan'er would have pressed her Master about the matter, and wouldn't have given up until she figured out a way to prevent him from going to such a dangerous place. But she had grown

up, and understood that it was a decision for him to make. She knew that within her Master's heart was an obsession that even she couldn't comprehend.

And so she said nothing.

During the thirteen years which passed, Meng Hao extinguished a few more Soul Lamps. Now, he had only seven which continued to burn.

Another year passed, and Yan'er was now at the peak of the Immortal Realm. The speed of her progress was far beyond normal, causing widespread shock among the disciples of the Ninth Sect. But when they considered who her Master was, they realized that it wasn't such an unreasonable thing.

After all, the good fortune of eight Vast Expanse Shrines was beyond incredible.

Chapter 1482: Looking Back at This Life!

That year, Yan'er faced her Ancient Tribulation.

That day was one of utmost importance to Meng Hao as well. He personally set up the relevant spell formations, and arranged for the energy of Heaven and Earth in the Ninth Sect to act as Dharma Protector. Several days later, when the Ancient Tribulation finally concluded, he breathed a sigh of relief.

He watched Yan'er pass her Ancient Tribulation, watched her ignite her Soul Lamps, and then watched her close her eyes in meditation to begin breathing exercises. The whole time, his gaze was soft and kind. To mortals, she wouldn't be considered young, but to cultivators in the Ancient Realm, she was like a girl. The passage of time left no scars upon her. She only continued to grow more beautiful, and at the same time, mature. To other members of the sect, she was truly a Chosen, someone who knew how to conduct herself properly and with decorum, someone everyone enjoyed being around.

It was only around Meng Hao that she would pout and act like a coquettish little girl.

Meng Hao could tell that Chu Yuyan's aura was growing stronger and stronger on her. Sometimes, he couldn't even tell the difference between the two.

That was especially true as he watched her doing breathing exercises after passing her Ancient Tribulation. Many memories flitted through his mind.

In her last life, Chu Yuyan had never passed through the Immortal Realm. But in this life, with Meng Hao's help, she was reaching the highest pinnacles.

Furthermore, regardless of whether her name was Chu Yuyan or Yan'er, she had earned a place in his heart for all eternity.

"It's about time for me to let go, too...." he murmured.

A few days later, Yan'er opened her eyes and glanced over at Meng Hao. From the look in his eyes, she seemed to understand what was about to happen. She loathed the idea of parting with him, but it had been years since she came to understand the choice he would eventually make. Today, there was something deep within his eyes that explained everything.

"Master...." she said, her voice quavering.

"You're in the Ancient Realm now," he said softly. "You understand how to go about extinguishing your Soul Lamps, right?"

"If there are any areas you don't understand, now is the time to ask me.

"Before the Ancient Realm, cultivators can receive assistance from others. In fact, such assistance can make things much easier. However, starting with the Ancient Realm, you'll have to rely completely upon yourself.

"Never forget what I told you before. We cultivators cultivate, not the body, but the heart."

Tears welled up in Yan'er's eyes, and then began to stream down her cheeks. She was trembling.
"Master...."

"I've prepared nine jade slips for you. Each one of them contains some of the power of my divine sense.... If you encounter a dangerous situation, you can be protected." By this point, Meng Hao's clone was extremely close to the Dao Realm, and he could even draw upon some of the power of his true self.

As such, the nine jade slips held some of his true self's divine sense power, and would be able to keep Yan'er safe wherever she went on Planet Vast Expanse.

"I've also prepared seven volumes of Dao treatises, which contain all of the magical techniques and divine abilities I've learned in my life.

"There are also 100,000 medicinal pills which I concocted especially for you. That should ensure your path of cultivation is a smooth one.

"As for magical items, I never did build up a huge collection, but what I did gain, I'm leaving to you.

"There are also Immortal jades and spirit stones. In the past, I used to be extremely attracted to them, but now that I think back, it just makes me sigh. I'm leaving everything to you."

"Master, I don't want any of that, I just want..." She trailed off, tears flowing down her face. She was afraid, terrified even. Although it had been ten years since she realized what her Master planned to do, she still wasn't ready for it to actually happen.

"Because of the fame I have built up," Meng Hao continued, "no one will dare to bully you while you're in the Ninth Sect. Everyone here will take care of you. I've also paid a visit to the Paragon to ask him to watch out for you.

"I might not be here, but I've made various other preparations to keep you safe, for example the mastiff, who will continue to accompany you."

Anxiety erupted within Yan'er. "No, I don't want that. I don't care, Master, I--"

"Yan'er!" he growled.

A tremor ran through her. In her entire life, she couldn't remember a single time when her Master had been strict with her. This was the first time. Even more tears flowed down her face.

"You've grown up," he said softly. Then he reached out and bopped her head.

She subconsciously bowed her head, weeping.

He shook his head. "Come on," he said. "I want to take you somewhere." As he turned to leave, she rose to her feet, wiped the tears off her cheeks, and followed. For the first time in thirteen years, Master and apprentice left the Ninth Sect.

They traveled to the border region of the ninth continent, where they found a river, next to which was a village. They arrived around evening, when smoke was rising lazily from the chimneys of the houses. Meng Hao caught sight of the house where he had lived as a child in this life. It had long since changed ownership; the scholar who had found him in the river had passed away many years ago.

However, the old man who had cared for him was still alive. He had ended up marrying the village widow, and both of them were now completely ancient, with numerous children and grandchildren.

When Meng Hao saw the old man, he thought back to many warm memories from this life, and a slight smile touched his face.

Yan'er stood quietly at his side. She said nothing, but she could sense the tender feelings in her Master's heart.

They left around dawn. Meng Hao didn't actually meet with the old man in person. However, he left behind numerous age-prolonging, longevity-enhancing medicinal pills, as well as jade slips which would protect the man and his bloodline for generations to come.

It wasn't long after Meng Hao left that the old man yawned and walked out of his room. When he looked down, he saw all the items that Meng Hao had left, and his jaw dropped. After some contemplation, he shivered and looked up into the Heavens. Finally, he smiled.

"Haowie, you came back...?" He chuckled as he recalled the young boy from so many years ago.

A few days later, Meng Hao stood at the very top of the Vast Expanse Shrine, where he clasped hands to the Heavens.

“I am Fang Mu, from the Ninth Sect of the Vast Expanse School. I desire to walk the Transcendence Path. Paragon, please open the portal!”

As his voice echoed out, the Paragon first gaped in confusion, then began to reel in shock. A buzz filled the Ninth Sect as countless disciples flew toward the mountain peak upon which rose the Vast Expanse Shrine. There, they saw Meng Hao standing at the peak, and Yan’er standing at the bottom of the mountain, looking up at him.

“He’s... going to walk the Transcendence Path....”

“Indeed. The Transcendence Path is exactly the type of place for a Chosen like him!” The other Chosen in the Ninth Sect sighed, mixed emotions playing out on their faces.

People had long since speculated that he might do something just like this. The truth was that Ancient Realm cultivators weren’t prohibited from walking the Transcendence Path. However, it was usually done only by unique Chosen with special qualifications.

As for Meng Hao, if he didn’t qualify to be Chosen, then no one in the Vast Expanse School did.

Naturally, he was qualified to walk the Transcendence Path.

Yan’er stood there silently, looking up at her Master atop the mountain. Her eyes gleamed with determination, and she took a deep breath, telling herself that she had to be strong. Yet, she couldn’t stop the tears from rolling down her cheeks.

Meng Hao’s voice was still echoing out when the voice of the 7-Essences Paragon responded from within the Ninth Sect.

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely!” Meng Hao replied, his voice filled with a decisiveness that could sever nails and chop iron.

Moments later, an intense rumbling sound filled Heaven and Earth, as if someone were working a type of grand magic. It sounded like the sky itself were being ripped open. Everything shook as an enormous rift appeared up above.

The rift shone with a seven-colored glow, dazzling and radiant. The light then transformed into a staircase, which descended from above and came to a stop directly in front of Meng Hao. He looked up at the staircase, and could see that within the rift in the sky was another world.

It was at this point that an ancient voice echoed out: “The sect rules of the Vast Expanse School state that any disciple who enters the Transcendence Path must leave behind a Soul Lamp. If the lamp shines, the cultivator lives. If the lamp is extinguished... the cultivator has died.”

The countless disciples in the area looked on silently.

Meng Hao waved his sleeve, causing a stream of soul fire to fly out from his forehead. The soul fire swirled through the air, transforming into the shape of a Soul Lamp.

This particular Soul Lamp was different from his collection of Ancient Realm Soul Lamps. It was formed from his own soul fire, and would indicate to the outside world whether or not he was still alive. Based on the state of that flame, people outside would know the state he was in as he walked the Transcendence Path.

What people did to the flame on the outside, however, wouldn't affect Meng Hao. He waved his hand, sending the soul fire lamp over to Yan'er.

“Place that in my secluded meditation facilities,” he said, smiling. With that, he took a deep breath, stepping forward onto the staircase and speeding upward toward the rift.

As he rose higher into the sky, the Ninth Sect's 7-Essences Paragon spoke into his ear. “Fang Mu, there are many things in life which can't be forced. If you reach a point where you can't go onward, you must turn back....”

Just when Meng Hao was about to step into the rift and enter that most ancient Transcendence Path, Yan'er suddenly called out in a loud voice.

“Master, do you... do you remember back when you told me the story of Chu Yuyan? You promised that if I wanted to hear the rest of the story, that you would tell it to me.”

Meng Hao stopped and looked back down at the mountains below, and at Yan'er, standing there in the crowd. "I remember," he said, smiling softly. "Do you want to hear it now?"

She trembled, tears pouring down her face. "No, not now," she replied. "Master, can you tell me the rest of the story when you get back...?"

The idea of parting with her Master hurt so much that it felt like her heart was being crushed.

"Of course," he replied, nodding. With that he turned, took a deep breath... and stepped into the rift, onto... the Transcendence Path.

Chapter 1483: On the Transcendence Path!

From the moment of the creation of the Vast Expanse School until now, the Transcendence Path had always been of vital importance. It could even be considered a trial by fire that gave birth to the reserve power of the entire sect.

In truth, it wasn't really a trial by fire, not the type that disciples in sects usually participated in. Despite being part of the Vast Expanse School, the things that happened on the Transcendence Path were beyond the control of even Paragons.

Everything depended on the individual involved. Everything depended on chance and luck.

From ancient times until now, countless disciples of the Vast Expanse School had walked the path, and yet none had reached the end. Everyone who returned had done so from somewhere partway along the path.

Those who didn't return died along the way.

Actually, the Transcendence Path wasn't really a literal path.

It was a very unique location, so much so that even people who had been there and experienced what lay inside had difficulty explaining it to others. It was almost as if there were some magical law at play which prevented people from explaining everything that had happened inside.

The first thing Meng Hao saw after entering the rift, after stepping onto the Transcendence Path, was a lamp.

It was... a bronze lamp.

It actually looked almost completely identical to the bronze lamp inside of his true self.

Except, this bronze lamp was enormous, so large that it was impossible to describe, larger even than Planet Vast Expanse. The starry sky in this location was the type that made one's mind reel to even look at it.

The Transcendence Path... was this bronze lamp.

The burning flame of the lamp was made up of three parts, the outer flame, the inner flame, and the heart of the flame.... Apparently, they formed three different dimensions within the world, and the light they cast illuminated everything therein.

The world was vastly enormous, as was the bronze lamp. In addition to the dimension in the flame, the body of the bronze lamp itself also contained its own dimension.

Meng Hao's first thought upon looking at the shocking lamp was that it was actually the same lamp which existed within his true self.

Then he couldn't help but think of the Devil Realm's World-Butterflies, or the precious treasure that was the Mountain and Sea Realm, which became the Nine Mountains and Nine Seas.

All of those things could contain worlds of living things. This bronze lamp that he was looking at... was that same type of precious treasure.

"So, the Transcendence Path... is actually broken up into two parts. One part is in the body of the lamp, the other, in the flame.

"As for the flame... it is further broken up into three parts. The outer flame, the inner flame, and the heart of the flame...." Meng Hao's eyes glittered with determination. With that, he transformed into a flash of light that shot toward the bronze lamp.

The bronze lamp got bigger and bigger as he approached. Time passed. Not even Meng Hao could have predicted that after flying for seven months, going all out with every scrap of power he could muster, he still wouldn't have reached the lamp itself.

By this point, he couldn't even see the lamp's flame any more, only a world of bronze.

His expression was very serious as he continued to fly onward. Three months later, the lamp started to look different. He could see lands covered with buildings. He saw countless mountain ranges, and even rivers and seas.

Eventually, his vision swam until he couldn't see. Then, when things were clear again... he was within the world of the bronze lamp.

Rumbling sounds echoed out, and an indescribable force pushed down onto him. It felt like countless mountains were trying to crush him, as if an enormous hand were pushing down onto his head. The pressure shoved him down out of the air, sending him speeding toward the ground.

A moment later, he slammed into the earth.

A boom echoed out, and afterward, he lay prone on the ground, blue veins bulging out on his neck and face. He let out a roar, and his body shook violently. After enough time passed for three incense sticks to burn, he was finally able to struggle into a crouching position.

That effort alone left his garments soaked with sweat. He was trembling physically, and his bones felt like they were on the verge of breaking. His eyes were thoroughly bloodshot.

The intensity of the pressure exceeded anything Meng Hao could have imagined, and was the most terrifying weight he had ever borne. Beneath this pressure, every rotation of his cultivation base made it seem like his qi passageways would burst.

Despite all of that, his eyes gleamed with focus, and even a tinge of madness. Gritting his teeth, he ever so slowly rose to his feet. It took two incense sticks' worth of time, but in the end, he was standing there, roaring at the top of his lungs.

In that very same instant, one of his remaining seven Soul Lamps was extinguished.

The extinguishing of that Soul Lamp unleashed new life force which flooded into him, strengthening him and allowing him to stand tall and straight.

His eyes grew redder, but excitement filled his heart.

“So, this is the Transcendence Path huh.... I never would have guessed that one of the Soul Lamps I found so difficult to extinguish could be put out as soon as I entered.” He looked around and found himself surrounded by a desolate wasteland. Other than him, no living being could be seen.

However, he knew that he couldn't possibly be the only person in here. There were other cultivators from the Vast Expanse School who had entered the place in the past, and were still inside after countless years.

Taking a deep breath, he took a step forward and began to walk. He felt like a mortal, plodding along. The path to be tread was a long one, that was something he had come to understand even more clearly as he drew closer to the bronze lamp.

Considering his current state, walking the entire length of the bronze lamp, and then reaching the second portion of the Transcendence Path, seemed almost impossible.

And yet, he didn't give up. Panting, jaw clenched, he walked alone through the wasteland....

That year, some important events occurred within the Vast Expanse School.

Fang Mu, who had established an unheard-of legend within the Vast Expanse School, who had summoned the Tenth Heaven of all of the Vast Expanse Shrines of the nine sects, stepped onto the Transcendence Path with an Ancient Realm cultivation base.

His departure caused the Chosen of the other sects in the Vast Expanse School to breathe sighs of relief. Living in the same era as Fang Mu made them feel as pressured, as if Heaven were weighing down on them.

Now they could relax, at least temporarily. No one could say for sure whether Fang Mu would rise to new heights on the Transcendence Path, or whether he would fade away and never be heard of again. Time would tell.

Another thing that happened that year was that the Sect Leader and the rest of the group who had entered the necropolis finally returned. They had remained within the necropolis for dozens of years, and yet, were not able to reach the ninth land mass. They reached the seventh, but were unable to open the path to the eighth.

When they returned, some of the original party members were not with them. Those who did return were all in bad shape, and Bai Wuchen hovered on the brink of death.

However, all of the group who had returned alive had made significant progress with their cultivation bases. The faint aura of Transcendence was upon them, which caused a huge stir in the Vast Expanse School.

Also during that year, Patriarch Chi Feng made a cultivation base breakthrough, acquiring his ninth Essence and becoming the Eighth Paragon.

Outside of the Vast Expanse School, somewhere out in the boundless starry sky, Meng Hao's true self was in the location of the fourth copper mirror shard, flying along at top speed. His face was pale, and blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth. A vast swarm of termites was chasing after him, voraciously devouring everything in their path.

At the moment, he had black armor that covered his arm and chest, giving him incredible battle prowess. By now, killing peak 9-Essences cultivators would be no difficult task for him. And yet, these termites had him bedraggled and fleeing.

The main reason was because there were so many of them they were impossible to even count. Furthermore... each and every one of them emanated brutal auras, the weakest of which was in the Immortal Realm, and the strongest... 9-Essences!

Their numbers were beyond description....

Thankfully, he had prepared well before coming into this area. After speeding along for a short time, he reached a point where he had set up a spell formation earlier. The light of teleportation flickered, and then he vanished. A moment later, the swarm of termites engulfed the teleportation portal.

Apparently, even the flickering teleportation portal was something that the termites considered to be food. Crunching sounds emanated out, and in the blink of an eye, the spell formation had been completely consumed.

However, being unable to consume Meng Hao's true self, the termites howled in rage. Anyone who could hear the sound of it would be truly shaken.

After a while, though, they begrudgingly gave up and returned to their home, a land riddled with countless passageways burrowed here and there.

In another location in the starry sky of the Vast Expanse, dazzling light flickered, and Meng Hao's true self staggered out. He coughed up a mouthful of blood, then closed his eyes and rotated his cultivation base. Rumbling booms like thunder could be heard inside of him as numerous pustules appeared on his skin. They began to wriggle, and then tiny termites burst out from within. Each and every one screamed and then exploded.

After expelling and destroying several hundred termites, Meng Hao's body was soaked with blood. However, when he opened his eyes, they shone brightly, and his body quickly recovered.

"I wonder how many countless ages that swarm of termites has existed. How unimaginable...." With that, he looked down at the armor which covered him, as it faded away and transformed into four mirror shards.

He had found the fourth mirror shard in the termites' nest, and had extracted it from within the body of the termite queen herself.

"With four shards, I have half.... Now, to get the fifth shard.

"My clone is on the Transcendence Path.... Who would have imagined that path to be so difficult...? If my speculations are correct, completing the Ninth Hex is not something that can be done in a single life.

"I have to collect the rest of these mirror shards. Getting just these two took me a few dozen years, but I suspect that acquiring the final four... will take hundreds." He looked around in exhaustion for a moment before sitting down cross-legged to do breathing exercises. After a while, he rose and sped off in the direction of the fifth shard.

Chapter 1484: Extinguishing Soul Lamps on the Path!

Three years passed.

People in the Vast Expanse School still talked about Fang Mu. As for the mountain he had lived on, only Yan'er occupied it now. It was not open to visitors, and her life was once again peaceful and quiet.

Without Meng Hao there, there was no more playful pouting on her part. Sometimes, she just sat there in a daze, daydreaming about the past.

But there was no avoiding the truth.... Her Master was gone.

Other than practicing cultivation, there was only one thing that she absolutely had to do every day, and that was to visit her Master's secluded meditation facilities, where she had enshrined his soul fire.

As long as that soul fire burned, her Master was alive.

One day, she came to visit as she always did. She kowtowed to the soul fire, and then began to speak in a murmuring voice.

"Master, you've been gone for three years. That's not too long...."

"Oh, last night when I was practicing cultivation, I finally understood that one magical technique.

"Another thing you don't know about, Master. I heard that yesterday, those jerks from the other sects started making trouble again. Supposedly, they're going to start challenging the Vast Expanse Shrine once more.

"Master, there's another thing...." Every time Yan'er came, she would speak to herself in his fashion, as if her Master were standing there in front of her. This time, even as she spoke, a tremor suddenly ran through her, and her voice faltered. Her expression flickered, and the blood drained from her face as she stared in shock at the soul fire.

For three years, the soul fire hadn't changed at all. But just now, it had faded a bit, as though it might wink out at any moment. The sight caused Yan'er to shake, and her mind to spin. She knew that this was the flame of her Master's life force, and that if it went out, it meant that he was dead.

Obviously, he must be experiencing some deadly situation on the Transcendence Path.

Her heart filled with bitterness and anxiety, and yet there was nothing she could do to help her Master. She could do nothing to change anything, really.

"Master, I'm so useless...." Tears began to roll down her cheeks as she trembled, still staring at the soul fire.

The truth was that Meng Hao really was facing a deadly test on the Transcendence Path. The pressure he was facing had just increased dramatically.

He had continued to walk for three years, and gradually, had become used to the pressure. He had even reached the point where he could jog for a bit. But today, he crossed into a new region in which the pressure suddenly increased by, not double, but tenfold!

It happened suddenly and without any warning whatsoever. Meng Hao had literally no time to even react before being slammed down onto the ground.

Many of his bones were fractured as he struggled against the pressure, and his flesh was smashed. Cracking sounds could be heard as his skeleton hovered on the brink of being shattered.

A sensation of imminent life-or-death crisis swept through him. On top of it all, his cultivation base was suppressed. He began to tremble, and his eyes were completely shot with blood as he let out a howl. However, at the moment, there was nothing he could do.

Any other person would have been destroyed instantly, but Meng Hao's true self had created this clone following the pattern laid out by the bronze lamp, making it perfect in every aspect.

It was pure, lacking any impurities or defilements, and possessed the ultimate Immortal aura. In fact, it was even possible to say that this clone was an Immortal body unto itself.

When you added in the terrifying divine will of Meng Hao's true self, it meant that the clone was just barely able to survive under this sudden tenfold increase in pressure.

Time passed. After fifteen or sixteen hours, Meng Hao's vision was fading. However, beneath the intense, deadly pressure, he was able to extinguish one of his six remaining lit Soul Lamps.

Instantly, life force poured into him, healing his bones and mending his flesh. His cultivation base flourished, and his fading life force once again began to thrive.

Having endured through the deadly crisis, Meng Hao struggled into a sitting position. His face was pale, and he was panting as he looked behind him at the path he had walked. As of this moment, he fully understood how the Transcendence Path worked. The pressure was not something that remained constant, instead, it would increase explosively.

Obviously, the farther one traveled along the path, the more terrifying the pressure got. Furthermore, there was no warning; it would happen in an instant. Life and death were separated by a single step.

As Meng Hao's life force was restored, Yan'er was there in his secluded meditation facilities in the Ninth Sect of the Vast Expanse School, staring at his soul fire. When the flame began to burn brightly once again, she wiped her tears away, and made a decision.

"Master, I'm going to get strong as quickly as possible. Then... I'll walk the Transcendence Path with you." Having made her decision, she took a deep breath and left the secluded meditation facilities.

From that day on, she didn't remain holed up on the mountain. She left, and began to challenge the Vast Expanse Shrine. Although the tolling bells offered no benefit to her, the other good fortune within the Vast Expanse Shrine was still helpful.

That was her choice: first challenge the Vast Expanse Shrine, then walk the Transcendence Path.

Another three years passed. Meng Hao had now been on the Transcendence Path for six years. So far, he still hadn't caught sight of anyone else. It was as if he were the only living being in all Heaven and Earth. As he proceeded onward under the incredible pressure, he gradually got used to it. Eventually, he reached the point where he could jog, just like he had before. However, he had the feeling that... an explosive increase in pressure was coming.

As the feeling grew stronger, he pressed onward with increased caution. A few months later, he finally saw someone up ahead. It was a person wearing similar clothes to himself, who proceeded forward with great difficulty, his hair completely disheveled. However, he emanated the aura of the Dao Realm.

This was the first fellow disciple he had seen so far on the Transcendence Path. However, before Meng Hao could even call out a greeting, the man up ahead took a step forward, then shuddered and immediately fell to the ground. Then, even as Meng Hao watched, he transformed into a blood mist. It only took a moment for that blood mist to be crushed down into the ground, and completely dispersed.

Moments later, there was no trace of blood left, nor any other indication that the man had existed. It was almost as if what Meng Hao had seen before was just an illusion.

Meng Hao stopped in place to think, his heart pounding. If he hadn't witnessed the man's death, things might have been a bit easier. Ever since three years before, when the explosive increase in pressure had happened without any warning, he had always thought it might be better to know beforehand so he could prepare himself.

But now he wasn't so sure.

Now that he knew where the border existed, he would be able to prepare ahead of time. And yet, that also opened the door for doubt and fear. Moments ago, he had seen a Dao Realm expert crushed into a blood mist, and that left him more than a little reluctant.

After a long moment passed, his eyes flickered brightly, and he took a deep breath. Rotating his cultivation base, he began to walk forward, filled with determination.

Eventually, he reached the border; if he took another step he would be in exactly the same spot where the Dao Realm expert had been destroyed. He lifted his foot up, and without any trembling or hesitation, he stepped forward.

Rumbling echoed out as incredible pressure exploded down onto him, pressure that was twenty times as powerful as the pressure he had faced upon entering the Transcendence Path.

A boom could be heard as Meng Hao's body began to explode. Blood spattered everywhere, and the cracking of bones echoed out. The pain was so intense that anyone would scream in response, and yet Meng Hao gritted his teeth and held his breath. Massive rumbling sounds echoed out as he rotated his cultivation base and sent out divine sense. Simultaneously, all of his Soul Lamps exploded with power.

Just when he felt like he couldn't hold on any longer, when his body would fully collapse, one of his final five Soul Lamps winked out.

The extinguishing of the Soul Lamp flooded him with life force, like rainfall onto a parched desert. He immediately began to recover, although it still took effort just to stand in place. He closed his eyes for a long time before finally continuing to plod along like a mortal.

"Four lamps left..." he murmured hoarsely, gritting his teeth as he walked along. Extinguishing one Soul Lamp in three years was a bit slow, but was a speed Meng Hao could accept. After all, on the outside, it would have taken hundreds of years to extinguish his remaining Soul Lamps.

However, the deadly pressure in this place could stimulate the potential of one's life force; either you succeeded, or you died.

Three years later, Meng Hao had been on the Transcendence Path for nine years, and was facing pressure beyond imagination. He had originally assumed that the pressure in the next region beyond the twentyfold increase would be that of a thirtyfold increase. It was only upon stepping into that area that he found, not a thirtyfold increase, but fiftyfold increase!

The explosive level of the pressure completely destroyed half of his body. Blood sprayed in all directions, and it was only by the extinguishing of his fourth Soul Lamp that he managed to survive. After some further rest and recovery, he proceeded on.

"Three more lamps!" he thought. His hair was a mess, and his face was ashen, but he clenched his jaw and proceeded along. It was in his twelfth year on the Transcendence Path that he finally caught sight of someone up ahead.

Not just one person, but four!

They were seated cross-legged several hundred meters up ahead, doing breathing exercises. Their cultivation bases made them all 3-Essences Dao Lords, very close to the 4-Essences level.

As Meng Hao neared, their eyes opened, and they couldn't hold back from being shocked.

“Ancient Realm?”

“The third tribulation can't be passed by anyone below the Dao Lord level. How did he get here!?”

“From ancient times until now, Ancient Realm cultivators haven't been prohibited from traveling this path. However, most of them stop before the third tribulation.”

“Could this be a new Chosen from the sect?” These four Dao Lords had been away from the sect for an entire sixty-year-cycle, and were thus unaware of the legendary Fang Mu. Their eyes began to shine brightly as Meng Hao walked up to them.

As he neared, one of them called out in a hoarse voice, “What sect are you from, disciple?”

Chapter 1485: Malicious Intentions!

“The Ninth Sect,” Meng Hao said, looking over at the four Dao Lords.

None of them said even a single word in response. After hearing that Meng Hao was also from the Vast Expanse School, their interest waned. Sometimes plotting, scheming and even open fighting went on between the various factions of the Vast Expanse School. However, most people weren't willing to bring those conflicts with them into a trial by fire. One could very well end up hurting oneself in so doing.

The four Dao Lords ignored Meng Hao, and he ignored them. He continued walking until he was at the same point along the line as them. There he stopped, and looked at the area up ahead.

Obviously, these four men were sitting in this spot for a reason, and Meng Hao was well aware of exactly why.

“So, not even Dao Lords dare to step past this point?” he thought. Moments ago, the Dao Lords had mentioned a third tribulation. Obviously, the different areas he had entered every three years were the tribulations these people were referring to.

“The first tribulation was tenfold, the second tribulation was twentyfold, and the third tribulation was fiftyfold. Could it be that this fourth tribulation is a hundredfold?” Even as Meng Hao stood there pondering the situation, the Dao Lord who had asked him about his identity earlier opened his eyes.

“The fourth tribulation increases the pressure by a hundredfold,” he said. “You need to be careful, kid. I don’t know how you got here, but... if you step in there without having a 4-Essences cultivation base, you’ll almost certainly be killed.”

Meng Hao turned and clasped hands in thanks to the Dao Lord. Then he turned back, took a deep breath, and to the shock of the four Dao Lords, took a step forward!

“Are you looking to die?!” That was what all four of the shocked Dao Lords were thinking as Meng Hao started to walk. Rumbling sounds simultaneously echoed out.

Almost instantly, his legs were shredded to pieces. Half of his body was destroyed! His arms burst into a mist of blood, and in the blink of an eye, the rest of his body was shredded to pieces by the hundredfold pressure!

Only his head remained within the blood mist, as well as... 108 Soul Lamps. Three of those lamps were lit, and the rest were extinguished.

Meng Hao only had his head left, but he roared nonetheless, and blue veins popped out on his skin. Then, his Soul Lamps began to vibrate, and then one of the remaining three suddenly went dark!

After the lamp was extinguished, the blood mist which had exploded out began to form back together into a body. Although it was covered with wounds, Meng Hao managed to take a breath, then cough up a mouthful of blood as he fell to the ground.

The hundredfold pressure continued to crush down onto him as he struggled up into a cross-legged position. Then he closed his eyes, rotating his cultivation base and circulating the life force which had come from extinguishing the Soul Lamp as he fought back against the pressure.

“Impossible!” The four Dao Lords on the other side all stood up, faces covered with expressions of disbelief. All of them were panting, and their eyes were as wide as saucers.

“He’s... he’s actually holding up!”

“Only 4-Essences cultivators can enter the fourth tribulation. Not even we can step in there!”

“I remember three years ago when Dao Lord Flamefire from the Seventh Sect walked in, and was killed instantly...” Their minds were reeling as they stared at Meng Hao.

A moment later, one of them suddenly whispered, “Just now, was I just seeing things, or did he have 108 Soul Lamps?”

The other three gasped. Moments ago, they had been so preoccupied with the fact that Meng Hao actually took a step forward that they hadn’t paid much attention to his Soul Lamps. Now that they thought back, they couldn’t help but exchange astonished glances.

“When did someone inhuman like this appear in the sect?”

“I noticed that he only had two lit Soul Lamps. If... if he actually extinguishes those final two, then how powerful will he be?” With each moment that went by, the men were more and more shaken.

A few days later, the group of four looked on with mixed emotions as Meng Hao opened his eyes. He took a deep breath, and then oh-so-slowly rose to his feet. It was difficult to do, but after he finished the movement, he gritted his teeth and began to walk forward, completely ignoring the four Dao Lords.

As he proceeded along, he got farther and farther away, until he disappeared from view. The Dao Lords could do nothing but sit there in silence, completely shaken by the fact that Meng Hao was walking through the tribulation that they themselves could not even enter.

“Only two Soul Lamps left,” Meng Hao thought. “The final two...” His vision was swimming, and his breath came in ragged pants as he proceeded along with great difficulty.

“After those two Soul Lamps, I can step into the Dao Realm!”

“In that moment, I will be able to form my Essence, and use its power to begin completing the Ninth Hex!”

“That is when I will see if my speculations are correct!” After forming the outline of the first sealing mark of the Ninth Hex all those years ago on the Vast Expanse Shrine, he had begun to speculate about a certain matter.

He had the feeling that this clone of his would actually only be able to complete one sealing mark in his single lifetime. Most likely, he wouldn't be able to complete even two, let alone nine.

The Seal the Heavens Hex was simply far too powerful and majestic. It was a Hexing magic that, realistically speaking, shouldn't even be able to exist in the starry sky of the Vast Expanse.

He took a deep breath as he trudged forward. Another three years passed in the blink of an eye. However, he still hadn't reached the fifth tribulation, the reason being that he was moving much more slowly than before, and also had to rest frequently.

It wasn't until five years later that Meng Hao reached the point where he could start jogging. Only then did he eventually catch sight of the border of the fifth tribulation.

There, he saw cultivators.

There were two of them, seated cross-legged at almost the same position along the path. Astonishingly, both were 4-Essences cultivators, and one of them, a middle-aged man in a black robe, was at the peak of 4-Essences, just around the corner from 5-Essences.

The two men took note of Meng Hao's arrival, and one of them even looked at him with a hostile glare.

“Someone's finally here,” said the middle-aged man. “Ancient Realm... Wow, an Ancient Realm cultivator who can pass through the fourth tribulation. Perfect for our plan...” Obviously, any Ancient Realm cultivator who could make it here would obviously be a very important person in the sect, and most likely a future Paragon.

Because of that, he hesitated for a moment.

In that moment of hesitation, Meng Hao had already jogged up and was approaching the border itself.

The middle-aged man and the other 4-Essences Dao Realm experts exchanged a glance, and when they saw the decisiveness in each other's eyes, they gritted their teeth and cast all doubts aside.

They looked over coldly at Meng Hao, who was now only about one step away from entering the fifth tribulation.

The middle-aged man with the hostile expression didn't seem very anxious, nor did he seem to notice that Meng Hao apparently had the courage to immediately step into the next region. Only people with incredible power would be able to forego resting and measuring up the next area.

"Kid, why don't we make a deal..." the middle-aged man said, his voice cold.

"Don't worry," said the other Dao Realm expert. "The two of us don't wish you any harm. In fact, we want to offer you something incredibly helpful."

Neither of them were paying much attention to where Meng Hao was standing. Both of them were of the opinion that virtually no one would ever do anything except rest here before taking another step.

However, even as the words left their mouths, Meng Hao completely ignored them, and stepped forward, his eyes glittering.

"Wait!!"

"Are you trying to kill yourself?!?!" The two Dao Realm experts were completely shocked, and rose to their feet anxiously. As for Meng Hao, a violent tremor ran through him.

The pressure that was crushing down on him had rocketed directly to... one hundred and fifty times the original pressure!

His body instantly collapsed, and not even his head remained intact. He transformed into a mist of blood, provoking grim expressions from the two Dao Realm experts. They had been waiting a long time for someone to come along and fall into their scheme; how could they ever have guessed that the person to show up would be a complete idiot?

“What a moron that kid is! He deserved to die a worse death than he did for stepping in there like that!”

“Who cares if he dies or not? He’s screwed things up for us now. Dammit!” However, their curses were suddenly cut short, and their jaws dropped in shock.

The blood mist that was Meng Hao was acting differently than similar situations they had seen in the past. Instead of dispersing, it began to form back together. It only took a moment for it to once again turn into the vague shape of a person.

When they looked closer, they were shocked to find that... 108 Soul Lamps could be seen within that figure. Two of those Soul Lamps were lit, with the rest being extinguished.

“This....”

It was at this point that one of those two Soul Lamps suddenly winked out. As a result, the life force remaining in the blood mist caused it to begin to form together, even as the intense pressure weighed down!

Apparently, some incredible power was forcing the blood mist back into the shape of a body!

However, the intense pressure seemed to be interfering, as if the power of one extinguished Soul Lamp wasn’t enough to complete the task. But then... the final Soul Lamp flickered, and then, to the disbelief of the two Dao Realm experts, suddenly...

Turned dark!

In that moment, everything went completely silent. Then, a Heaven-shaking, Earth-shattering blast of energy shot out from the blood mist, sending the two Dao Realm experts staggering backward in shock!

Chapter 1486: The Clone Passes Away In Meditation

The peak 4-Essences cultivators outside of the fifth tribulation couldn’t help but be astonished by the intense energy buffeting them.

Everything shook violently, as though some invisible force were battering the lands.

At the same time, the blood mist continued to converge into a body.

The face wasn't distinguishable, only the fact that it was a body. Furthermore, there were 108 Soul Lamps within that body, each of which resembled a divine being sitting there cross-legged in meditation.

The shape they formed burst with the aura of an Immortal, as if a true and authentic Immortal were now coming into the world!

The pressure in the area instantly attacked the Immortal aura, forcibly blasting it away, causing cracking sounds to emanate out, and tiny rifts to snake out in the air, as though... the air were about to be destroyed.

The two peak 4-Essences cultivators edged away. They could scarcely believe what was happening as the aura destabilized their minds and crushed down on their cultivation bases. They almost couldn't even breathe.

Next, another astonishing, terrifying aura surged out from within Meng Hao.

This time, it wasn't from the 108 Soul Lamps. Instead, there were nine sealing marks, which shone as radiantly as the sun as they swirled around, emanating a pressure that could shake Heaven and Earth.

The pressure caused blood to spray out of the mouths of the 4-Essences Dao Realm experts. They were sent tumbling backward as if by a powerful attack, and even as they screamed, their fleshly bodies were shredded to pieces.

Their bedraggled souls emerged, shrieking. They retreated by several thousand meters, shaking with unprecedented terror.

“What... what are those sealing marks?!?!”

“One look, one single look was enough to destroy our bodies!!” They wanted to flee, but the intense pressure crushing down on them made it impossible for them to retreat. From the look of things, they were about to be completely destroyed.

It was at this point that the nine sealing marks within Meng Hao began to emanate streams of light that connected to the 108 Soul Lamps. The radiant light seemed to burst with an Immortal aura, making them Immortal Threads that connected through all of the Soul Lamps, forming a circle, forming... an Immortal Root!

A spirit like an Immortal, and a foundation that reached as deep as the root of a tree. This was an Immortal Root!

“He’s definitely not in the Ancient Realm. That aura... it’s terrifying! It’s like a Paragon!”

“That’s... that’s an Immortal Root?” The 4-Essences Dao Realm experts were shaking violently, and their souls seemed to be fading away.

The Immortal Root was something legendary within the Vast Expanse School. Supposedly, all cultivators had Immortal Threads inside of their bodies, and when their cultivation base reached the pinnacle, or if their bloodline was powerful enough, those Immortal Threads would form together into an Immortal Root.

Only by possessing an Immortal Root could someone truly be considered... an Immortal!

When Meng Hao extinguished the last of his Soul Lamps and entered the Dao Realm, an Immortal Root appeared.

Because of that Immortal Root, something very strange happened.

His 108th Soul Lamp became the Immortal Root, which in turn created something like a huge tree. It had nine branches, which were connected to the nine sealing marks inside of him. They were like Immortal fruits growing on that tree!

Among those nine branches, the first began to shine with dazzling, multicolored light, and pulsed with colorful bursts of something that looked like lightning.

As for the other eight branches, they were dark, as though they lacked any life force whatsoever.

As the first branch of the Immortal Root pulsed with light, the first sealing mark began to shine, until it was blindingly bright!

As of this moment, the first sealing mark was complete!

A tremor ran through Meng Hao, a Heaven-sealing aura pulsed out from within him, causing everything to shake, and a huge wind to kick up. At the same time, the aura of the Dao Realm exploded out.

Then, his eyes opened.

Stepping into the Dao via Nirvana Fruit!

Meng Hao's clone was actually formed from a Nirvana Fruit, not for the purpose of living a new life, but to utilize that bloodline power to be able to step into the Dao Realm more quickly than normal!

His eyes shone with light so radiant that a single glance from him seemed capable of completely absorbing the souls of the two 4-Essences Dao Realm experts!

Normally speaking, Dao Realm Tribulation should have descended. However, there was something special about the Transcendence Path that made it impossible for the Tribulation to find him. It couldn't even sense the Dao Realm Aura on him, let alone come to him.

Meng Hao sat there silently. The sudden transformations which had occurred because of the extinguishing of his final Soul Lamp were surprising, and yet, actually served to confirm his previous speculation.

"In this life... I can't complete the Ninth Hex. I can only complete one of the necessary sealing marks." Meng Hao looked into the colorful light cast by the first branch of the Immortal Root, and saw multicolored sparks flickering about. He poured his consciousness into them, and as he did, his life flashed before his eyes.

He saw himself floating down the river, and then saw the scholar carrying him away. He saw the old man playing with him, and then saw his Seventh Year Tribulation. After that, he awoke and joined the Ninth Sect.

He rose from mortal to Immortal, took Yan'er as his apprentice, and then stepped onto the Transcendence Path.... Those were the things he saw.

They were the complete memories of a lifetime, from beginning to end.

“So... that’s how it is,” he murmured.

“The path I’ve picked is correct. The Ninth Hex is far too shocking, and shouldn’t even exist. Therefore, in my clone’s single life, I can only form one part out of nine.

“Well, that’s fine. As long as I’m on the right track, everything will be worth it!”

He sensed the 108 Soul Lamps which formed the Immortal Root, something that his true self had never experienced in all of his cultivation. That Immortal Root was feeding and nourishing the sealing marks of the Ninth Hex. After a moment, his eyes shone with understanding.

“The Immortal Root is the focus of the complete Ninth Hex. With that Immortal Root, the nine sealing marks can be completed.

“As for this body, it has walked to the end of its path. If I want to form the second sealing mark, I’ll have to do it another way....

“Even if my clone ended up becoming a Paragon, I would end up being stuck with only this first branch. What I need now... is that second branch.

“Each branch requires simply the memories of a lifetime. In that case, it seems this clone of mine truly must become independent. To my true self, this clone is my fourth life. But now that this Immortal Root has appeared, this clone... has experienced a first life!

“Nine branches. Nine lives.... When the memories of all those lives are combined, and come back from reincarnation, that is when the Ninth Hex, the Seal the Heavens Hex, can be completed!” The

more he reached enlightenment regarding the matter, the more he realized that the Immortal Root and the nine branches truly confirmed his speculations from before.

“Reincarnation.... I need to live nine different lives, and save the memories of those lives, regardless of what they are.

“The best thing to do... is seal the memories away. In the end, after the ninth life concludes, I’ll reawaken.” After a bit of hesitation, he sat there quietly, and finally, sighed.

In some ways, he didn’t wish to part with his current life. He turned his head, and although he wasn’t really sure of what direction he was facing, he had the feeling... that he was looking at Planet Vast Expanse.

That was where the Ninth Sect was, and that was where his apprentice Yan’er was.

What he worried about most in this particular life was Yan’er.

“Seal my memories, sever my thoughts, enter reincarnation....” He sighed, waving his sleeve. The blood mist was gone, and he stood just inside the fifth tribulation, eyes shining with increasing determination.

“Enough hesitation,” he thought. He pushed his hand out in front of him, causing the air to shatter and a vortex to appear. Apparently, this rumbling vortex was the doorway into reincarnation.

As it opened, Meng Hao stretched his hand out toward the souls of the two 4-Essences Dao Realm experts who had been plotting against him. Before they could plead for mercy, he crushed them.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as their souls transformed into motes of light, something like fuel for the vortex. The aura of reincarnation grew stronger.

“Yan’er,” he said softly, “our relationship of Master and apprentice in this life... is now over.” He closed his eyes, seemingly recalling past memories. After a long moment passed, he opened them again, and they were bright and clear. Then, he sat down cross-legged, as he... chose to pass away in meditation!

His body gradually began to shine, but at the same time it withered up. In the end, when he was nothing more than a shriveled corpse, his forehead opened up and a soul appeared, shining with Immortal light.

Within that soul was an Immortal Root, and nine sealing marks. That was everything which Meng Hao's clone had cultivated in his life. The eyes of the soul were bright, like that of an innocent infant. That was because all of the memories of the life he had just lived were severed and sealed away deep inside.

The soul of Meng Hao's clone stepped into the reincarnation vortex, and vanished. He was leaving... to begin the clone's second life.

Everything grew silent. Meng Hao's body remained there, seated cross-legged, motionless....

Meanwhile, back in the Ninth Sect of the Vast Expanse School, Yan'er was in the middle of meditating when suddenly, she shivered. Her eyes opened. It felt as if a cord connecting her to something had just been broken.

Trembling, she rushed over to her Master's secluded meditation facilities. When she pushed the door open and looked over to where her Master's soul fire was, she felt like she had been struck by lightning. She stood there quietly, tears running down her face that seemed as if they would never stop.

After a very long moment passed, she coughed up a mouthful of blood. From the look in her eyes, it was as if her entire world... had collapsed.

"Master...."

Meng Hao's soul fire, which had rested there for so long... had been extinguished.

Chapter 1487: Reincarnation!

Time passed. It was the beginning of spring, and on Planet Vast Expanse's eighth continent, the lands were just beginning to recover from winter. In one particular town, a spring thunderstorm brought a bit of snow with the rain, and a child was born, a boy.

Ten years sped by in a flash, and child was now a young man. Because he was intelligent, and came from a good family, he ended up walking the path of a scholar. He took the Imperial examinations, and a few years later left home to work for the current dynasty of the mortal empire which ruled the eighth continent.

He rose through the ranks quickly, eventually earning a spot in the Imperial court. He soon became infatuated with palace intrigue, something at which he excelled. Eventually he earned a status as high as the sun at noon; the emperor even appointed him as the designated foster-father for his children.

His name was Fang Hao.

Nobody in the capital city of that mortal world was unaware of the name. Of course, cultivators would never pay attention to a single mortal. However, in the current dynasty, he was the ultimate power.

Fang Hao, the most powerful person in the empire next to the emperor himself, was somewhat of an eccentric. He never married, and never sired any offspring. At the age of eighty, he was no longer part of the court, but the people loyal to him, and thus his power, held sway over the entire government.

A word from him was just as powerful as an Imperial edict.

One winter, the snow started to fall, and screams rose up in the capital city. Soldiers were fighting in the streets, filling the city with icy bleakness that seemed colder than the winter itself.

In one corner of the city was a beautiful plum garden, currently blanketed in snow. There, an old man sat in a wheelchair, being pushed through the garden by a servant.

The old man wore a thick, warm coat, and his face was covered with wrinkles. He had an aura of death to him, and his eyes were nothing more than narrow slits. At the moment, he looked just like any other old person might look.

“Lai Fu, come here....” the old man said softly. Instantly, the middle-aged servant hurried around in front of the old man and bowed, a respectful expression on his face, eyes shining with reverence.

The old man's voice was hoarse as he continued, "I remember mother saying that I was born during the last snowfall in winter.

"Now that I'm old, I keep thinking back to old times....

"I've been dreaming a lot lately, dreaming of a different world. I feel like I'm getting closer and closer to actually seeing that world. How interesting." The old man looked around at the plum garden, then looked up into the sky at the falling snowflakes.

His servant did nothing but listen respectfully.

"Tell the third son that I demand his head on a platter. I've never liked him.

"It's time to end this war of succession. The eighth son is a good kid, pick him." From the calm way the old man spoke, it sounded as if he were speaking about some trivial matters, not a rebellious war of succession which affected the entire empire!

But that was just how this old man was. His eyes opened wide, and although they were somewhat clouded, there was a power shining therein that was beyond the ordinary.

Now, he was no longer just an old man. He was a supreme being who had the power to determine life or death in the empire!

This was Fang Hao, who was also... the second life of Meng Hao's clone!

The servant voiced his consent, and a few days later, a head was delivered to the old man. The rebellion over succession was ended by a single word. Suddenly, the winter didn't seem as cold as it had been.

A few months later, the last snowstorm of winter hit. The old man sat there watching the snow fall, and slowly closed his eyes. When he breathed his last breath, his forehead opened up and a soul flew out. It had nine sealing marks, and an Immortal Root. Two of the branches of that Immortal Root shone with brilliant light, and the second sealing mark gradually lit up.

The second life for Meng Hao's clone had ended. The entire country went into mourning.

His funeral hall was packed inside and out. All of the officials were present, and common people from near and far came as well. A proclamation was made that, throughout the entire empire, people were only permitted to wear black or white.

The old man had no idea any of that was happening.

His memories were buried and sealed. When he awoke, he was on the seventh continent, born into a family of hunters. It was winter.

When he came into the world, a hearty and excited voice rang out: “The son of Tiger Shi will definitely be the best hunter in the land!”

His third life had begun.

Meanwhile, Meng Hao’s true self was far, far away from Planet Vast Expanse, speeding through the starry sky. Vicious-looking black armor covered over half his body, even his left arm!

“I found the sixth mirror shard!” he thought. He looked exhausted, and a bit pale in the face. He had already been away from Planet Vast Expanse for more than a hundred years. During that time, he had faced many dangers, and had already visited hundreds of worlds that were inhabited by living beings.

He was shocked by how difficult it was to acquire the copper mirror shards. Each one was a precious treasure which was guarded carefully by whoever had come to possess it.

Because of the vast stretches of time involved, the mirror shards had passed through many hands, and had all ended up among peak 9-Essences beings. Of course, all such beings were the type who had existed in that stage for countless years.

Furthermore, the majority of those beings were not cultivators, but rather, other strange entities that existed within the Vast Expanse.

Meng Hao had tracked down the fifth mirror shard in a world that had been formed into the shape of a mirror. In that world, he found what turned out to be an undying enemy. They fought back and forth for decades upon decades, and Meng Hao killed that enemy so many times it was impossible

to count. Eventually, he found the weakness of the world, and only by threatening to destroy it could he convince the enemy to hand over the mirror shard.

The sixth mirror shard was even more difficult. The difficulty there lay not in a powerful opponent, but rather... the fact that the mirror shard lay in a sludge, a sludge so large that every particle which made it up was a separate dimension.

As for where exactly the mirror shard was in all that, the only way Meng Hao could find out... was to search through the dimensions one by one.

That search took him nearly a hundred years.

In addition to the actual mirror shards, there were other benefits to his adventures. Meng Hao's experiences left him with a much deeper understanding of the starry sky of the Vast Expanse. As the decades passed, his cultivation base climbed higher and higher, especially after the battles with the powerful enemies he was facing. Furthermore, he was gaining enlightenment of all of his eight Essences.

He wasn't even sure exactly where his battle prowess was at this point.

However, he did know that with his current cultivation base, he wouldn't even need to use the copper mirror shards to fight the Sect Leader and the others. He would be able to fight them on his own power, even if the Sect Leader, Sha Jiudong, and Bai Wuchen joined forces.

In the starry sky of the Vast Expanse, the only people who could fight Meng Hao would be those eccentric 9-Essences experts who had lived for countless years, and who were just under the level of Transcendence.

Every time he defeated a powerful expert, he would extend an offer to join him. He was always refused, and would never press the matter, but would simply leave, a slight smile on his face.

However, he always took note of the locations occupied by those experts. Once he finished forming his Ninth Hex, he would return, whether he had Transcended or not. Then, whether they wanted to or not, he would enlist them to help take back his home!

As Meng Hao sped along, he could sense that his clone was entering his third life. Because the clone's memories were all sealed, it made his connection to Meng Hao grow weaker. However, the

basic resonance was still there. Although he couldn't control his clone's body after it had been reincarnated, he could see what was happening. He had the feeling that if he attempted to forcibly interfere, a disharmony would occur, which would cause even more problems in finishing the Ninth Hex.

“The second life is over, and the second sealing mark is finished. It seems it will take quite a few years... for my clone to complete the work with the Ninth Hex.

“When he finishes, I'll be able to... return to the Mountain and Sea Realm!” His expression was one of intense anticipation. He took a deep breath and began to speed in the direction of the seventh copper mirror shard.

It was around that same time that, back on Planet Vast Expanse, the Sect Leader and the others were once again organizing an expedition into the necropolis.

Furthermore, another Chosen had appeared within the Vast Expanse School, someone whose fame rivaled even Fang Mu.

It was... Yan'er!

Bells rang as one Heaven after another was summoned. When she summoned the Ninth Heaven, the entire Vast Expanse School was shaken. And she didn't stop at one Vast Expanse Shrine. She followed the same path as her master, challenging the Vast Expanse Shrines of all of the nine sects, leaving her name there in the rankings.

She took second place in all of them, and rocked Planet Vast Expanse with the Ninth Heaven.

Countless people were shocked, and couldn't help but draw comparisons between her and Fang Mu. The commotion her actions caused shook the Vast Expanse School without cease.

Currently, she stood there upon the Ninth Heaven in the Ninth Sect, looking up into the Heavens. Within her eyes could be seen reminiscence, contemplation, and determination.

Just as she had sworn nearly a hundred years before, she would walk the Transcendence Path!

After seeing that her Master's soul fire had been extinguished, she had sworn an oath which became the focus of her entire life.

Throughout the years, a few people had come back from the Transcendence Path with stories about how Fang Mu had passed away into meditation. Supposedly, his corpse still rested on the path. Strangely, though, it was impossible to actually touch the corpse.

Such stories were told by more than one person, so they had to be true.

However, Yan'er couldn't believe that her master would simply perish on the Transcendence Path. So she would follow the same road as him. She would go see for herself what exactly had occurred.

A few days later, Yan'er, the second most astonishing Chosen to appear in the Vast Expanse School, extinguished the last of her Soul Lamps, and stepped into the Dao Realm. She experienced a shocking Dao Realm Tribulation that was witnessed by many. When it was all over, she went to the Ninth Sect's Paragon, just like her Master had, and said the same words.

"I wish to tread the Transcendence Path. Paragon, please open the portal!" As her words echoed out through the air of the Ninth Sect, countless disciples looked on wordlessly. Mixed emotions could be seen on their faces. During the past hundred years or so after Fang Mu had passed away, she had gone from being battered and broken, to being powerful.

She was no longer the little girl she had once been. To these people, she had long since become... their Eldest Sister.

In response to her request, an ancient voice echoed out: "Why are you doing this too....?"

She clasped hands and bowed, voice ringing with determination as she said, "It doesn't matter, Paragon, I've made up my mind!"

Chapter 1488: Little Tiger Shi

After a long moment, the Ninth Sect's Paragon responded with a sigh. "Back then, I should never have let Fang Mu open the portal to the Transcendence Path. This time... I shall not permit such a thing to happen again!"

The death of Fang Mu had been a devastating blow to the Ninth Sect. In contrast, the Chosen from the other eight sects had breathed sighs of relief.

They no longer felt as if a huge weight were hanging over their heads. But then... not a hundred years later, Yan'er accomplished the same feat as her Master, and placed that weight right back where it had been.

When Yan'er heard the response of the Ninth Sect's Paragon, she closed her eyes, then prostrated herself on the ground. There she remained, unmoving. Apparently, if she was refused entrance, she would remain in place right there.

She was completely focused. This was her mission in life, and she was not making a request. What she was doing far exceeded a request....

She wanted to seek her Master, to confirm whether or not he had truly perished. That was her obsession, and it would never, ever be wiped away.

One month. Six months. A year. Three years....

Spring. Summer. Autumn. Countless days and nights passed, and Yan'er remained prostrated there the entire time. No matter who came to try to convince her to give up, she remained rooted in place. She was focused, and she was determined. People were shaken, and couldn't help but think of that other even more stunning figure from the past.

This Master and apprentice were truly alike in many ways.

Five years later, rumbling filled the sky as a huge rift opened, and a staircase descended from up above.

"Thank you, Paragon," she said. Her face was a bit wan, but she took a deep breath and prepared to begin walking up the stairs. But then, a gentle force poured into her body, wiping away her exhaustion and filling her with more energy than before.

"Make it back... alive," said the Ninth Sect's Paragon, his voice soft. After the five years which had passed, even he understood the level of Yan'er's focus, and was left sighing. He wasn't capable of hindering Fang Mu's only apprentice.

Rather than just watch her prostrate herself in such a manner and wait for her life force to wither away, he had instead...given in, and let her go.

As the Paragon's sigh echoed out, Yan'er clasped hands and bowed, then looked up at the rift, her eyes shining with determination, and reminiscence.

"Master, Yan'er is going to come find you," she said. With that, she burst into motion, flying up the stairs and disappearing into the rift.

The year that Yan'er left, the rest of the Chosen in the Vast Expanse School didn't feel as if a weight had been lifted, but instead, that it had sunk down further.

Master and apprentice had both stepped onto the Transcendence Path, whereas the Chosen... were still fighting over the Vast Expanse Shrine. It struck them as being similar to the difference between mud and the clouds.

Yan'er slowly made her way along the Transcendence Path. She wanted to go quickly, but was not able to. As for Meng Hao, he had been able to pass through the first tribulation in three years. But Yan'er couldn't match that speed. She needed much more time, and yet, her determination never lessened. In fact, it increased.

"Master, I'm definitely going to find your remains," she murmured. The intense pressure weighing down on her made progress difficult, yet she trudged on. She was followed by the mastiff, who quietly walked next to her the entire time.

Time passed in a blur. Fifteen years went by.

The boy who had been born more a dozen or so years earlier in the mountainous forests of the seventh continent was now a young man. He had become one of the most outstanding hunters in the village, and although he wasn't very tall, he was exceptionally agile. At the moment, he was dashing through the trees, a hunting bow in his hand. After enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, he suddenly stopped in place, then nocked an arrow to his bow with lightning speed.

A thrum could be heard, and the arrow sped through the air to plunge into the head of a black bear, roughly thirty meters away. It pierced in by about four inches, enraging the bear but not killing it. The bear roared and began to charge through the trees toward the young man.

The young man calmly fell back, loosing more arrows into the bear. Blood flowed, causing the animal's fury to mount as it raced forward. Then, the young man suddenly stopped in place and looked coolly at the beast.

Seeing that the young man had stopped moving, the bear picked up speed. Just when it was almost upon him, the ground suddenly caved in, and a huge hole appeared. The bear fell in, to be impaled upon the countless wooden spikes which had been driven into the ground at the bottom of the pit.

A howl echoed out as the bear died.

The young man took a deep breath, his eyes shining with excitement. He carefully dropped down into the pit, extracted the bear, and then headed back to the village, the carcass slung over his shoulders.

By the time the boy arrived home with the bear, he was soaked with sweat. Sitting in the courtyard was a muscular, middle-aged man with a broad smile on his face. His right leg was bound tightly; a few days before, he had broken it on a hunting expedition. Thankfully, he was in good health, and had visited the doctor immediately after the accident occurred. In the future, he would have some problems with the leg, but nothing too significant.

“Great! The Shi Clan's little tiger cub can hunt bears now!”

The young man hurried over, smiling. About then, the door opened, and a middle-aged woman appeared. She looked dotingly upon the young man, tousling his hair for a moment before glaring at her husband.

The man shrank back sheepishly from the woman, then, trying to sound manly, chuckled and said, “Heh heh. He's no baby any more. I think when I was his age I could hunt bears too. It's only natural that the son of Tiger Hu could do the same.”

The young man smiled. The warmth and love in the house was palpable. This young man was the third life of Meng Hao's clone. Little Tiger Hu.

The warmth and love in the household persisted for two more years. But then one winter, his father went missing on a hunt, and the warmth faded away.

That night, it was as if the boy's world collapsed. His mother refused to believe that his father, the best hunter in the area, someone who knew the local terrain like the back of his hand, would simply go missing. Therefore, she went out to search for him. Again and again, night after night.

She never found him. A year later, his mother went blind from grief. Two years later... she passed away.

Before dying, she clasped Little Tiger Hu's hand in her own, and her vacant eyes seemed to stare off into the distance as she whispered, "Little Tiger, your father couldn't have just gone missing...."

Little Tiger Hu wept that day, just as he had wept the day his father went missing. From then on, he refused to live in the village, and also refused to marry. He lived out in the mountains, where he searched relentlessly for his father.

Time passed. One year. Another. And another.

He combed all of the local mountains, high and low. For twenty years he searched. One spring day, in a far corner of the mountains, he found a rusty knife. The instant he saw it, his eyes turned red, for he knew that it was his father's knife.

It was the first clue he had ever found. He diligently began to search the area, and about 300 meters away from the knife, he unearthed a skeleton.

After examining the skeleton, he noticed a place on the right thigh where it had been broken once, whereupon he dropped to his knees and kowtowed. This was his father who had gone missing all those years ago.

His mother never believed that his father would have gone missing, and neither had Little Tiger Hu. He had always believed that his father was too great a hunter. Even if he encountered some dangerous beast, he would have been able to come up with a way to escape with his life. Besides, the most dangerous animals in the mountains were bears.

After examining his father's remains, he confirmed that there was no evidence that he had been attacked by a wild animal. Instead, what he found was a wound on his father's spine, the mark of an arrow. Twenty years ago, he had been shot in the back.

Little Tiger Hu was an expert when it came to bows and arrows, so to him, the evidence was clear.

He looked at his father's skeleton and smiled, a smile both bitter and vicious. Then, he carried his father's skeleton back to the village and buried it next to his mother. He erected a burial mound over the two of them, which he knelt in front of and murmured, "Dad, I'll get revenge for you, no matter what price I have to pay...."

A long time passed before he finally rose to his feet, and when he did, he seemed even colder than before. With that, he turned and left.

More time passed. Ten years later, Little Tiger Hu was an old man. He had spent the last decade using every method and means at his disposal to investigate the truth about his father. In the end, he confirmed that the killer was from a clan in another hunting village in the mountains.

The murderer who had killed his father was still alive.

Little Tiger Hu didn't bother to investigate the details of why the murder had occurred. All he knew was that when you killed someone, you had to pay the price with your own life.

One snowy night, when everything was freezing and cold, he entered the house of the killer. When he emerged, he reeked of blood, and was carrying a severed head. He had killed the old man, and when his children fought back, he killed them too. He had slaughtered the whole family.

He ended up being fatally injured, but still managed to stagger back to his own village, severed head in hand. He threw the head down in front of his parents' grave, and then sagged to the ground. He began to drink alcohol, and talk softly to his parents in words that no one could hear.

The snow fell harder. The seriousness of his injuries grew worse by the minute. He was like an oil lamp on the verge of sputtering out. As his consciousness faded, he suddenly seemed to catch sight of his parents.

After a while, he closed his eyes and lay down on the burial mound, as if he were reuniting with his parents, and once again feeling the warmth and love that he had as a child.

The snow covered his corpse, but it couldn't cover up the soul which flew out of his forehead. As the soul rose up into the sky, it looked back at the burial mound and sighed. Within the soul, it was possible to see that the third sealing mark was shining with radiant light.

The soul clasped hands and bowed to the corpse, then turned and reentered the cycle of reincarnation.

His third life was over, and the fourth life... was beginning.

It was in that moment that Yan'er entered the second tribulation in the Transcendence Path. The tenfold pressure caused her to grit her teeth, but she continued on. Her cultivation base was now at the peak of the 1-Essence level.

Chapter 1489: Chen Lei

The clone's fourth life also began in winter, on the sixth continent, in a sprawling mansion.

In addition to the cultivators on Planet Vast Expanse, there was also a warrior class. In some ways, warriors also existed on a higher level than mortals, although to cultivators they were little more than ants.

In his fourth life, Meng Hao's clone was born as the Young Lord of the mansion. The mansion was located in the capital city of the mortal world of the sixth continent. For some years, it had been inhabited by a clan which had been founded by one of the most powerful warriors in the land. In fact, in the mortal world, he was known as an Arch-Warrior.

The Arch-Warrior's surname was Chen. The day Meng Hao was born, a thunderstorm raged outside, and so he came to be known as Chen Lei.

On the day the clone's fourth life began, Meng Hao's true self was speeding through the starry sky of the Vast Expanse, away from the location where the seventh copper mirror shard had been located. Behind him echoed an enraged roar.

A dust storm exploded out, filling the starry sky, transforming into an enormous head. Its face appeared to be enraged, and yet, was too frightened of Meng Hao to go chasing after him. Its roaring caused the starry sky to tremble.

"The day I unseal myself, I'll come looking for you!" raged the face. "I'll wipe out your entire bloodline. I'll eradicate everyone connected to your Karma!"

Meng Hao's true self smiled and responded in a cold voice: "You won't have to come looking for me. I'll come back for you before that seal is unraveled."

The difficulty in acquiring this mirror shard had exceeded that of all the previous ones. Despite his current level of power, he had experienced many dangerous situations before managing to get his hands on it and make an escape.

He flew along, an excited expression on his face. He now had only one more mirror shard to collect before he could call out to the copper mirror. By this point, he was already able to get a general feeling for where the copper mirror was, although it was impossible to narrow down enough of a direction to search for it directly.

"Once I get that last mirror shard, I'll be able to call out to the copper mirror!" His eyes shone with anticipation as he shot in the direction of the eighth mirror shard.

Even considering the speed he was capable of, it took him ten years to reach his destination. As he neared the location of the eighth shard, he frowned.

There was no vortex here. Instead, he saw a flower!

It was astonishingly large, about as big as half of Planet Vast Expanse.

Its roots seemed to meld into the void itself, and as for the flower, it was not in a state of bloom. It was still little more than a bud. However, the aura it emanated caused even Meng Hao to shiver in fear.

He could clearly sense that the eighth copper mirror shard was located within that flower bud. However, no matter what divine abilities he unleashed, he couldn't even scratch the surface of the flower bud.

From what he could sense, the flower was currently in a state of growth, and after some time passed, it would bloom naturally, without any interference or assistance from him.

"I just have to wait until it blooms...?" he thought, frowning. After a moment passed, he tried out a few more divine abilities, but in the end, sighed in defeat.

“I guess it doesn’t matter. My clone is still in his fourth life. He needs a bit more time. I guess... I’ll just wait here and watch the flower grow.” His eyes flickered as he made some augury calculations. “At the fastest, it will probably take a hundred years, and at the slowest, a few hundred. However, once it blooms... I’ll be able to enter. Then, the eighth mirror shard will be mine.” With that, he flickered into motion, appearing on one of the flower’s leaves, where he sat down cross-legged, closed his eyes, and began to meditate quietly.

Time passed. Some years later on the sixth continent of Planet Vast Expanse, his clone’s fourth life, Chen Lei, was no longer an infant. He was now ten years old, and yet was already an important person in the clan mansion.

He had a high status, and was shockingly talented. He had advanced by leaps and bounds in his cultivation of the way of warriors, and already had developed inner qi. He had even come to be called the Junior Arch-Warrior!

Despite his talents, he wasn’t very interested in training, and spent most of his time playing. His parents weren’t happy about that, nor was his grandfather, the Arch-Warrior who had started this whole clan. However, they could do little more than sigh.

In the final analysis, it could be said that Chen Lei grew up quite pampered. In fact, when he finally reached the marrying age, he suddenly became obsessed with traveling. He took his servants all over the country, and by the time he lost interest in that, he was already thirty years old. His parents thought that he had finally reached the point of being ready to settle down, and were about to arrange a marriage....

But then Chen Lei suddenly fell in love with a girl. She was a very important person, being the daughter of the emperor. She was on an outing once when Chen Lei ran into her, and he was instantly smitten. After that, he poured all of his energy into pursuing her.

He lavished her with gifts to gain favor, and did virtually anything she asked him to do. It got to the point that the entire clan was dragged into the matter, and soon everyone began to suffer because of it. Chen Lei’s grandfather was gradually weakening in his old age, and his parents, despite being powerful warriors, were not Arch-Warriors. Because of Chen Lei’s pursuit of this beautiful girl, the entire clan entered a state of clear decline.

At one point in his pursuit of the princess, she manipulated him into killing an important court official, which instigated a huge catastrophe. In order to save Chen Lei’s life, the clan had to part with all of its remaining wealth. In addition, his grandfather ended up serving the emperor and performing all sorts of dangerous tasks, which pushed him closer and closer to the grave.

His grandfather had originally assumed that this would be a wakeup call for Chen Lei. How could he ever have imagined that, despite waking up to reality, Chen Lei would then become entranced with Immortal cultivation? The clan was destitute, and Chen Lei was almost forty years old, and yet he still decided to head out to search for the path to Immortality.

He walked that path for an entire decade, and yet made little progress.

Ten years later, he was half a century old. His hair was graying, and he was growing weaker physically. It was with listless eyes that he finally returned home, only to find an empty and abandoned mansion, as well as numerous gravestones.

Everyone was dead. The second year after he left, his grandfather had passed away. In the eighth year, his parents had been killed by a powerful enemy. All the other members of the clan were slaughtered, and it was only because of the kindness of the surviving servants that anyone had been buried at all.

When Chen Lei saw all of this, his mind went blank. It rained that day, and he ended up standing in the downpour, shivering. Grief filled him, and he began to weep, his tears mixing in with the rainwater as they fell to the ground.

“Dad.... Mom.... Grandpa....” Now he truly awakened. He thought back to his life, and he suddenly wanted to laugh. He recalled the grand aspirations of his youth, how he had developed inner qi at such a young age, and how he had thought his entire life would be simple and easy. He had always thought that as long as he wanted to succeed in something hard enough, he would.

He had loved the finer things in life. He had traveled the world. He had fallen in love with a beautiful princess, and thrown away vast sums of wealth to try to win her heart. In the end, she used him to kill someone, someone he should never have killed. Thus had disaster been wrought.

He dragged his clan into ruin, and then ran off to practice cultivation. Now that he had returned, Chen Lei felt completely useless, a sinner who had killed his entire family and clan.

In his bitterness, he laughed until he coughed up blood, and then collapsed onto the ground, where he lay, pelted by the falling rain.

The next day, the rain stopped. Chen Lei woke up, and looked even older than before. Although he was only fifty, it was as if he had already had one foot in his coffin.

From that day on, a new gravekeeper lived in the mansion, who would often contemplate his life, and his past madness.

Time passed. Ten years later, his back was hunched with age. He could tell that his life was nearing its end. That winter, it was extremely cold. One bright morning, snow began to fall, and he suddenly heard the sound of horse hooves. Off in the distance, a military procession could be seen.

Soldiers rode horses in tight formation around a palanquin. As the procession neared, someone in the palanquin apparently said something to the soldiers, and they all stopped moving. A pretty young woman emerged, dressed in expensive clothing. Next to her was an old lady, who she supported with her arm as they walked toward the mansion.

“Grandmother, why did we stop here?” the young woman asked, sounding a bit puzzled.

“When I saw this place, I thought of an old friend,” replied the old woman. She was an old-timer, but had aged well, and wore expensive clothing just like the young woman. Few wrinkles could be seen on her face, which radiated a healthy glow.

The grandmother and granddaughter stopped outside of the barren mansion. The granddaughter was polite, and didn’t ask any further questions. As for the old woman, mixed emotions could be seen on her face, as though she was thinking about things that had happened once upon a time. There was even a bit of remorse in her eyes.

After a long moment passed, the old woman sighed, and was about to turn and leave, when her granddaughter suddenly said, “Grandmother, someone’s there.”

The young woman pointed as the front door of the mansion opened, and Chen Lei appeared, stooped over like an old man.

Almost immediately, soldiers rushed forward protectively. The old woman studied Chen Lei’s face, and a touch of uncertainty appeared in her expression.

“You are...?” she asked.

Chen Lei bowed his head and replied in a raspy voice, "One of the servants here. I watch over the graves."

"Have you lived here for a long time?" the old woman asked.

"Ten years," he replied softly.

The old woman didn't respond at first. When she did, she asked, "The Young Lord from this place... did he... ever come back?"

Chen Lei opened his mouth as if to respond, then closed it and simply shook his head.

The old woman stood there in silence for another long moment. Then she called for the soldiers to leave two pieces of silver to help pay for the maintenance of the graves. With that, she returned to the palanquin, and the procession began to move on. As it did, the old woman pulled open the palanquin curtain and looked back at Chen Lei. This time, she could clearly see his profile, and suddenly, a tremor ran through her.

Oh so slowly, her eyes went blank, and she closed the curtain.

The procession disappeared off into the distance.

Chen Lei ignored the two pieces of silver and looked up at the falling snow. How could he not have recognized that old woman? She was the very princess he had fallen in love with all those years ago.

Murmuring to himself in a voice that only he could hear, he walked back into the mansion.

The snow began to fall harder.

Chen Lei straightened up his clothing and walked into the rear courtyard, where the clan graveyard was located. He had long since dug a grave there for himself, which he slowly climbed down into. At the bottom was a coffin, which he entered. After closing the lid, he took a final breath, and then closed his eyes.

“What a waste of a life,” he thought. He never opened his eyes again.

Chapter 1490: Little Mute

In his first life he was a Chosen. In his second life, he reached the pinnacle of the mortal world. His third life ended soaked in blood. His fourth life was, for the most part, a waste.

After dying in the fourth life, his soul flew out, and the fourth of the nine sealing marks glittered radiantly.

The soul entered the cycle of reincarnation, and the fifth life began.

As that happened, Meng Hao’s true self was sitting cross-legged on the leaf of the huge flower, waiting for the flower to bloom.

On the Transcendence Path, Yan’er was struggling forward with gritted teeth. She had passed the third tribulation, and was proceeding toward the fourth. She repeated to herself over and over again that she had to keep going. Based on what she had heard from others who had come back from the Transcendence Path throughout the years, she knew... that her Master was in the fifth tribulation.

And she was getting closer and closer to that very location.

“Master, Yan’er is going to find you.” The intense focus in her eyes grew stronger. Taking a deep breath, she walked on.

The fifth life began amidst winter snowfall, in a town on the fifth continent. The birth of the child brought no happiness to that family, and was in fact met with silence.

A moment or two later, the young father bitterly walked out of the house... and placed the baby down onto the street.

“It’s not that dad and mom don’t want you,” he murmured, “it’s just that you....”

The reason the baby was abandoned was because he was crippled. He was born with only a stump of a tongue, ensuring... that he would never be able to speak. Furthermore, he had a birthmark on his face, making him frighteningly ugly.

The baby's crying grew more and more hoarse as it echoed out into the freezing cold. Eventually, a middle-aged man appeared, wearing a raincoat and a wide, conical hat. When he heard the crying, he walked up to the baby.

Looking down, he sighed, then picked the baby up into his arms and carried him home. The man lived in a small, cold house, within which swirled a permanent aura of death.

Gradually, a frozen corpse became visible, which apparently the man... had performed an autopsy on.

This man was the town coroner.

"Abandoned, can't talk, and ugly as a stray dog. I'll call you Little Mute." The man looked at the baby and smiled. After taking off his hat, it was revealed that he had a long scar running down his entire face, giving him a very vicious appearance. His smile was somewhat frightening, but his eyes were kind.

Little Mute was raised on the gruel provided him by his father the coroner. He grew slowly; apparently the iciness of winter had seeped into his bones, and he was always weak and fearful of the cold. He never seemed to develop fully, and it always as if a strong enough gust of wind came along, he might be carried away with it.

Because his father was a coroner, he had frequent contact with dead bodies. Any time someone in the area was killed, the corpse would be sent to the coroner for examination. Gradually, Little Mute learned the same skills as his father.

"Remember this type of wound, Little Mute. Usually it indicates that the spleen was punctured....."

"See, this one was obviously poisoned."

"Cut the chest open here, Little Mute, and check for tiny white insects. If you see any, make sure not to touch them."

“Look at this fellow, Little Mute. His head and torso have both been slashed open. What kind of power would do that? Not even warriors could inflict such precise wounds. These injuries were caused by an Immortal. I wonder what he possibly could have done to offend an Immortal.”

At first, Little Mute was afraid. However, thanks to the constant instruction given him, he eventually became quite familiar with examining corpses. By the time he was a teenager, he didn't feel any fear at all, and would sometimes even go behind the coroner's back to do his own autopsies.

The coroner grew older and weaker. Soon, he wasn't taking care of Little Mute, instead, Little Mute was taking care of him.

More years passed, and eventually the coroner had trouble seeing, and could no longer perform the duties of his trade. At his recommendation, Little Mute became the new town coroner.

Little Mute was an adult, but was still physically weak, as though he had never fully grown up. The birthmark on his face grew larger, making him unbearably ugly, and he was as mute as ever. Couple that with the fact that he had frequent contact with corpses, and he developed a somewhat sinister air which ensured that no girl would ever want to marry him.

Little Mute didn't really care about that though. He would be like his father, and live single for all his days.

He went about his coroner's work diligently. It was almost as if he were naturally gifted in those arts. Ten years went by in which he came to be known as the best coroner in the area, and was often called out to other towns for consultations.

The old coroner continued to decline. He had no wife to accompany him, only Little Mute. He would often jabber garrulously, whereupon Little Mute would listen quietly and smile.

Although he couldn't speak, he was able to make some signs with his hands, allowing him to communicate to some degree.

Years passed, and Little Mute became so well-known as a coroner that he came to be frequently summoned to the capital city. The old coroner eventually died. He passed away peacefully, and in no pain. Little Mute wept.

After burying the old man and paying respects, Little Mute left the town and moved to the capital city.

Year after year passed. Before long, Little Mute was fifty years of age, and was famous throughout the empire. A mere look at any corpse, and he could determine all the details about the cause of death. He could even perform such wonders with skeletons that had been dead for many years.

His understanding of corpses eventually reached an indescribable level, and he came to be known as the empire's Grandmaster Coroner.

However, coroners were still coroners, and would always be considered lowly. Despite reaching the pinnacle of his field, it was a position that commanded true respect only from others in that same field.

And yet, Little Mute wasn't resentful or dissatisfied. He knew that he was nothing more than a mute, incapable of speech. In his later years, he returned to his hometown and began to write a book.

He compiled all his knowledge about corpses, all of his experiences and judgements, into one prolific work. One year, winter came, and as he was looking out of the window at the snow, he thought about a story the old coroner had often told.

He had described finding Little Mute in the street one year as a baby, in the middle of winter.

Little Mute sat there quietly, thinking, and his eyes gradually turned blank. He didn't have much life left in him, and was still as afraid of the cold as he had always been. He suddenly felt as if his life had no warmth in it at all, as if he were like a corpse.

He knew that he wouldn't be able to last for much longer. One night, he walked out of his house and, facing the gusts of snowy wind that blew against his face, returned to the spot where the coroner said he had found him.

Looking down at the ground, he sighed softly, then laid down and looked up into the sky. He let the cold embrace him. He allowed the snow to fall onto his face. It didn't melt.

Gradually, a smile appeared on his face, a smile that would never fade....

He went as he had come. In his entire life, he never spoke a single word....

His fifth life ended. It was a bit dull when compared to his fourth life. He had none of the glory he had experienced in his first life, none of the vast power of his second. There was no bloodshed like his third life. If anything, his fifth life had been one of mediocrity.

The only thing he had possessed was peace and quiet, as well as mastery of his field of work.

His soul rose up and seemed to merge into the wind and snow. At the same time, the fifth sealing mark began to shine brightly.

Yet again he was reincarnated, and his sixth life began.

About that same time, Yan'er was trembling as she walked along the Transcendence Path. The mastiff had been with her for the hundreds of years she had been walking along, and by this point, she was reaching the end of the fourth tribulation.

Her cultivation base had risen continuously along her journey, and her enlightenment had grown. She was now at the level of a Dao Lord. The fourth tribulation had been very difficult.

One step after another, she proceeded along, drawing ever closer to the fifth tribulation.

Eventually she reached the border, and her eyes began to shine brightly. At long last, she was able to lay eyes on her Master....

There he was, a corpse sitting in meditation, as he had sat for hundreds of years....

He was covered in dust, but his facial features were clearly distinguishable. Everything about him caused Yan'er's heart to tremble. She quietly dropped to her knees and kowtowed.

"Master," she said hoarsely, her cheeks wet with tears. Despite the hundreds of years which had passed, her memories of her Master were as clear as ever.

She would never forget. Could never forget.

This was her focus. Her obsession. It was why she had climbed the Vast Expanse Shrine and walked the Transcendence Path. The reason for everything was her master. She wanted to see for herself whether or not he had truly perished.

As of this moment, she could look at his corpse, but could not approach it. If she took even a step into the fifth tribulation, she would be destroyed in all aspects. She could only stand there, one step away from him, weeping. After a long moment though, her eyes began to shine with a strange light.

“Wait a second...” A tremor ran through her as she looked at Meng Hao’s forehead. After a moment passed, she gritted her teeth and extended her right hand toward his face.

To do that, she had to reach into the fifth tribulation. Pressure exploded onto her arm, which instantly began to transform into a blood mist. However, in the very moment before that happened, she managed to touch his forehead.

Rumbling could be heard as Yan’er coughed up a mouthful of blood. She staggered back, her right arm half destroyed. And yet, she didn’t care about that. In that brief moment, she had discovered a secret which no other person would have noticed.

“Master’s forehead opened up. This is the Dao of Reincarnation. That magic... was something he passed on to me. His soul... didn’t naturally disperse. Other people might think that, but not me. I’m his apprentice, and from what I can sense, Master... isn’t dead!

“But if he didn’t die, then why did his soul fire go out...? Unless...” Yan’er was not the young girl she had been so long ago. She was intelligent to begin with, and because of her understanding of Meng Hao, she had already guessed the truth. However, she didn’t want to accept it.

After a long moment, her eyes began to glow, and she began to breathe heavily. The focus in her eyes grew more intense.

“Master... even if you are in the cycle of reincarnation, then I will journey among the masses to find you...” With that, she rose to her feet. By means of medicinal pills, she regrew her right arm, then took a deep breath and gave Meng Hao’s corpse a final, long look. Then, she and the mastiff turned and headed back toward the entrance of the Transcendence Path. Her destination: the nine continents of Planet Vast Expanse, where she would search for her Master.

She understood how the Dao of Reincarnation worked, and from the clues present, she was sure that her master was currently somewhere on Planet Vast Expanse.