

The Heavens 161

Chapter 161: Ultimate Vexation Appears!

It wasn't just Xie Jie whose attention turned to Meng Hao. Xu Youdao and the gray-robed Cultivator also gave him deep, meaningful looks.

His expression was calm, but inwardly, his mind flashed with understanding. Now he knew why everyone had looked at him so strangely when they had entered the large Cauldron.

The Nine Great Names didn't include Meng, so once he entered, they must all have reached the conclusion that he was using an assumed name.

Even he was a bit uncertain regarding this revelation. He looked through the sheets of lightning toward the nine massive statues. Sure enough, amongst them could be found faces similar to Xu Youdao, the gray-robed Cultivator, and even Xie Jie.

These statues depicted their ancestors. They had surnames which could be traced back to ancient times, Clans which some people called the Nine Great Families.

“Am I of the Nine Great Families...?” Meng Hao asked himself. Moments later, a smile appeared on his face, although it was a bit cold. He was sure that he was not of the Nine Great Families.

He had remembered how upon entering the enormous cauldron, the copper mirror had grown hot within the bag of the Cosmos. If that was all, it wouldn't be enough evidence to prove anything. But Meng Hao had also suddenly recalled how the mirror had grown hot during the secret meeting, when Han Bei had produced the information regarding the first volume of the Classic of Time.

“Han Bei must have prepared for this day for a long time,” he thought, “and it wasn't just one secret meeting she attended. The information she sent out was not restricted just to late Foundation Stage Cultivators, but more importantly, to only bloodline members of the Nine Great Families.” With all this scattered information, he came to the conclusion that it must have something to do with the copper mirror.

“Just what is this mirror exactly? It can agitate the auras of wild beasts to explode, it has an astonishing power of duplication, and apparently has helped me achieve my goals by using

underhanded means. Even though I'm not of the Nine Great Families, I was still able to enter this place. All these various thoughts flashed through Meng Hao's mind in quick succession. Only a moment or two passed between Xie Jie's question and Meng Hao's response.

"Whether or not the Nine Great Families include Meng, I don't really know," he said coolly. "But the fact that I entered the cauldron and made it to this point raises a very important issue." The look on his face made it very clear what he was thinking.

Xie Jie's eyes flickered, and he furrowed his brow. Meng Hao's words left him speechless. The words were a defense in themselves, even though he neither admitted nor denied anything; or perhaps he had done both. Xie Jie looked at him for a long moment.

The response had been clear; Meng Hao didn't know. But maybe the reason he was here was because he was indeed of the Nine Great Families.

"Fellow Daoist Meng provided you with his answer," said Han Bei calmly. "Elder Brother Xie, I know that you have some Green Cloaking Pills on your person that the Sect Leader gave you specifically for use in this place. I know this already, there's no need for you to confirm or deny it."

Xie Jie was quiet for a moment. He looked around at the lightning, his face somber. Then he slapped the top of his head and spit out a small green pill the size of a fingernail. As soon as it flew out, it exploded, sending large amounts of green Qi out in all directions. As it did, the lightning began to grow slightly transparent, as if they were being cloaked.

The five of them continued onward several hundreds of meters, with Xu Youdao and the gray-robed Cultivator taking the lead.

A hundred meters later, Xie Jie, his face grim, said, "I only have three Green Cloaking Pills!" He spat out another pill, and they raced forward amidst the indistinct lightning.

With the power of the two Green Cloaking Pills, they were able to reach the location of the nine statues. The statues were awe-inspiring, as was the cauldron in their center, which seemed as if it could contain the Heavens.

An ancient aura circled about the area, brushing against their faces and making them feel as if they had traveled back to a primordial time. It was like they could feel the boundlessness of that era.

Han Bei was incapable of concealing the excitement within her eyes. She panted as she looked up at the statue of her ancestor. Next to her, Xu Youdao, the gray-cloaked man, and even Xie Jie stood by silently, all of them gazing at the statues of their respective ancestors.

Meng Hao had no way to comprehend what was going through their minds. His face was the calmest of the bunch as he looked at the statues one by one. Finally his gaze fell upon the circular cauldron that represented the heavens.

Even as he looked at the cauldron, something in his peripheral vision caught his attention. Something was moving on one of the statues. Meng Hao's eyes immediately darted over, and then opened wide.

There, upon the shoulder of the statue that resembled the gray-cloaked Cultivator, some dust had fallen away to reveal something. It was square, and looked gelatinous and somewhat elastic, like a slab of meat jelly.

It was pure and white, and after looking upon it, the first reaction of most people would be to try to eat it. The object sat on the statue's shoulder, wriggling a bit, causing more dust to fall down. Meng Hao stared, eyes wide, mouth agape. The thing seemed to be alive! Suddenly, it flew off of the statue's shoulder and onto its head. Then it leaped up into the air. A crack appeared on the surface of the meat jelly, which opened up into an enormous mouth. Instantly, the lightning in the sky crackled. Ten lightning bolts fell down directly onto the meat jelly.

It chewed for a bit, then stopped, as if it were digesting the lightning. Meng Hao gaped in astonishment as it dropped to the ground and then hop, hop, hopped over to land on the circular cauldron. It remained there motionless.

It wasn't just Meng Hao who saw this happen. The noise caused by the lightning and the meat jelly was incredible, causing Han Bei and the others to all look over. Han Bei's eyes narrowed, whereas Xie Jie's opened wider. He gasped, and the two of them exchanged a shocked, knowing glance.

“That's...”

The gray-robed Cultivator suddenly said, “That must be what the Black Sieve Sect needs the Hundred Spirits Tower for. They want to drag out Ultimate Vexation.” A mysterious look appeared in his eyes. Within his pupils appeared magical symbols as he attempted to gain information. This had nothing to do with his Cultivation base, but something specific to his eyes.

Before Han Bei and Xie Jie could say anything, the meat jelly suddenly jumped up. The face of an old man, his eyes closed, magically appeared on its surface. His nose twitched, and his eyes opened. They appeared to be filled with frustration. The meat jelly suddenly flew up and shot toward the exit of the square cauldron. But then it stopped in mid-air, as if it were hesitating. It floated there for a moment and consumed more lightning.

Seeing this, the eyes of the five Cultivators gleamed.

“Why is this thing called Ultimate Vexation?” Meng Hao suddenly asked of the gray-robed Cultivator.

“Even I don’t know,” was the reply. “I haven’t been able uncover any information about its origin. The Black Sieve Sect has likely spent much more time researching it. The little I do know is that as long as it has existed, it has been called Ultimate Vexation.”

“I couldn’t care less what that thing is called,” said Xu Youdao. “Half an hour has already passed. If Fellow Daoist Han can’t retrieve the rest of the Classic of Time soon, then our whole trip here will have been a waste!”

Without a word, Han Bei sat down cross-legged beneath the statue of her ancestor. Her hands made incantation gestures, and her ancient jade began to emit a greenish glow as it rotated around her. Meng Hao’s eyes glittered and he stepped a bit closer to her.

Everything around them was relatively quiet. Only the claps of thunder roared out. Time passed, the space of roughly one hundred breaths. Han Bei’s eyes suddenly opened, and the sound of incantation words floated from her mouth. Xu Youdao, the gray-robed Cultivator, and Xie Jie all stood around, as vigilant as ever.

Suddenly, the sound of Han Bei’s incantation ceased, and she spat out a mouthful of blood onto the ancient jade. It emitted a blinding green light and flew toward the hands of the statue.

It didn’t move incredibly fast, and actually wobbled back and forth a bit in the air as it moved. The blood drained from Han Bei’s face, as if she were having trouble controlling it. As the jade neared the statue, the two scripture scrolls in the statue’s hands began to glow brightly. Cracks appeared on their surfaces, and a boom echoed out. Suddenly, two pieces of jade exploded out from within the two scrolls.

Everyone clearly saw this happen, and though they might have their suspicions as to what was happening, it was obvious that two pieces of jade were flying away from the exploded scripture scrolls. Whistling sounds echoed out from them as they shot out.

The two jade pieces flew out, seemingly completely out of control, not controlled by anything or anyone. They seemed to be shooting out in an attempt to leave the square cauldron.

Before they could go very far, though, they were grabbed by the greenish glow emanated from Han Bei's ancient jade. It was as if they were all connected somehow. The two escaping pieces of jade suddenly stopped in mid air; they began to shake, as if they were struggling. A loud buzzing sound emanated out from them.

Han Bei coughed up some blood, and immediately seemed to grow listless. Exhaustion covered her face, and suddenly, her ancient piece of jade slipped out of her control and fell toward the ground.

In that instant, the other two pieces of jade suddenly began to fly off into the distance. It was very sudden, and there was no time for anyone to think. Xu Youdao's eyes flickered, and his body shot up into the air as he flew toward one of the jade pieces. The gray-robed man's eyes narrowed, but he too stepped up and shot forward, a green beam of light that shot toward the second jade piece. As for Xie Jie, he flew up and toward the original jade piece, a look of suspicion on his face.

"No fighting, Fellow Daoists," cried Han Bei. "Great tribulation will come on anyone not of my bloodline who touches those items! I have a method to bring together the three ancient pieces of jade." She coughed up some more blood.

I found a lot of different articles about various varieties of meat jelly. Here is one relatively general article. From what I understand, most meat jellies in China are made from pork. In any case, the ingredients of meat jellies are not very important to the story. Check out the picture to get an idea of what it's supposed to look like.

Chapter 162: Crafty Schemes

Her words were essentially meaningless. Xu Youdao increased his speed.

Three people, three different directions. They sped forward, their lightning-repelling items glittering. They flew forward in the twinkling of an eye. Meng Hao also took action; however, he

didn't rush in pursuit of the jades. Instead, he headed toward Han Bei, who seemingly had lost control over her own ancient jade.

At the same time Xu Youdao reached the jade he had been pursuing. He flicked his sleeve, collecting it into his bag of holding. Throughout the process, he avoided any dangers whatsoever.

“Hahaha! Fellow Daoist Han, I've retrieved the item for you. I'll keep it with me for now and give you a copy later.” At the same time as his laughter rang out, Xie Jie's eyes suddenly glittered brightly. Anyone looking at him would see the same suspicions that existed moments before on his face. However, Han Bei was not faking; the anxiety and enmity on her face after all the coughing up of blood were real. And yet, Xu Youdao had succeeded; Xie Jie seemed to no longer suspect anything. He increased his speed.

As he shot forward, a lightning bolt descended toward him. He spat a third Green Cloaking Pill out of his mouth. A boom sounded out as the pill activated, completely concealing Xie Jie from any lightning. He bit his tongue, spitting out some blood that turned into a blood mist. As he passed through it, his speed increased dramatically. In an instant, he was upon the piece of jade. With the flick of a sleeve, he collected it into his bag of holding.

Xie Jie's eyes burned as he glanced toward the gray-robed Cultivator. He was rocketing forward, seemingly focused on pursuing the jade piece, but doing so with caution. Having seen Xu Youdao and Xie Jie's successes, he increased his speed, and within a moment was almost in the position to acquire the last piece of jade.

All eyes were focused on him. Meng Hao watched him flick his sleeve to gather up the piece of jade. Suddenly, for some inexplicable reason, the lightning in the area began to accumulate. In the blink of an eye, ten bolts of lightning shot down.

The gray-robed Cultivator's lightning-repelling treasure was simply incapable of resisting, and shattered. His face fell, and he was just about to do everything in his power to evade, when a shocking thunderclap sounded out. Everyone watched as the man's body was transformed into bits of floating ash. Even his bag of holding was destroyed.

Only the ancient jade remained, floating beneath the lightning, undamaged. Bits of ash and bone, the remnants of the gray-robed Cultivator, slowly drifted down to the ground.

Han Bei coughed up some more blood. Her face was pale, but she gritted her teeth and raised her trembling hands toward the drifting piece of jade.

It shook, then changed directions, shooting back toward Han Bei and Meng Hao. Based on its trajectory, it seemed it was actually heading toward Meng Hao.

“Fellow Daoist Meng, be careful!” shouted Han Bei shrilly.

Everything was happening too quickly. Seeing the death of the gray-robed Cultivator caused Xie Jie’s expression to change. A horrified look appeared on Xu Youdao’s face. However, at the moment, both of them were looking at the piece of jade the was descending toward Meng Hao and Han Bei. The death of the gray-robed Cultivator seemed to have been an accident that had nothing to do with the ancient jade.

The two of them flew forward simultaneously. From the look of it, if Meng Hao attempted to interfere, they would join forces to destroy him. However, their speed was a bit slower than his. Even moving as fast as possible, it seemed that they would arrive a moment too late.

Meng Hao, eyes glittering, shot forward, a barely perceptible mocking smile forming on the corner of his mouth. The three of them closed in on the piece of jade.

It was at this moment that the closed eyes of the meat jelly floating in the mid-air suddenly opened. It caught sight of the three people flying toward the jade, and suddenly it shot forward with indescribable speed. In a flash, it landed on Xu Youdao’s head.

Xu Youdao’s body shook, and a look of astonishment appeared on his head. “Fellow Daoist Xie, help me...”

Before Xie Jie could even react to his words, the meat jelly opened its mouth. Suddenly, massive amounts of lightning bore down. It seemed as if they were entering the mouth of the meat jelly. But by the time they disappeared, Xu Youdao’s body was nothing more than ash in the wind.

He didn’t even have time to scream.

Xie Jie gasped, and his face flickered. He suddenly stopped moving, his heart pounding. He stared in astonishment at the floating meat jelly; his scalp began to go numb.

Without Xu Youdao and Xie Jie pursuing the ancient piece of jade, it quickly arrived at Meng Hao. He chuckled, shooting forward, and then actually moving out of the path of the piece of jade. Now, it was heading directly toward Han Bei. She gaped in shock, as did Xie Jie, who was still reeling from the actions of the meat jelly moments ago.

Meng Hao laughed, looking back and forth between Han Bei and Xie Jie. “Your act could fool gray-robos, but did you really think you could fool me?” A look of ridicule appeared in his eyes. He spit out the lightning flag. The surrounding lightning was instantly thrown into chaos.

Hearing Meng Hao’s words, Han Bei frowned and Xie Jie’s eyes flashed. They said nothing.

“The appearance of that meat jelly was not something you anticipated, and therefore Xu Youdao lost his life. That was an accident, not part of your scheming. In any case,” he continued coldly, “with Xu Youdao gone, your three person plan cannot be completed. I think now you should consider allowing me to take his place, assuming I wish to.” He smiled.

The lightning flag next to him sent out ripples, causing the surrounding lightning to roil even more violently. Not wanting to attract the attention of the meat jelly, he pulled the lightning flag close to him and suppressed the rippling.

An unsightly expression covered Xie Jie’s face. Meng Hao’s craftiness left him awestruck. During their entire journey, he had barely interacted at all with Han Bei and Xu Youdao. He’d assumed no one could possibly connect the three of them together. And yet Meng Hao had.

“It was Xu Youdao’s final words that made it clear to you,” said Han Bei with a little smile. “Fellow Daoist Meng, you are very perceptive. I can’t help but admire you in this.” There didn’t seem to be any anxiety on her face whatsoever. “It’s true. There can only be three people in the end. I’ll be honest with you, Fellow Daoist. I’ve betrayed the Black Sieve Sect because of this place. Originally Xie Jie and I received authorization from the Sect to come here. Unfortunately, we never imagined that the object the Sect sought, Ultimate Vexation, would be here. And we never predicted that Xu Youdao would fall.” She straightened her hair and smiled. Despite her beauty, he had been careful of her machinations from the beginning. She was clever, but Xie Jie couldn’t compare at all.

As she spoke, Han Bei lifted her hand and made a grasping motion. A blue streak of light shot toward her from the position where Xu Youdao had been killed. Moments later, a gray streak appeared from where the gray-robed Cultivator had died. They circled around in the air. As they did, Han Bei opened her mouth and spit out a yellow strand. The three strands intertwined and began to emit a bright light.

The yellow strand was obviously from the Li woman, which Han Bei had somehow retrieved after her death.

“In this place of treasures of the Nine Great Families, only the Han Clan treasure can be retrieved. The rest of the statues have not been damaged, and are therefore still sealed. We originally needed strands from three bloodlines, and power from three people, to be able to open the true location of the Time refining treasure of the Han Clan. Now, we have no choice other than to use Xu Youdao’s strand. Brother Meng,” she said earnestly, “let’s not bring up everything from before. I hope we can agree on that. If you agree, then you can have your copy of the Time refining treasure. I’m willing to swear an oath on the name of my illustrious Ancestors!” She slapped her bag of holding to produce a Feng Shui compass. She quickly erased the branding inside of it.

“This object,” she said, “can serve as an expression of my apology. Actually, the exit I spoke of earlier is not really an exit. That place will only return you here. This Feng Shui compass is a Sect treasure. You can use it to get out of this place. However, it won’t take you out of the Blessed Land, It will merely take you out of the square cauldron.” The Feng Shui compass floated over to Meng Hao.

He eyed it expressionlessly, casting his Spiritual Sense into it for a moment. Then he exchanged a glance with Han Bei. Their eyes glittered simultaneously. Xie Jie looked at them, his face grim. He let out a cold snort.

Meng Hao took the Feng Shui compass, his expression the same as usual. He examined it further with Spiritual Sense. After confirming that it was a teleportation device, he nodded.

Han Bei’s smile grew even more beautiful. She gave Meng Hao a slight bow, then looked over at Xie Jie, who was glaring at Meng Hao. He made no attempt to hide his displeasure. He and Han Bei had been a couple for some time. Once their mission here was completed, they were to return to the Sect and be officially united as beloved.

Han Bei took a deep breath and then waved her beautiful hand. The three colored strands interlocked and flew out. They grew longer, creating a complex pattern which then shot toward the statue of the Han ancestor and into the crack on its back. At the same time, Han Bei bit her tongue and then spit out some blood. The three strands turned bright red, and continued to stream into the crack.

Next, the strands separated. Han Bei grabbed one, and the other two shot toward Meng Hao and Xie Jie respectively.

Meng Hao's eyes glittered as he grabbed the strand. As soon as he touched it, he felt the copper mirror growing hot within the bag of the Cosmos.

“The objects held aloft by the nine statues are not real. They are mere illusions. The true treasures are inside the circular cauldron. No one can take them, not even someone of one of the nine Bloodlines. However, the body of the Han ancestor was struck with Tribulation Lightning, and was cracked. Therefore, the Time refining treasure within the cauldron is the only of the nine that can be acquired!

“The only way to get it, is to break open the circular cauldron. With our Cultivation bases, that would be impossible. Brother Meng! Xie, dear! Please bolster the power of my bloodline. We will use the power of the ancestor statue to retrieve the item!” Her eyes glowed mysteriously as she looked at Meng Hao and Xie Jie, a sweet smile on her face.

Chapter 163: Tender Killing

A roaring sound filled the world within the cauldron. The lightning in the region danced about, and the meat jelly seemed to have been frightened. Its attention now appeared to be fixed upon Meng Hao and the others.

Han Bei's voice rang out. “I shall now employ my bloodline magic. Brother Meng and Xie, dear, please assist me with all your power.” She bit her tongue, spitting more blood out onto the strands that wound into the crack on the statue. It began to emit a red glow.

A droning roar sounded out, and the entire statue began to tremble. Vast quantities of dust poured off of it. Meng Hao suddenly felt as if the strand in his hand was pulling at his Cultivation base, as well as his Spiritual Sense.

His eyes flickered, but his face remained still. Next to him, Xie Jie's eyes glittered brightly as he poured power from his Cultivation base, as well as Spiritual Sense, into the strand he held. He looked at Meng Hao, killing intent flickering within his eyes. Then his gaze shifted to Han Bei, and his gaze grew warm. It could be said that the two of them were a ‘green plum and a bamboo horse,’ childhood sweethearts. When they were young, there had been some conflict between them, but as of now, it seemed that Han Bei really had worked her way into his heart.

Suddenly, the roaring grew in intensity. Han Bei's face grew pale. She was in control of the three threads; Xie Jie and Meng Hao were simply providing the assisting power with their Cultivation bases and Spiritual Sense. They had no way to do anything to cause the statue to do anything. They poured their power in, while Han Bei employed the power of her bloodline.

Using her bloodline to touch the spirit of the ancestor statue was magic that only she could perform. If anyone else tried to touch the statue's spirit, their Cultivation base would wither up. It was something that neither Meng Hao nor Xie Jie could do.

About ten breaths worth of time passed. Booming sounds filled the sky. Suddenly the kneeling statue emitted a roar as... its eyes suddenly began to shine, as if it were alive. Its body... slowly began quiver, as if it were preparing to stand.

Han Bei's face grew paler, her eyes brighter. She spat out more blood, causing her Blood Qi to enter into the statue. The whole statue trembled violently, as if an earthquake were shaking it. Then, the massive statue... stood up!

Its eyes emitted a dull glow, and a mysterious pressure filled the entire area. It slowly lowered its hands. As Meng Hao watched, the images were burned indelibly into his memory.

He took a deep breath, continuing to provide Cultivation base power and Spiritual Sense. Han Bei's body shook. This was real trembling, not an act; her face was as pale as a corpse's. But determination radiated out of her eyes, and she spat out more blood.

Boom!

The statue slowly outstretched its right hand, pointing with its index finger. The finger seemed to be filled with an indescribable power; it descended toward the circular cauldron situated in the middle of the nine statues.

Meng Hao's eyes narrowed and gleamed mysteriously.

"I need more power!" said Han Bei, her voice urgent. Without hesitation, Xie Jie poured more power into the strand he held.

Meng Hao's eyes shined as he did the same. Some of the color returned to Han Bei's face, but moments later she spat out more blood, filling the statue with more power. Its finger continued to approach the cauldron; it seemed the cauldron would open at any moment.

At this exact time, however, the descending finger suddenly changed directions. It no longer headed toward the circular cauldron, but toward Xie Jie. It moved with incredible speed, causing a look of complete shock to cover his face.

“Han Bei, what are you doing?!” cried Xie Jie, throwing the strand away from himself. His eyes filled with intense terror, and he shot backward. Meng Hao’s eyes flickered. He opened his mouth, and the lightning mist flew out, preventing Xie Jie from moving backward. His body stopped moving. His words were still echoing out by the time the massive finger reached him.

The finger barely touched him, and his entire body exploded with a bang, even his Dao Pillar. In an instant, everything disintegrated; his life was completely gone.

He didn’t let out a blood-curling scream, only a furious roar that lingered on after his death. An orange strand curled up where his body used to be, which then entered the statue’s finger.

His bag of holding rose up and flew over to Han Bei. She grabbed it and immediately produced a small black vial. She crushed it, and a phantom figure floated up that looked in every way exactly like Han Bei. She absorbed it in through her ears, mouth and nose.

All of this takes some time to describe, but actually happened in space of only a few breaths. Meng Hao watched everything with the same expression as always, as if he had been expecting it to happen. He was completely expressionless, although his eyes flickered.

“Many thanks for your assistance, Fellow Daoist Meng,” said Han Bei with a sweet smile. She bowed slightly toward him.

“Fellow Daoist Han, it was a clever move to exterminate your dear Xie,” he said coolly. He was not surprised, because the violet Feng Shui compass she had given him now was not just unbranded, it also contained a message.

In the message, she had directly told him that she planned to kill Xie Jie, and when it happened, he shouldn’t be alarmed.

“When the Black Sieve Sect captured me and my clansmen, it seemed as if they would treat us well. But in actuality, we were nothing more than animals in a cage. Xie Jie was the worst; he treated me horribly since childhood. After we grew up, he had further desires.... It’s only natural for me to slay him. If I hadn’t, then everything we acquired today would belong to the Black Sieve Sect. Now, we can share everything between the two of us.”

She smiled at him and said, “Brother Meng is surpassingly astute, I don’t dare to attempt to deceive you. That is why I left the message on the Feng Shui compass. I always accomplish what I set out to do. Today, the Time refinement technique will become ours. From now on, you don’t need to do anything more.”

Her expression was sincere, although she sighed inwardly. Of the six people who had begun the mission, all had their own thoughts and plans. Only Meng Hao had seen through everything and come through it all.

People had fallen around him, but he remained unscathed. This caused fear to grow in Han Bei’s heart, as well as admiration. Had any mistakes been made along the way, Meng Hao would have been dead.

Because of this, she was subconsciously afraid of provoking him. Therefore, her words were actually true, and revealed her true intentions.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever. He said nothing, just simply nodded. However, the lightning mist surrounded him. If Han Bei did anything threatening, he would call down the lightning; death would be assured.

Han Bei took a deep breath and looked at him. She abandoned any last bit of scheming. The journey here had been difficult, and she had used up all her tricks. She really did not want to meet any more mishaps. Her hand flickered an incantation, and the massive statue shook, then began to reach back toward the circular cauldron.

When it touched it, the entire world within the square cauldron shook. The lid of the circular cauldron slowly tilted up, and a violet Qi began to pour out of it. Inside, Meng Hao caught a glimpse of three jade pages floating up. Their appearance seemed to coincide with that of the violet Qi, and they hadn’t completely emerged from the cauldron, as if they might sink back in at any time.

Han Bei’s eyes filled with a bright glow, and she gasped. Her right hand slapped her bag of holding, and a small clay jar appeared, about the size of a person’s head.

It flew up into the air, transforming into a beam of light that shot toward the circular cauldron. As it neared, cracks spread out across its surface and it exploded, sending the ash that had been inside shooting forward.

Within the ash were what appeared to be ten phantom images. There were men and women, and their ages varied, but they all resembled each other; these must be Clan members of the same bloodline.

This was not just random ash; it was ash collected upon the cremation of various Han Clan members, and contained life force. The figures spread out, and then bowed respectfully toward the circular cauldron.

“Bloodline of Patriarch Han, according to the ancient agreement, the bloodline remains, Patriarch, please return....” As the phantoms spoke, they entered the violet Qi.

At the same time, the statue of the Han Clan Patriarch stretched out its palm and pressed it against the cauldron.

The instant the figures entered the violet Qi and the statue pressed on the cauldron, it vibrated, emitting a droning sound that shook everything. Amidst the roaring, the phantom figures began to burn. As for the statue, it trembled violently. Starting at its feet, cracks spread across its entire body. Suddenly, it began to collapse into pieces.

From this day forward, there would no longer be nine statues in this place, but eight!

Han Bei shook as if some invisible power were rocking her. She took a few steps back and then spit up some blood. At the same time, a violet glow flew out from the crumbling statue. Meng Hao could clearly see the excitement which appeared in her eyes. Within the violet glow appeared to be a small, sleeping person. It suddenly shot toward Han Bei, hitting her between the eyebrows and merging into her.

“That’s what she came for!” thought Meng Hao, his eyes narrowing.

At the same time, because of the sacrifice of the ten Han Clan phantoms, the three jade pages within the violet Qi freed themselves from the circular cauldron and flew out. As they did, a sound like a sigh could be heard from the circular cauldron.

As the sigh sounded out, one of the flying jade pages suddenly stopped and then spun backward toward the cauldron. The other two continued to fly forward.

Chapter 164: That Bird’s Aura...

The spot between Han Bei's eyebrows glowed with a violet light. Panting, she shot into the air after one of the pages. Meng Hao also leaped into the air, moving with as much speed as he could muster after the other page.

They flew up simultaneously and in different directions, dodging in and out of the lightning in pursuit of the jade pages. Just as each person was about to lay hands on their respective pages, the meat jelly, which had been observing them this whole time, suddenly sprang into action.

Its movement caused Meng Hao's expression to flicker and Han Bei's face to fall. Both of them were filled with fear.

The object itself wasn't dangerous, but it seemed to enjoy jumping onto peoples' heads, and then consuming lightning. In other words, its arrival heralded the onslaught of a sea of lightning!

"Dammit!" said Meng Hao, his eyes narrowing when he saw the meat jelly heading toward him. Han Bei, who was moving in a different direction, breathed a sigh of relief.

Keeping his eye on the meat jelly, Meng Hao grabbed the jade page and then shot backward as fast as possible. He caused the lightning mist to withdraw; it might be an effective tool to threaten others in this place, but would only serve to attract the meat jelly, and thus, more lightning. Unfortunately, it seemed he had acted too slowly.

He shot backward as fast as possible, but the meat jelly was clearly very persistent. In a flash, it was in front of Meng Hao. It shot downward, and appeared to be just about to land on Meng Hao's head.

Before it did, and before Meng Hao could even do anything, the meat jelly suddenly trembled. The face of the old man appeared on its surface once again. His eyes were wide open, and his expression was one of both disbelief and disgust. Suddenly, it opened its mouth and spoke.

"Dammit! Dammit! How come you have that damn bird's aura on you?!" It hopped backward through the air as if it was completely disgusted with Meng Hao and wouldn't even come near him. It flew back up and then suddenly vomited, as if it had just seen something so disgusting it was painful.

If that were all, then it wouldn't be a big deal. But then a flash of light could be seen as the meat jelly suddenly appeared in front of Han Bei. She watched in shock as it gulped down the jade paper in a single bite.

It started to chew, and when she saw this, Han Bei's scalp grew numb. She could do nothing but move backward.

"Gross, gross, gross..." said the face on the meat jelly, its expression twisted as it looked over at Meng Hao. It looked as if it was scared to even get close to him.

Meng Hao had a strange expression on his face as he looked at the retreating meat jelly. He glanced at horrified Han Bei.

She was silent for a moment, and then said, "Congratulations on acquiring the Time refining technique of the Han Clan, Fellow Daoist Meng. There are three jade pieces in total, but each page has a technique that can be used by itself." A complicated look appeared in her eye. Suddenly, the lightning in the area began to roar.

It rapidly increased in intensity, each and every bolt brimming with the fierce intensity it had at the beginning. The hour time period had passed. As of now, a lack of lightning-repelling objects equated to certain death and transformation into flying ash.

The sheets of lightning made Meng Hao's expression fall. Han Bei also looked shocked.

"You acquired the object, so it's yours, Brother Meng," said Han Bei hurriedly. "I will lay no claim to it. But I must ask you to take care for it well. Please do not lose it. Next time we meet, you must give me a copy. That was our agreement." As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she slapped her bag of holding. A violet Feng Shui compass appeared in her hands. It flashed, and then her body disappeared as she was teleported away. In that same instant, however, the meat jelly shot forward, borrowing some of the teleportation power to also leave the world of the cauldron.

Meng Hao looked around at the vast fields of lightning, and then immediately pulled out the violet Feng Shui compass, which he had examined closely earlier. He poured Spiritual Sense into it, activating its teleportation power. In an instant, he was teleported away from the world of lightning.

When he reappeared, the sky above was dark, and the earth was trembling. Booms echoed out everywhere, and his Dao Pillars were instantly unstable. He immediately coughed up a mouthful of blood and staggered forward a few paces. He looked around.

He was in the wide plain, not far from the place where he had met up with Han Bei initially. He took a deep breath. Han Bei hadn't been lying; the Feng Shui compass did what she said it would.

He lifted his hand, within which was the good luck charm. He was just about to pour some Spiritual Sense into it and leave this bizarre Blessed Land, when suddenly a massive tower began to rise up from the earth off in the distance. Everything shook, and roaring filled the air.

He could see that this pillar was like a tower, and it emanated an aura. The aura was not that of Core Formation or the Nascent Soul stage, but of Foundation Establishment!

This was the the Hundred Spirits Tower, constructed with the Dao Pillars of over two hundred Foundation Establishment Cultivators!

Meng Hao sucked in a deep breath when he saw the Hundred Spirits Tower. Surrounding the tower were phantom figures of hundreds of Cultivators. They emitted shrill howls which merged together into a powerful sound of grievance. The sound rose up into the heavens, causing everything to be dark.

From various directions, ten or so freshly acquired Dao Pillars flew through the air toward the tower and melded into it. The power spreading from the tower grew even more intense.

"I suppose the rest of the rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivators who came here are all dead..." He was silent, struck by the extent of the Black Sieve Sect's plotting. His Dao Pillars trembled inside of him. Were they not Perfect Dao Pillars, he wouldn't be able to keep them under control.

"I can't stay here any longer..." he thought. However, it was at this time that he cocked his head and stared off into the distance. His eyes glittered slightly, and he decided not to leave. Instead, he flew up and off into the distance.

He flew for the space of about ten breaths before stopping. There below him in the plain, he saw a group of four Cultivators sitting cross-legged in meditation. Around them circled a protective spell which seemed to be resisting the power of the Hundred Spirits Tower.

One of them, was none other than Lu Tao!

Meng Hao watched on as one of the four people coughed up some blood. His body suddenly exploded, and an illusory Dao Pillar flew out of him off into the sky.

After that, another Cultivator began to tremble. His eyes snapped open and he stared at Lu Tao. He laughed bitterly. "You despicable...." Before he could finish, his body was torn to pieces as his Dao Pillar flew out. The third person's face grew pale as his body also was torn to shreds. His Dao Pillar flew off into the distance.

However, the death of these three people made the protective spell many times stronger than it had been just now. Lu Tao sat inside pale-face, gritting his teeth with dogged will. The power of this spell was the only thing resisting the gravitational force outside.

Meng Hao looked down. He could see clearly that the three Cultivators had been under Lu Tao's control. In reality, their Dao Pillars had been blood sacrifices to protect Lu Tao. Their deaths had simply bolstered his spell.

Meng Hao, his face placid, descended toward Lu Tao. He landed next to the spell, looked down at Lu Tao, and gave a dry cough.

Lu Tao began to tremble. When he opened his eyes and gaze upon Meng Hao, a look of shock covered his face.

"So, it's... Fellow Daoist Meng...." His face was pale, his voice anxious as he looked at Meng Hao.

"Nice spell," said Meng Hao coolly. He spoke neither quickly nor slowly, but his words caused Lu Tao to feel extremely alarmed. From his perspective, it seemed that Meng Hao wasn't being affected at all by the gravitational force.

"Fellow Daoist Meng, what... what do you want?" His heart was filled with deep anxiety. If Meng Hao interfered with the spell, then it would be broken. He could imagine what the gravitational force would do to him after that; his body would shatter and his Dao Pillars would fly into the sky to join all the others in the enormous tower.

"Tell me what the Thunderclap Leaf really does," he said calmly, looking at Lu Tao within the spell.

“I already told you, Fellow Daoist Meng,” he blurted, growing even more nervous. “The Thunderclap Leaf....” Before he could continue, Meng Hao reached out and pushed down on the spell circulating around Lu Tao.

As he did, the spell trembled, and a small crack appeared on its surface. Terror flashed onto Lu Tao’s face.

“Stop, Fellow Daoist Meng, please... I’m not deceiving you. The Thunderclap Leaf really can...”

Meng Hao gave a cold snort and then pushed down again. A boom sounded out, and seven or eight more cracks appeared within the spell. Lu Tao could suddenly feel even more of the gravitational force that existed in the outside world seeping inside. His Dao Pillar trembled unstably. His scalp went numb; he was currently scared out of his wits.

“Thunderclap Leaves are rare in the Southern Domain,” he gushed, talking as fast as he possibly could. “Special techniques exist which can imbue them into magical items to increase their lightning power! Fellow Daoist Meng, listen to me, I have a jade slip here as evidence. Just read the technique in the jade slip and you’ll receive enlightenment!!” He produced a jade slip which he showed to Meng Hao. His entire body trembled, and a look of entreaty appeared on his face. His words sounded sincere, as if he weren’t concealing anything.

“Still trying to fool me?” A cold light gleamed in Meng Hao’s eye. His right index finger stabbed into the spell. A boom rippled out as more cracks filled the spell. There was even a wide hole in one place. The gravitational force poured in. Lu Tao’s face twisted and he coughed up some blood. It looked as if his body would explode at any moment.

Chapter 165: Sieve Net Thunder Tree!

“STOP!!!” shrieked Lu Tao, terror-stricken. His face completely drained of blood, and he felt as if the shadow of death were looming over him.

He clearly remembered the scene when he had entered this Blessed Land, how so many Cultivators had exploded, their Dao Pillars sucked away. He was from the Black Lands, and knew a secret method that he had been able to utilize to stay safe. But with Meng Hao here, he felt an incredible pressure weighing down upon him that he had never felt before.

Furthermore, it seemed that no matter what he said, Meng Hao wouldn’t believe him. Meng Hao completely had the upper hand. Faced with such life-or-death danger, Lu Tao’s schemes disappeared like ash into the wind.

“I’m telling the truth,” said Lu Tao pleadingly. “Thunderclap Leaves can be absorbed into magical treasures to imbue them with the power of lightning. Why don’t you believe me!?” His voice was hoarse, and from the look on his face, he had been pushed to the limit and had nothing more he could say. His eyes suddenly seemed to flash with understanding. He gave a hoarse laugh, and his eyes filled with boldness born of desperation. “I get it. It’s not that you don’t believe me, it’s that you want to kill me!

“Fine! Just shatter my spell, then. I, Lu, have already explained the Thunderclap Leaf’s usage. If you’re going to kill me, then just kill me. But you can forget about getting the information from my jade slip!” Gritting his teeth, Lu Tao pushed down hard on the jade slip. If Meng Hao was really going to destroy the spell, then he would crush it to make sure the fish died and the net was torn; everyone would lose.

Meng Hao looked calmly at Lu Tao. Some time passed, and then he sighed. He lifted his hand and pushed down again. A boom sounded out. What was destroyed, however, was not the spell, but rather the jade slip in Lu Tao’s hand.

Meng Hao destroyed it, transforming it into pieces of ash.

This caused Lu Tao’s face to fall and his heart to grow cold. Obviously, this action on the part of Meng Hao indicated that... he didn’t believe him!

“Tell me, or don’t tell me. I’m out of patience,” he said coolly. It’s not that he didn’t believe what Lu Tao said about the Thunderclap Leaves being able to imbue magical treasures with the power of lightning. But Lu Tao spoke his words too easily. They might be true, but Meng Hao couldn’t imagine that the Thunderclap Leaves collected by Patriarch Reliance would be so simple.

A bitter smile appeared on Lu Tao’s face, as if he had nothing left to say. Meng Hao nodded slightly, then began to press down onto the spell. This time, he would completely destroy it.

“I’LL TELL!!” Lu Tao’s body was trembling, and his heart nearly collapsed into pieces. The shaking of his Dao Pillar turned into a look of resolve in his eyes, and a bitter smile on his lips.

“I’ll tell you,” he said, quivering. “But you have to swear that after I tell you, you won’t do anything to damage my spell.” He smiled a painful smile. Everything he had said before was filled with half-truths, and yet, none of it even touched on the real truth, the most important part. Facing up against death the way he was now, however, he had no choice but to be honest.

“Speak,” said Meng Hao, his expression the same as ever, but his eyes shining mysteriously.

Lu Tao took a deep breath, and was silent for just a moment. Then, with a pained look, he slowly began to speak. “Thunderclap Leaves come from the Thunderclap Tree. But the Thunderclap Tree’s real name is Sieve Net Thunder, or Mulberry Thunder Tree.”

Meng Hao’s expression was placid, and it was impossible to tell what he was thinking. He looked coolly at Lu Tao. This in turn caused indescribable terror to fill Lu Tao’s heart. His anguished expression grew stronger, and the coldness within him completely encompassed his heart and filled his body. He began to tremble with fear.

“There’s a legend about the Mulberry Thunder Tree. According to this legend, in ancient times there was an almighty being who achieved enlightenment while sitting underneath a Sieve Net Thunder Tree. Heavenly Tribulation descended, desiring to wipe out this new Dao. The will of the lightning infected the tree. As for the almighty being, it split apart the Tribulation Lightning and then stepped into the stars.

“Though the almighty being departed, the Sieve Net Thunder Tree absorbed some of its Dao in addition to the power of the Tribulation Lightning. It was destroyed, and yet, a thousand years later, a sprout appeared within the dead trunk!

“Thus was born a tree that was mulberry, but not mulberry. Thunder, but not thunder. A Sieve Net Mulberry Thunder Tree!”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered as he listened to Lu Tao, but he said nothing.

“In regards to the almighty being which achieved enlightenment underneath the Sieve Net Mulberry Thunder Tree, what he said that day beneath the tree was that if he could not achieve ultimate supremacy, he would rather his body be shattered, and stay underneath the tree for all eternity!” Lu Tao lowered his head as he spoke, hiding the stubbornness which shone in his eyes.

A strange expression appeared on Meng Hao’s face as he listened to the story. It seemed to him unlikely that Lu Tao was making this story up as he went.

“Countless ages have passed since the Sieve Net Mulberry Thunder Tree appeared. Eventually, it became part of the heart of the earth, which then caused more trees to sprout. Yet, they contained

the experiences from events in ancient times. Because the will of the Heavens evolved, this tree was eventually able to cast off that which withered it. Today, it is as precious as phoenix feathers and qilin horns.”

Lu Tao was silent for a moment before continuing. “Most Cultivators will use the tree to meld it with magical items, or even absorb it into their Dao Pillars, acquiring the invincible thunder which exists within the Sieve Net Mulberry Thunder Leaf.

“However, in the Black Lands, there is a type of larva called Frigid Snow, which exists in the snowstorms of mid-winter. Of all the remarkable bugs in the world, it is ranked number ninety-seven. It’s a remarkable larva; it doesn’t produce silk, but rather, intense coldness. It is quite prized by Cultivators, and if it can be acquired, is viewed as a precious treasure. It can be refined into a Frigid Spirit, embodied into a Frigid treasure.

“This larva is not common, but not exceedingly rare, and occasionally appears.” At this point, Lu Tao paused for a moment and looked at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao looked back at him, and their gazes locked for a moment. Lu Tao sighed inwardly, and then continued.

“What only a few people know, however, is that there is an unusual relationship between the larva and the Sieve Net Thunder Mulberry Tree. If the larva consumes the leaves of the tree, it is possible for it to become the number four ranked remarkable bug... the Eyeless Larva!

“The Eyeless Larva turns into a chrysalis, and will produce a thread of silk. That thread cannot be broken, nor can the body be destroyed. The body cannot be destroyed, and the thread cannot be broken. It creates an unstoppable cycle. The thread becomes an invincible precious treasure.

“The Eyeless Larva has only appeared twice throughout history, and each time, the thread it produced caused a sensation in the Cultivation world. There was even conflict in the Eastern Lands. To this very day, no one knows what caused the death of the Eyeless Larvae that appeared twice before.” Lu Tao sighed inwardly. Having finished speaking, he looked deeply at Meng Hao, then closed his eyes.

Meng Hao muttered to himself as he looked at closed-eyed Lu Tao. Finally, he laughed. Turning, his body transformed into a prismatic beam which shot off into the distance.

After Meng Hao left, Lu Tao opened his eyes. He looked blankly up at the sky, then let out a long sigh. Soon, his eyes filled with a cold glow.

“Everything I said now was ninety percent true and ten percent false. That guy might be smart, but he’ll have a hard time telling which is which. He’ll definitely go looking for the Frigid Snow Larva. If he really does feed it the Sieve Net Thunder Mulberry Leaf, then he’s dead!

“All I have to do now is endure this pain a bit longer until the Black Sieve Sect finishes. Then I’ll be able to find some clues in this place to find what I’m looking for.” A grim look on his face, he took a deep breath, and then closed his eyes to begin repairing his spell.

Meng Hao was lost in thought as he flew through the air. Of course he wouldn’t believe everything that Lu Tao told him. However, he was fairly certain that at least some of what he’d said was true. It would have been too difficult to simply make up such a story on the spot. Perhaps half was true and half were lies.

“With desire, comes incompleteness. If I have no desire, then the storms will not touch me.” Meng Hao smiled as he continued onward. Everything he passed was completely barren; he didn’t see even one rogue Foundation Establishment Cultivator. Up ahead, the Hundred Spirits Tower emitted a bright glow which surrounded everything.

From such a distance, Meng Hao was unable to spot Xu Qing amongst the crowd. He silently took out the good luck charm and poured some spiritual energy into it. Immediately, he felt the teleportation power.

However, he couldn’t teleport immediately. It would require some time before the power could be activated. Meng Hao took a deep breath and then shot toward the peak of a nearby mountain. He sat down cross-legged. Ignoring what was happening around him, he continued to pour spiritual energy into the good luck charm, feeling the teleportation power growing in intensity.

“I need to wait for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn...” This was his first time using the good luck charm, so it was also his first time encountering its downside.

His current location wasn’t exactly safe, but there were no people around, only the glow emanating from the Hundred Spirits Tower. However, his Perfect Foundation was still capable of resisting it. If too much time passed, though, it would become more difficult to fight back. Therefore, he concentrated fully on the good luck charm.

“I wonder where I’ll be teleported to....” His eyes flickered as he felt the teleportation power surging. He placed his right hand on the ground. The dirt began to churn, and tentacles burst up out of the soil. They transformed into a violet-golden fruit the size of a palm. Meng Hao closed his fingers over it and then placed it into his bag of the Cosmos.

It was at this moment that suddenly, something flickered in the air near the Hundred Spirits Tower. It wasn’t large, but Meng Hao immediately recognized it. It was none other than what he and Han Bei had encountered before teleporting out of the square cauldron... the meat jelly!

It floated in mid-air, its archaic features gazing curiously at the Hundred Spirits Tower.

Suddenly, it emitted a piercing howl which filled heaven and earth. The wind and clouds surged, and the ground shook. Even the Hundred Spirits Tower trembled as if it might collapse. The hundreds of phantoms which circled around all began to shriek. Lightning began to build up on their bodies.

Surrounding the tower at its base were nearly one thousand Black Sieve Sect disciples, all sitting cross legged. In the forefront were eight Core Formation Cultivators. As soon as the meat jelly appeared and the clouds whipped into a frenzy, their eyes opened, and they looked up into the sky.

“It’s appeared!!”

“That thing is Ultimate Vexation?”

Their eyes filled with excitement, and their hearts pounded as their hands flickered incantations. Immediately, the ground in front of them began to glow, and suddenly Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful middle-aged woman appeared. Nascent Soul Cultivators!

“So, it was fished out!!”

“I shall acquire this item today!” cried Patriarch Violet Sieve. His eyes were fixed on the meat jelly and they shined with intense expectation.

Chapter 166: Ultimate Vexation Bonds a Master!

“According to the ancient records, this is Ultimate Vexation,” said Patriarch Violet Sieve. “It will never bond a master, it loves thunder, and consumes lightning. However, what excites it more than anything is not lightning, but the electricity within the human body!”

“The electricity contained within the Dao Pillars of hundreds of Cultivators, as well as the power of their Cultivation bases, has been combined into the Hundred Spirits Tower. This thing has never encountered such immense, intangible aura as that which emanates from this tower!” He stared at the meat jelly, which was currently backing away slowly.

Next to Patriarch Violet Sieve, the beautiful middle-aged woman was also staring at the meat jelly. Both of them rotated their Cultivation bases. They seemed ready to spring into action at any moment.

Panting, Patriarch Violet Sieve used Divine Sense to communicate with the beautiful woman: “Wait just a bit longer. This thing is fast, and if it wishes to flee, even a Sect Patriarch wouldn’t be able to capture it alive. It has an incredible aura, and if captured, may detonate itself and wait to be reincarnated. If that happens, who knows how many thousands of years will pass before it reappears....”

“We must wait for it to consume the Hundred Spirits Tower. Inside is a seal, which, combined with magic cast by the three Patriarchs on the outside, will strip it of its power of self-detonation. Then, the two of us will be able to capture it alive!!”

Meng Hao’s brow furrowed as he looked at the meat jelly. In his estimation it was a very inauspicious item. Inside the cauldron, it had caused the death of several people. In the end, it had even spoken, which left Meng Hao with a very strange feeling. He really disliked the thing.

“So, that thing is what the Black Sieve Sect came into this place for.” He was lost in thought for the space of about ten breaths. The good luck charm was almost activated and would be usable at any moment. Meng Hao’s expression was calm as he observed the proceedings. In his heart, he was ready to leave at a moment’s notice.

Up above, the meat jelly suddenly let out another menacing howl. The Hundred Spirits Tower trembled as if it were about to collapse. Arcs of electricity sparked off of it, as did a fatally enticing aura that Cultivators couldn’t sense, but the meat jelly could. Its nose twitched and its eyes grew wide. Patriarch Violet Sieve watched excitedly as it shot forward, approaching the Hundred Spirits Tower. Its mouth opened wide and it took a giant bite.

As it took more bites, the magical face on the meat jelly looked more and more happy. It even began to emit contented humming sounds. It swallowed bite after bite, and soon the Hundred Spirits Tower was more than half consumed. Suddenly, what remained of the tower exploded!

A boom resonated out as the tower collapsed in upon itself and then shot toward the meat jelly. The meat jelly was clearly frightened half to death. The crumbling tower transformed into an enormous chain that moved with incredible speed as it encircled the meat jelly.

The meat jelly let out a frightened screech. It quickly tried to hop backward through the air, but couldn't, as if it were being held down. At this very moment, outside the Blessed Land, next to the black door, the statue that had been carried to this place by the Black Sieve Sect began to emanate a mysterious glow. Within the dark glow were three figures sitting cross-legged in meditation atop the ragged hide, controlling it.

Within the Blessed Land, ear-splitting shrieks filled the air. Meng Hao looked at the meat jelly floating in mid-air, bound by the chain. The magical face looked panic stricken. It wanted to flee, but was held tight by the chain. As it tried to jump away, the chain stretched back behind it like a long tail.

At the same time, Patriarch Violet Sieve's eyes flashed. He took a step forward, and then his body disappeared. He reappeared next to the meat jelly. He lifted up his hand to grab it.

Simultaneously, the beautiful women also moved, appearing on the other side of the meat jelly.

The fear on the meat jelly's magical face grew more intense, and it let out a miserable cry. Its body suddenly began to shake, and lightning crackled off of it in waves. Heaven and earth shook, and Patriarch Violet Sieve's face flickered. He retreated a pace. The beautiful woman's eyes narrowed, and she too retreated, not daring to touch the lightning.

As the two retreated, the chained meat jelly rushed forward, its face filled with helplessness and despair. With the chain restricting it, it couldn't move very fast. Behind it, Patriarch Violet Sieve's eyes gleamed, and he let out a cold harrumph.

"You can't escape," he said, his voice filling the air. "Today, the Black Sieve Sect has come for you!" He took a step forward, reaching his hand out. The beautiful woman gave a cold snort and lifted her hand up as well. In the blink of an eye, her body seemed to be surrounded by stars, which then transformed into a multicolored beam that shot up to surround the meat jelly on all sides.

The meat jelly quivered, and flew forward. The magical face spoke, its voice archaic, like that of an old man's: "You people can't do this...."

When they heard the words, shock filled the faces of the surrounding thousand Black Sieve Sect Disciples. They had never imagined that this object would be able to speak with the voice of a human.

"So, you truly are Ultimate Vexation," said Patriarch Violet Sieve, laughing. He shot forward along with the beautiful woman. Their eyes glowed mysteriously as their bodies transformed into beams of light as which surrounded the meat jelly.

If that were all to it, it wouldn't be a big deal. But next, the eight Core Formation Cultivators among the Black Sieve Sect disciples all let out a shout. The rest of the disciples began to chant a scripture.

At the same time as the scripture droned out from the mouths of the thousand disciples, far away in the Southern Domain, tens of thousands of Black Sieve Sect Cultivators sat cross-legged, also chanting a scripture. Above the Ten Thousand Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect, an enormous vortex circulated in the air. It sucked in the scriptures chanted by the tens of thousands of Cultivators and transmitted them into the Blessed Land via the mouths of the thousand Cultivators there. The power of the scripture caused everything to shake and tremble.

A concerned look appeared on the meat jelly's magical face. "You people are immoral. You should be converting that bird, you shouldn't be trying to convert me...." Its voice sounded frightened, and it let out another shriek. Suddenly, a huge bluish aura began to emanate off of it.

Screaming miserably, the meat jelly shot forward, its expression desperate. It wanted to flee. At this moment, a massive roaring sound filled the sky. Up above, an enormous cage appeared in mid-air.

It was composed of pitch black iron bars which were inscribed with countless magical sealing symbols. It emanated a shocking pressure which caused large amounts of fissures to split the earth below.

The cage glittered as it shot toward the meat jelly, preparing to capture it alive and lock it tight. A black aura emanated out from the cage's bars, within which could be seen countless faces whose features were filled with excited avarice.

All of this takes a long time to describe, but actually happened in an instant. Meng Hao was not very close, yet was still shaken to the core. The good luck charm was almost ready to activate.

Although everything that was happening was shocking, he didn't really care too much about it, and was mostly focused on getting away.

But... suddenly, he leaped up and began to retreat backward.

“That damned meat jelly, why is it coming toward me?” He retreated unhesitatingly, eyeing the meat jelly as it changed direction and for no apparent reason shot toward him.

Meng Hao couldn't make himself believe that the meat jelly would pass him by. Having seen the destruction left in its wake within the cauldron, he was certain that the thing was coming directly toward him.

Meng Hao's scalp went numb. He thought about the two Nascent Soul eccentrics, about the bizarre sound of the scripture being chanted, and about the massive cage descending from above. His annoyance with the meat jelly grew more and more intense.

But he was merely a Foundation Establishment Cultivator. No matter how fast he moved, there was no way he could evade an item which was currently being chased by two Nascent Soul eccentrics and, in fact, the entire Black Sieve Sect. The meat jelly was chained, but its speed was still impossible to describe. One breath, it was off in the distance, and the next breath, it was directly in front of Meng Hao. It slowly descended onto his head.

A look of shock covered Meng Hao's face. He reached up, grabbed it, and threw it away as far as possible.

The instant it was thrown away, it hopped back toward Meng Hao, opened its mouth and then bit his arm.

“If I can't escape,” it wailed, “then neither can you, you immoral fellow...”

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful woman approached in pursuit, and when they saw what was happening, their eyes went wide with intense rage.

“Doth thou dare!” raged the violet-robed Patriarch. His roar reached to the Heavens, and the entire land began to quake. His speed was incredible, and within moments, was in front of Meng Hao, a look of indescribable rage on his face. His palm descended toward Meng Hao.

Boom!

As the boom echoed out, a twinkling shield appeared around Meng Hao. It wasn't being emitted by Meng Hao, but rather the meat jelly. Furthermore, as Meng Hao retreated, it wasn't under his own power, but rather because the meat jelly was pulling him along by the arm.

It had his arm firmly gripped in its mouth, which caused blood to seep out. Its body trembled, and was no longer translucent. Now it looked somewhat muddy.

"So disgusting, so disgusting, so disgusting.... gross, gross, gross...." it cried. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful woman stood by, their expressions mixtures of rage and disbelief.

"Bonding... it... it's bonding a master?"

"I've bonded a master," cried the meat jelly, hopping up onto Meng Hao's head and transforming into the shape of a hat. "I bond this guy as my master. Useless! It's useless to capture me now. You immoral people, I've already bonded a master! I have no more powers of flight and no more shield. I'm crippled, I'm going to die! You bunch of foolish fools, you're too evil! I, I, I, I...." It suddenly turned its shocked attention to Meng Hao. "Hey, why haven't you teleported away yet?"

Chapter 167: You Know, That's Immoral...

"Are you an idiot? Ohh, I like idiots. Idiots are good. Idiots are great. Eee?"

How come you haven't teleported away yet? Wait, are you actually an idiot? Why did that bird pick an idiot?" The meat jelly continued to chatter without stopping.

Patriarch Violet Sieve raised his head up to the sky and howled. He shot closer, lifting his hand. All the light in the area seemed to grow dim, and ripples spread out everywhere, which then began to collapse in toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's face went pale. With a bitter smile, he looked at the glittering shield in front of him that was protecting him from Patriarch Violet Sieve. It was rapidly collapsing. Up ahead, the faces within the black aura emitted by the cage roared with rage. There was no time for Meng Hao to think. He pinched the good luck charm, and a roar sounded out. Pain filled his body. To everyone watching, it looked as if the moment before the protective shield broke, a black hole appeared next to Meng Hao. It swallowed him up, along with the meat jelly.

Meng Hao disappeared, along with echo of the meat jelly's voice:

“Although it actually makes me like you more, are you really an idiot? No way. There's really no way. That bird is the root of all immorality, and yet the person he selected turns out to be an idiot... idiot... idiot....”

The voice echoed out into silence. It was the only sound to be heard. Patriarch Violet Sieve stood there, his face unsightly, rage surging from his eyes. The chain fell to the ground in front of him. The meat jelly had bonded Meng Hao as its master, and had cast off the chain.

“Bonded....” panted the Patriarch. “It actually bonded a master. According the ancient records, it can't bond a master! It has never bonded a master!” He lifted his head up and roared.

The beautiful, middle-aged woman took a deep breath. After a moment, her eyes glittered. The cage disintegrated and the chain broke up into countless pieces and drifted away. The figures within the black aura began to fade, and the aura itself dissipated. As it did, Patriarch Violet Sieve's heart trembled.

“A good luck charm from the Milky Way Luck Sect.... So, that person was able to leave because of that object. I will find him. I will pay any cost necessary to find him. But his Sect can't find out. Ultimate Vexation has bonded a master. That's excellent. A new variable. Perhaps Longevity Qi cannot be produced, but Longevity Pills can!!”

Meanwhile, in the Southern Domain.

Near the sphere of influence of the Blood Demon Sect was a lake. The lake was as smooth as a mirror, and emitted spiritual energy, causing the entire area to be covered with mist throughout the year. It had a very otherworldly look.

But, that was only from the perspective of mortals. Although the spiritual energy in the area wasn't bad, it was far from being close to what is was within the five great Sects. Even some smaller Sects had greater accumulations of spiritual energy.

Although this area was within the sphere of influence of the Blood Demon Sect, it was on the very edge, on the area bordering the Solitary Sword Sect's territory. Occasionally, Cultivators from the Blood Demon Sect would fly by this area. In actuality, it was a relatively dangerous place.

That was because the Blood Demon Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect had a blood feud, which was common knowledge amongst Southern Domain Cultivators. Although no major conflicts had broken out, small fights would occasionally occur.

Many areas surrounding the lake were actually battlefields for the Solitary Sword Sect and the Blood Demon Sect.

Next to the lake was a mountain village, which was inhabited by a Clan by the name of Xiao. The most powerful member of the Clan was of the mid Foundation Establishment stage. Seven or eight Clan members were at the Qi Condensation stage, and the rest didn't have any latent talent whatsoever. Years ago, the Clan Lord had been a disciple of the Blood Demon Sect. However, he was growing old, and had been injured. His Cultivation base could make no further progress, and his longevity was running out.

In most cases, disciples like this are asked to leave the Blood Demon Sect and found Clans in the surrounding areas. Their heirs will then have the chance to enter the Blood Demon Sect.

Generally speaking, even if the Solitary Sword Sect came into the region, they would ignore such people. As a result, the Xiao Clan's territory had been relatively peaceful in recent years.

However, that peace was mostly because no large Sect had made any attempt to bully them; often there would be friction with surrounding Cultivator Clans.

This was especially true because of the position they occupied next to the Spirit lake. Many surrounding Cultivator Clans coveted the lake, and glared at it like a tiger eyeing its prey. Were it not for the Cultivation base of the Xiao Clan Lord, their clan would definitely have been carved up like a melon.

Unfortunately, Xiao Clan Lord Xiao Chang'en's longevity was reaching its end, and his body was beginning to deteriorate. A crisis was forming. Today, members of the Xu Clan had arrived with ill intentions. They strolled through the Xiao Clan, cold smiles covering their faces.

"Fellow Daoist Chang'en," said the Xu Clan Lord Xu Luodi with a false smile and a sinister voice, "you should carefully consider my proposal. If we form a marriage alliance, then we can share this lake. That will ensure that the names of Xu and Xiao will exist forever. The day when our Clans can re-enter the Blood Demon Sect will be just around the corner." Behind him trailed ten or more Clan members with Cultivation bases at the Qi Condensation stage. The most conspicuous among them was at the eighth level of Qi Condensation. He was currently casting smiles toward one of the members of the Xiao Clan, was a tall, slim young woman with a scowl on her face.

The girl wore a long green robe. Wind from the lake lifted her silky hair. She had beautiful features and skin like jade. Her intelligent eyes were like those of a red phoenix, tilted upward gently. She was truly a rare beauty.

Xiao Chang'en stood next to her, looking somewhat sickly. The flame of his life force was growing dim. Behind him were the seven or eight Qi Condensation Clan members. He glanced at the people from the Xu Clan, and opened his mouth to speak, but then trembled and began to cough. The young woman reached out to support him, a worried look on her face.

Xiao Chang'en took a deep breath and then said, "Xu Luodi, you can have the lake, but as for a marriage alliance, that's impossible." He patted the hand of the woman who stood next to him, and then glanced at the people from the Xu Clan. He was clearly weak, but his look could chop nails and slice iron.

"The Xu Clan wants this lake," said Xu Luodi. "As for the Xiao Clan's talisman expert girl, we want her too. If you agree, excellent. But if you disagree...." A smile covered his face, and yet his eyes glowed with killing intent. He took a step forward.

As his foot descended, a wave of mid Foundation Establishment pressure emanated out, filling the area. The faces of the Xiao Clan Qi Condensation Cultivators went pale and filled with nervousness and uncertainty. Ripples spread out across the surface of the lake.

At this exact same time, however, the sky above, which had previously been filled with blazing sunlight, suddenly seemed to grow dark.

It went back to normal in an instant. It happened so fast that if you blinked, you might not even notice.

However, the faces of both the Xu and Xiao Clan flashed, and they all gasped. A look of disbelief appeared on Xu Luodi's face, and as for Xiao Chang'en his heart was currently filled with the flames of fury, and yet all he could do was gape in astonishment. All of the Clan members present were currently staring toward the lake.

A gigantic black hole had appeared above the lake, sending the lake waters roiling. A person appeared from within the black hole, emerging along with massive amounts of black aura. He coughed up a mouthful of blood. A noisy voice could suddenly be heard.

“I’m not finished. Are you really an idiot... idiot... idiot?”

Face pale, Meng Hao emerged and glanced around. His gaze landed upon the Cultivators from the Xu and Xiao Clans. As the black hole disappeared behind him, Xiao Chang’en stopped panting and collected himself. A strange light gleamed in his eye. The woman next to him was about to open her mouth, but Xiao Chang’en lightly covered it with his hand.

He did this because he was the owner of the lake. Xu Luodi wasn’t the only person who had come here recently with ill intentions and a desire to take a superior position. The current situation caused Xiao Chang’en’s heart to be filled with anxiety. His eyes immediately began to shine with a stern aura. A cold smile appeared on his face.

At first, he had been nervous, but after checking Meng Hao’s Cultivation base, he let out a light sigh. He was still a bit suspicious, though, considering the strange nature of Meng Hao’s arrival.

“Fellow Daoist, who are you, and why have you intruded upon this Spirit lake land?” These words were uttered not by Xiao Chang’en, but by Xu Luodi. From what he could see, Meng Hao was at early Foundation Establishment. Considering how tenuous the situation the moment, he couldn’t be certain that this person wasn’t here to assist Xiao Chang’en.

As he spoke, the seven or eight members of the younger generation of his clan started to get nervous and stare at Meng Hao.

“Senior, some problems occurred with my teleportation and I inadvertently appeared here.” Meng Hao’s body flickered, and he landed on the shore of the lake. When he did, Xiao Chang’en pulled the woman back with him a few steps, away from Xu Luodi. His fellow Clansmen followed suit. He said nothing, but an enthusiastic look had suddenly appeared in his eyes.

When Xu Luodi saw this, he frowned. As Meng Hao stepped foot onto the shore, Xu Luodi suddenly strode forward, the power of his mid Foundation Establishment Cultivation base flaring into power. A hypocritical smile filled his face as the pressure radiated out.

The hat on Meng Hao’s head suddenly began speaking to him.

“You know, that’s wrong. That’s very immoral. You shouldn’t tell lies. You obviously came here because you were fleeing for your life. You did have a reason to come here. You came here on purpose!”

Meng Hao's face grew dark and Xu Luodi stared in shock. Xiao Chang'en's eyes narrowed, although his expression went back to normal in an instant. The woman next to him looked in wide-eyed astonishment at the hat on Meng Hao's head.

Meng Hao frowned, then took the hat off his head, crumpled it into a ball, and threw it away as hard as he could.

"Fellow Daoist," he said, ignoring the hat, "where am I? What is the nearest Sect?" He glanced at Xu Luodi's rippling Cultivation base and vigilant expression, and then looked at Xiao Chang'en.

"Fellow Daoist there's no need to ask when you already know the answer. Why did you...." Xiao Chang'en was starting to get a strange feeling about the situation. But before he could finish speaking, he suddenly noticed that the hat which had just been crumpled and thrown away, suddenly restored its shape, and was back on Meng Hao's head.

Chapter 168: The Xiao Clan Gifts the Lake

"You know, that's wrong. That's immoral. You can't just throw things onto the ground. What if you hit a little kid? That would be a sin. Even if you didn't hit a little kid, you might hit one of the fish in the lake, or maybe some shrimp. That would also be wrong. Listen. You should carefully take me off. You should...." The hat continued to talk non-stop with its preaching.

Meng Hao frowned, and Xu Luodi stared in amazement. His surrounding Clansmen looked at Meng Hao's hat in disbelief. After a moment, Xu Luodi's face grew grim. He was getting the feeling that this early Foundation Establishment Cultivator was doing this on purpose.

"Enough!" said Xu Luodi. "This isn't a place where you can just come and go as you please. If you won't tell the truth, then I'll just grab you and force the truth out of you." He couldn't figure out whether or not this guy was here to help the Xiao Clan or not, but at the moment, Meng Hao was being very annoying. More importantly, Meng Hao's Cultivation base was only at the early Foundation Establishment stage. He would be able to determine his purpose in coming here after capturing him.

Before he even finished speaking, Xu Luodi walked forward. He lifted his right hand, and a dark red glow appeared, which coalesced into a red whip. The whip emitted cracking sounds as it screamed through the air and flicked back and forth. At the very end of the whip, a ferocious, fork-tongued snake head appeared. It shot directly toward Meng Hao.

As Xu Luodi made his move, the members of the Xu Clan behind him all looked incredibly excited. Whenever the Clan Lord attacked, he achieved victory; that was what they had seen in their experience. They couldn't wait to see their Clan Lord mop the floor with an early Foundation Establishment Cultivator.

Meng Hao gave Xu Luodi a cool look. During his time protecting Xu Qing in the Black Sieve Sect's Blessed Land, he had encountered many such Cultivators. He lifted his hand, which was holding a dark reddish fruit. He threw it toward the ground.

As soon as the fruit hit the ground, it burrowed down. Instantly, the ground began to shake. Even as the dark red whip neared Meng Hao, a boom filled the air. The ground in front of Meng Hao erupted as a mass of dark red vines shot out. They rose a dozen or more meters into the air, emanating rippling power that matched that of the mid Foundation Establishment stage. The instant they appeared, they shot toward the whip.

An explosion resonated out. The whip couldn't withstand even one blow, and it collapsed into pieces. The ferocious vines opened their wide mouths and shot toward Xu Luodi.

His face fell, and the Clan members behind him looked on in disbelief, even more astonished than him. He cried out in alarm as he saw the more than ten vines approaching. His eyes narrowed, and he suddenly pressed down on the pit of his stomach. He spat up a large mouthful of blood, which then transformed into a mist. The mist coalesced into a blood-colored head, which then slammed into the vines.

An explosion echoed out, and the blood drained from Xu Luodi's face. He staggered back several paces into his pale-faced Clansmen, who all coughed up mouthfuls of blood.

"A Shaman Cultivator!" gasped Xu Luodi, retreating backward again.

He wasn't the only one to have such a reaction. Xiao Chang'en's eyes suddenly went wide. The faces of the surrounded Xiao Clan members flickered. The young woman next to Xiao Chang'en began to breathe rapidly.

"Even if you're a Shaman Cultivator, your Spirit minion is only at the mid Foundation Establishment stage..." His eyes filled with killing intent. He was deeply aware that when dealing with Shaman Cultivators, the most important thing was their Spirit minion. Such Cultivators had weak bodies, and they feared decapitation. However, before he was able to complete his sentence, he stopped speaking, as if something had clamped down on his jaw.

Up ahead of him, more earth showered up as another vine appeared. This vine was violet-colored, and twice as thick as the other vines. The instant it appeared, it emanated the power of the late Foundation Establishment stage.

The vine wasn't originally like this; however, because Meng Hao had branded it with his blood, it had mutated, and now had a trunk which had the strength of late Foundation Establishment.

"Screw off!" said Meng Hao coolly. His expression didn't change, and in fact, he wasn't worried inwardly either. He had just escaped from the hands of Nascent Soul Cultivators in the Blessed land, so as far as he was concerned, even late Foundation Establishment stage Cultivators were too trivial to mention.

Hearing his words, Xiao Chang'en's face flickered, and he felt anxiety. He had been about to speak, but seeing Meng Hao's smirk made him temporarily speechless.

Xu Luodi's expression flickered, and then he spun around. With the flick of a sleeve, he shot off into the distance with his Clansmen. His eyes were filled with venomous hatred. The object of his resentment, however, was not really Meng Hao, but the Xiao Clan. He was now convinced that Meng Hao had been called by the Xiao Clan to provide assistance.

Meng Hao watched with the same expression as ever as Xu Luodi left. He didn't call back the vines, either. He looked at Xiao Chang'en with the same smirk as before.

"Fellow Daoist," said Xiao Chang'en, "many thanks for your assistance. I, Xiao, was also pushed into a corner. Please accept my apology for causing you any trouble...." He clasped hands and bowed deeply to Meng Hao.

Honest people don't need to speak with hidden words. Xiao Chang'en spoke very directly, causing a smile to break out on Meng Hao's face. Even though he wasn't sure of all the details of the situation he had stepped into, he had picked up on some clues, especially the excitement that had appeared earlier on Xiao Chang'en's face. Meng Hao could see clearly that he had been used to put some pressure on the Xu Clan.

That was why he hadn't killed anyone, but rather let Xu Luodi escape. This caused Xiao Chang'en to hesitate. Xu Luodi had left in a rage, angry not at Meng Hao, but at the Xiao Clan.

Even though he was being used, he helped. He fixed the problem for the moment, but sooner or later, the Xu Clan would return. If Meng Hao was gone at that time, then Xiao Chang'en would have to pay the price. That price wouldn't merely be a daughter and a lake.

Xiao Chang'en laughed bitterly, and then bowed again to Meng Hao. Next to him, the young woman was silent, then seemed to come to a realization. She joined Xiao Chang'en in bowing toward Meng Hao.

"Many thanks, benefactor," she said, her voice crisp and melodious.

At the moment, everything was quiet, except for the voice of the hat on Meng Hao's head. "... and then you should lightly pick me up. You mustn't trample me underfoot." Actually, the voice hadn't stopped speaking this entire time. The words poured out in a steady flow.

Meng Hao frowned.

"Fellow Daoist, please forgive me," said Xiao Chang'en. "I don't care if the Xu Clan covets my Spirit lake, or even if they bully me because of my declining longevity. But they want to swallow up my entire Clan. Ai..." A bitter look appeared on his face. Suddenly he began to cough violently. The young woman stepped forward, her face covered with anxiety.

Meng Hao looked at Xiao Chang'en, and the thick death aura which emanated from him.

"What is this place?" he asked coolly.

"Sir," said the young woman, "we are on the border between the Blood Demon Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect." Her voice was light, but her expression filled with nervousness as she looked at Meng Hao.

Having heard this, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding and retrieved a jade slip. He examined it for a moment, confirming his position with a frown. Xiao Chang'en continued to eye him and the ferocious vines that surrounded him. He gritted his teeth.

"Fellow Daoist," he said, "I would like to give you this Spirit lake as a gift!" All of the Xiao Clan members, except for the young woman, stared in shock.

Meng Hao lifted his head and looked at Xiao Chang'en. He didn't express any opinion whatsoever, nor did he speak.

"I myself used to be a disciple of the Blood Demon Sect," said Xiao Chang'en. "But I was injured, barely escaping with my life. My Cultivation base is incapable of advancement, and my longevity cannot be increased. I'm afraid I only have a few years of life left.

"This Spirit lake was passed down to me from a member of the senior generation before he died. It's become the only way to grow the Xiao Clan. However, more and more people have been casting eyes upon it lately. I'm not sure how to keep it within the Clan. The Spiritual energy in the lake might not seem very abundant, but it's actually very beneficial for Spirit minions. Doing breathing exercises in this area is very good for them.

"Fellow Daoist, please accept the lake." His words were sincere. Although his heart was filled with bitterness, he couldn't think of any other option than this. His relationship with the Blood Demon Sect had been severed, and he couldn't participate in any of the struggles and fighting that went on amongst the Clans founded by former Blood Demon Sect disciples.

His only option was this early Foundation Establishment Cultivator in front of him, who happened to have a Spirit minion at the late Foundation Establishment stage.

"Furthermore," continued Xiao Chang'en, "there has been friction lately between the Blood Demon Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect. Occasionally great battles erupt, but this place isn't a battlefield, and with the exception of occasional disturbances from other local Clans, no one pays much attention to it..." He chose his words carefully as he tried to persuade Meng Hao to stay. Meng Hao smiled, and his eyes glittered.

Although it wasn't really what he had wanted, he ended up with the object the Black Sieve Sect had been seeking in the Blessed Land. He had no doubt aroused the ire of the Sect, and though they wouldn't announce it publicly, they would no doubt be searching for him.

"I wonder if Elder Sister Xu will be implicated..." he thought to himself. "I don't think that's very likely." Right now, his highest priority was to improve his Cultivation base. He needed to form his fourth Dao Pillar. That, coupled with his Perfect Foundation, would enable him to stand toe-to-toe with Dao Children from the five Sects and three Clans.

At that time, he would be above any Chosen, and would actually be in the top ten most powerful people in the Foundation Establishment stage in the Southern Domain. After he formed six Dao Pillars, he was confident that he could destroy any of the so-called Dao Children.

“Unfortunately, now that I have a Perfect Foundation, I have no way to absorb the spiritual power of heaven and earth. Even if I could find a way to force the absorption process, it would still be just too difficult.... The only thing I can do is use medicinal pills. But that won’t work for long.” Meng Hao sighed inwardly. A Perfect Foundation was strong, but had its setbacks. That having been said, if he had to make his choice again, he would still chose the Perfect Foundation.

“What if I can reach late Foundation Establishment...” he thought, his eyes shining with a barely detectable glow. He looked at Xiao Chang’en for a long moment, and then nodded.

“We can talk about the lake later,” said Meng Hao coolly. “I’ll stay here for a few days in secluded meditation. Please don’t disturb me. Furthermore, please bring me all of the Spirit Stones you have in your clan.

Xiao Chang’en spirits seemed to lift at first, and then a bitter smile covered his face. He gritted his teeth and nodded in agreement.

Chapter 169: Heavens, You Really Don’t Know?

Meanwhile, outside the Xiao Clan mountain village, Xu Luodi flew along grim faced, surrounded by his fellow Clan Members. He glanced back, his eyes filled with venomous anger.

“Xiao Chang’en, if you can recruit help from outside, then so can I! Trifling Shaman Cultivator. If you take his powerful Spirit minion out of the equation then I could slaughter him easily. With those type of Cultivators, the only main thing to worry about is their Spirit minion. I’ll behead him in an instant!” He let out a cold snort, and then eyed his fellow Clansmen. “You head back without me. This matter isn’t finished!”

The Xu Clansmen dispersed. Xu Luodi flicked his sleeve, transforming into a colorful beam that shot off into the distance.

“The only thing I can do is to go ask help from Mr. Sang Luo. He’s at the late Foundation Establishment stage, with seven Dao Pillars. He can easily take care of the Shaman Cultivator. The only problem is that he has a very eccentric personality, and might not agree to help.... But considering the price paid for that matter a few years ago, he’ll surely agree. It will all be worth it if I can get that Spirit lake!” His mind made up, Xu Luodi sped up.

He flew for about a day before arriving at the foot of a lonely mountain. A few vultures circled about overhead. Up ahead was a pile of wood about six meters tall. On top was a corpse.

The corpse had clearly been rotting there for several months. The sight of it was quite horrifying. A few vultures were perched on top of the wood pile, picking at it. They glanced at Xu Luodi, their eyes shining mysteriously. They clearly weren't afraid of the living.

"Xu Luodi requests an audience with Mr. Sang Luo," he said, eying the corpse, his heart thumping. The corpse was clearly completely lifeless. However, he recognized the remains as belonging to a local Clan Lord whose Cultivation base had been at the late Foundation Establishment stage.

His words rang out into the lonely mountain. After some time passed, a raspy voice drifted out.

"This fellow looked down on me a few months ago, so I grabbed him and brought him here. I tied him up as punishment, but never imagined he would be so weak. He died after only two months. You, what matter brought you here today!?"

Xu Luodi took a long breath as he gave a deep bow toward the lonely mountain.

"Senior, I've encountered some trouble. I would like to ask for Mr. Sang Luo's assistance to kill someone." He spoke directly, knowing that Mr. Sang Luo didn't like long-winded explanations.

"Kill someone.... Wahahahahaha!" A peal of ear-piercing laughter rang out. "Because of the friendship we developed that year, I can help you. But there are some requirements. A lot of requirements, actually."

"I understand," said Xu Luodi, lifting up a bag of holding. He tossed it out, and before it could hit the ground, it spun off into the distance, snatched up by some invisible force.

"Wait for me a few days," said the raspy voice. "After I finish refining this guy's bones, then I'll go with you." Suddenly, the vultures picked up the corpse and flew off with it into the lonely mountain.

Xu Luodi took another deep breath, his eyes glowing brightly.

"Xiao Chang'en, let's see how you fight back this time!" His eyes filled with killing intent, Xu Luodi sat down cross-legged to meditate.

Meanwhile, back in the Xiao Clan mountain village, Meng Hao also sat cross-legged, in a small room near the lake. A soft glow surrounded him that allowed him to see out of the room, but prevented anyone on the outside from seeing inside.

The glow was being cast by nine paper talismans. The talismans had been painted by the young Xiao Clan woman and then personally delivered to Meng Hao. After setting up the talismans, she had departed with a respectful bow.

After she left, Meng Hao spat out the lightning mist, which spread out to cover the area. Finally, he could open his bag of holding without anxiety. He pulled out the Sieve Earth Pill he'd acquired from the Black Sieve Sect, and examined it closely.

As he looked over the pill, the meat jelly hat on his head began to talk. "Hey, where did I leave off just now? Right, let's continue the matter from yesterday. You can't do that. It's immoral! You can't just throw me down onto the ground. That's too excessive!"

Meng Hao didn't respond. The meat jelly hadn't stopped talking at all. It seemed it could speak on a single subject for an entire day. It would be one thing if it didn't repeat itself, but it did, and never seemed to get bored, either.

"What would happen if you hit a little kid....?"

"It's also bad for the grass and plants...."

"The little fish and other creatures are all innocent...."

It felt like a buzz in Meng Hao's ears. He tried to ignore it, but the meat jelly hat's voice seemed to be growing louder. Eventually, it was shouting, its voice so loud that it drifted past the lightning mist shield to the outside. When they heard the voice, the Xiao Clan members all exchanged glances.

"SHUT UP!!" Grinding his teeth, Meng Hao grabbed the hat and threw it onto the ground.

"Eee? I wasn't finished. Where did I leave off? Oh well, let me change topics. You can't do that. It's immoral...." Meng Hao lifted his head up toward the sky, his expression more and more unsightly. After a moment, he stood up and began to trample on the hat.

The old man's pedantic face suddenly appeared. Even though Meng Hao was fiercely trampling it, it didn't let out any miserable cries. Instead, it seemed to speak even more earnestly. "You can't do that, it's too cruel! It's too immoral!"

"What do you want?" said Meng Hao, taking a few steps back and clenching his jaw. "You escaped, why are you following me? Go away. Go!"

"Eee? I've bonded you as my master. Bonding a master means bonding for life. I would never, ever be so immoral as to leave. I would never do something so lacking in principle, so lacking in..." Meng Hao slowly lifted his head up and stared blankly into the air. Enough time passed for two incense sticks to burn, and he finally looked back at the hat.

"...so lacking in character. I just told you seven hundred and forty-five things that I lack. Do you see how civilized I am? How sincere? In a word, I would never leave you."

Meng Hao didn't say anything. He suddenly lifted his hand and summoned a Flame Dragon, which slammed into the hat. This time, a miserable cry rang out, only to be quickly replaced by endless chatter. The hat was undamaged. As Meng Hao stared at it, veins popped out on his forehead. He had always thought of himself as good-tempered, but as of now his temper was exploding. He jumped up and down a few more times on the hat, trampling it.

But... a few moments later he stopped. Continuing to gush words, the hat returned to Meng Hao's head. This time, however, it changed colors. Now it was green, and its appearance was a bit more exaggerated than before

Meng Hao's face turned dark.

"Look, child, don't struggle. I'm a good person. I'm trying to help you. You're on the path of wickedness, but I'm willing to use my own power to help you. Child, perhaps you are unaware of how many young people take a wrong step in life, and then regret it for an eternity. I'll help you cast off the bitterness. I'll help you free yourself from that damned bird. I failed in my last life, and the life before that, and the life before that, too. That damned, despicable bird is the only bird I've never converted!" The hat seemed to be grinding its teeth now. "In this life, I will convert it!"

"Who is this bird you keep talking about?!" said Meng Hao, his face grim. A strange feeling had risen up inside of him. This hat couldn't be killed and couldn't be thrown away. It really was extremely annoying.

“You don’t know?” asked the hat, suddenly flying off of Meng Hao’s head. It’s shape suddenly rippled back into the meat jelly. The archaic face appeared, and it looked disbelieving as it gazed at Meng Hao. “Heavens, you really don’t know who that damned, mass-murdering, shameless....” The meat jelly began to quiver as it let off streams of curses. Meng Hao let out a long sigh and looked up into the air. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, he finally looked back at the meat jelly.

The meat jelly was finally concluding its description: “...should be thrown into a cesspool, damned bird? You really don’t know who it is?”

Meng Hao glared at the meat jelly for a long moment before slowly saying, “I don’t know.”

“You really don’t know?” asked the meat jelly, shocked. “You really, really don’t now? Impossible! You really, really, really don’t know?”

“I. Don’t. Know!” Meng Hao clenched his teeth. It was really frustrating trying to communicate with this meat jelly.

“Heavens! You have its aura on your body, but you don’t know. How is this possible? How can you not know? Heavens, heavens. You really, really, really don’t know?” Its eyes widened and filled with a look of complete disbelief.

Meng Hao didn’t know what to say. He closed his eyes and sat down to meditate. With a bang, the meat jelly transformed back into a bright green hat and flew back onto Meng Hao’s head.

Considering that Meng Hao was wearing scholars’ robes, the hat was extremely conspicuous. Anyone who caught sight of it would surely do a double take.

Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn.

“But, how can you not know?”

Two incense sticks.

“... Inconceivable! You actually don't know...”

Two hours.

“Why aren't you saying anything? Oh, I understand. You're ashamed. Look, it's okay. I'm a good person. I will do everything I can to bring you back from the path of wickedness. I...”

Meng Hao's face grew more and more unsightly. He really had reached his breaking point. His temper exploded. He roared, grabbing the hat and throwing it outside. He slapped his bag of holding, and nearly a hundred flying swords appeared and shot toward the hat. Meng Hao's hand flickered with incantations, and the Flame Dragon and Wind Blade appeared.

A boom rattled out in all directions, striking fear into the hearts of all the Xiao clan members. Xiao Chang'en's eyes went wide. Even though he couldn't see what was happening, the explosion itself was astonishing.

The young woman looked dazed, and then a strange expression appeared on her face.

Meng Hao ground his teeth, stalking forward, slashing his finger and covering it with blood. In a twinkling, the Blood Finger had appeared. His other hand flashed with the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex.

Massive explosions filled heaven and earth. A moment later, the ripples died down. Meng Hao's entire body exuded bitterness as he stared at the meat jelly, which skipping and hopping about energetically.

“It's so strange. You really don't know. How is it possible? You really don't know!”

Chapter 170: Lonely Sang Luo

Meng Hao was filled with regret. He should never have asked that question. He'd had no clue the meat jelly would talk on and on at such length. He took a deep breath, but before he could speak, the meat jelly's expression brightened.

“Oh, I know. You haven't reached Core Formation, so it can't come out. Hahaha! It can't come out...”

Meng Hao lowered his head, filled with helplessness. He looked at the meat jelly with a bitter smile.

He ground his teeth for a long moment before saying, "If you don't shut up, I'm going to take you back to the Black Sieve Sect!" He really just wanted to give voice to the frustration caused by the constant droning in his ears.

"That's okay. In any case, I've bonded a master, so it would be useless. Refining me would require refining you. Eee?" A dumbfounded look filled the meat jelly's face. It thought for a moment. "That's a good idea! I wonder what it would feel like if we got refined together. Let me think." A look of anticipation covered its face, causing Meng Hao too seem even more hopeless.

"How exactly can I get you to leave?" he said with a bitter laugh. His voice was softer this time.

Hearing this, the meat jelly instantly looked much more serious than before. Its voice solemn, it began to speak. Meng Hao ignored it, looking up into the air for the time it takes an incense stick to burn.

"... in short, I will definitely never leave you! I need to convert that bird. Until I convert it, I'll never leave!"

Meng Hao had always thought of himself as very focused. Once he set his mind to something, he couldn't be distracted. But now, he realized, that was before he had met the meat jelly.

Be it he himself, or some other consummate expert, anyone who met this garrulous, long-winded thing would surely be driven crazy... Meng Hao took a deep breath. He now had a much better understanding of the thing's personality. It must not be given a conversation topic! He lowered his head, and after about an hour had reached a state in which he could somewhat ignore the chattering in his ear. Despite the meat jelly's constant talking, Meng Hao took out the Sieve Earth Pill and began to examine it.

An earnest expression filled his face, but it was very hard to ignore the endless rambling. That was especially true when the meat jelly flew off of his head and landed in front of him. It seemed that it felt humiliated to be ignored.

"You can't do that. It's immoral!!" it cried, launching into another tirade.

Soon, night approached, and Meng Hao's face was covered with exhaustion. Buzzing filled his ears, and his eyes were bloodshot as he completely ignored the meat jelly. It was with despair that he had discovered that even if it wasn't given a conversation topic, the meat jelly would still continue to talk.

Until dawn. Until the next night. The moon hung brightly in the sky.

And then, finally, it seemed as the meat jelly had run out of things to talk about it. Meng Hao let out a sigh, and as he did, the meat jelly flew out to the lake shore and... began to talk to the fish within the lake....

Meng Hao let out another sigh of relief. He pulled out the copper mirror and the Spirit Stones given to him by the Xiao clan. He placed the Sieve Earth Pill onto the mirror and duplicated a single one. He thought for a moment, and then produced a jade slip. He branded it with Spiritual Sense, then flicked it out the window. Moments later, the young Xiao Clan woman approached nervously, leading a Spirit monkey with her.

The monkey screeched as it approached. The young woman looked off toward the lake shore for a moment, at the meat jelly hat, which was currently shouting out toward the lake.

"Xiao Caifeng greets the elder generation," she said, pulling her gaze from the meat jelly back to Meng Hao and the lightning mist which surrounded him. She bowed in greeting, and then proffered the leash which bound the Spirit monkey. Meng Hao's eyes opened. Without a word, he sent an Earth Sieve Pill flying toward the monkey. The monkey consumed it instantly.

It let out a few screeches, and its eyes rolled about. Meng Hao's eyes glittered as he observed, probing the monkey with his Spiritual Sense. Suddenly, the moonlight in the sky seemed to form threads which the monkey began to absorb. A contented look slowly filled the monkey's eyes.

About four hours passed in which Meng Hao observed the monkey, and Xiao Caifeng stood patiently off to the side.

Finally, Meng Hao nodded.

"Very good," he said coolly. Xiao Caifeng let out a sigh of relief. Clasping hands and bowing to Meng Hao, she led the monkey away. It was obviously much more powerful than it had been before.

Meng Hao lowered his head thoughtfully. Using the Spirit Stones provided by the Xiao Clan, he began to duplicate the pill. The pill's full name was Moon Sieve Mother Earth Pill, and could only be consumed at night. It used the moonlight as nourishment, and provided excellent results.

The cost to duplicate the pill was considerable, and the Xiao Clan was by no means a great Clan. They had not been able to provide many Spirit Stones, and soon, Meng Hao had already used half of them. The result was six duplicated Sieve Earth Pills.

"I wasted one pill, but caution required that." Dawn broke, and Meng Hao looked down at the six Sieve Earth Pills. He closed his eyes in thought, wondering how many of these pills it would take to develop his fourth Dao Pillar. Now that he had completed the circle of three Dao Pillars, it shouldn't be long before his fourth Perfect Dao Pillar started to become visible.

Time passed by slowly, and soon it was afternoon. The meat jelly was still at the lake shore, chatting with the lake waters. With his Spiritual Sense, Meng Hao was able to determine that all the fish had retreated to the bottom of the lake to hide. There was only one left, which was slamming its head against the shore, seemingly unable to take any more torment.

Fear lingering in his heart, Meng Hao collected up the remaining Spirit Stones. He was very much afraid of attracting the attention of the meat jelly and its excited ramblings. The last thing he needed was for it to come up with a new topic to talk to him about.

He retracted his Spiritual Sense, and then suddenly, his expression flickered. He looked past the lightning mist at the world outside.

At this moment, two colorful beams of light appeared in the sky above the Xiao Clan mountain village, then shot down screaming toward the village. In the lead was a Cultivator wearing a black robe. He was very short, a midget in fact. His long robe covered his face and trailed behind him through the air. At first glance, you wouldn't notice that there was a midget inside; you would only see a black robe flying through the air.

Behind the midget was grim-faced Xu Luodi, whose eyes radiated killing intent. Of course, the midget was none other than Mr. Sang Luo, from whom Xu Luodi had requested help.

The two of them were moving incredibly fast, and within moments had landed in the Xiao Clan mountain village. The midget spoke with a cruel, piercing voice that rolled out like thunder,

covering the Xiao Clan. Xiao Caifeng's face went pale, and Xiao Chang'en's pupils constricted, and his eyes filled with fear.

Before anyone could emerge, a roaring boom filled the air, and the Xiao Clan shook as its protective shield was smashed to pieces. The Xiao Clan main gate, just outside of the lake, immediately crumbled into dust. A gale force wind swept across the entire area.

The Xiao Clan's manor houses shook, and some collapsed. The Xiao Clan members who couldn't practice Cultivation trembled when they heard the voice. Pale faced, Xiao Chang'en quickly led a group of people out. Xiao Chang'en's face filled with astonishment when he saw the collapsed main gate, and the midget striding forward, his black robe trailing behind him. Xiao Chang'en staggered backward.

"So, it's this savage... Could it be that doomsday has arrived for the Xiao Clan..." Because of the midget's presence, he wasn't able to summon even the least bit of fighting spirit.

Mr. Sang Luo was quite famous in the region. Although he didn't dare to rile the Blood Demon Sect, there was no one among the surrounding Cultivator Clans who dared to provoke him.

His Cultivation base was extremely high, at the late Foundation Establishment stage, in fact. It wouldn't be long before he could step into the Nascent Core stage. He was savage and cruel, and if even one word was spoken to him in the wrong way, he would attack with vicious cruelty. He really had earned a fearful reputation.

Based on that alone, he might not necessarily be in such a good position. After all, the Cultivator Clans in this area were all filled with people who had connections to the Blood Demon Sect.

However... this Sang Luo had once been a disciple of the current generation of the Blood Demon Sect. However, he had broken some Sect Rules, and was thus expelled. His Cultivation base had been left intact, and he had not been prevented from causing trouble outside. Xiao Chang'en had even heard that he had an older brother who wasn't a midget, and had extraordinary latent talent. Apparently, he was a Chosen of the Blood Demon Sect.

"I, Xiao Chang'en, extend greetings to Mr. Sang Luo," said Xiao Chang'en, his face pale white as he watched Mr. Sang Luo approach, Xu Luodi at his side, radiating murder. Xu Luodi had a pleased expression in his eyes, causing Xiao Chang'en to sigh inwardly. He didn't place much hope in Meng Hao now. Meng Hao's Spirit minion was powerful, but his Cultivation base was simply too weak.

Sang Luo let out a piercing snort as he approached the Xiao Clan with Xu Luodi. His eyes gazed about from within the robe.

“Xiao Chang’en,” said Xu Luodi, “Call out that Shaman Cultivator you invited!” He laughed coldly. “Are you scared to show your face, Shaman boy? Get the hell out here!” His voice thundered out, causing Xiao Chang’en to stand there bitterly, not daring to say even a word. Behind him, his Clansmen trembled. Only Xiao Caifeng stood there motionless, face pale but eyes filled with fury.

Sang Luo stood there, enjoying the looks of fear in the eyes of the Xiao Clan members. He also reveled in Xu Luodi’s words. He couldn’t help but sigh inwardly. To him, life was as desolate as snow. It was lonely at the top, and in his heart was the desire to find someone who could defeat him.

What he didn’t know was that as soon as Xu Luodi’s voice passed through the lightning mist, Meng Hao stood up.

Meng Hao also heard the meat jelly, and it seemed as if it was preparing to conclude its speech. In his estimation, it wouldn’t be long before it returned to pester him.

“I really need to find someone to help free me from this torment,” he thought. “I’m really in agony!” Gritting his teeth, he strode out.

The air around the lake rippled as a mist of thunder rolled out. Meng Hao looked somewhat bitter as he walked forward. Beneath him, the ground heaved as the vines shot up to sway back and forth and emit piercing shrieks.

Meng Hao’s eyes were bloodshot, thanks to the torment of the meat jelly. He looked at Xu Luodi, and then the midget. He decided to target the late Foundation Establishment stage, in the hopes that the battle might last a bit longer.

“Trifling early Foundation Establishment stage,” said Sang Luo coolly as he eyed Meng Hao approaching. “Xu Luodi, you’re equally as hopeless.” His eyes peered out of his robe, filled with pride and aloofness. Again, his heart filled with the powerful loneliness of snow.

“Mr. Sang Luo, senior, you really can’t blame me,” said Xu Luodi hurriedly. “Just help me get rid of the Spirit minion. With that out of the way, I can easily smash this guy to pieces.” He glared ruthlessly at Meng Hao.

What Xu Luodi didn’t know was that true cruelty would not come to bear upon Meng Hao, but rather Sang Luo, lonely as snow. Something would happen that Sang Luo would never forget for the rest of his life. It would give him nightmares for the rest of his days, and leave a shadow on his soul... and it would happen shortly.

Perhaps afterwards, he would no longer feel as lonely as snow....