

The Heavens 171

Chapter 171: Blood Demon Dao Child

Sang Luo gave an arrogant snort that was apparently a response to Xu Luodi. Xu Luodi seemed to glow with vitality as he gazed upon approaching Meng Hao. His eyes were thick with cruelty.

“Today, Xu Luodi will help you to understand that when you help someone you shouldn’t, you will incur my wrath!” he said, his voice filled with crazed fervor. “And I will also help you to understand what Shaman Cultivators fear the most!”

The various Xiao Clan members were all pale-faced. Xiao Change’en laughed a bitter laugh, well aware that he had no way to undo what had already been done. He took a deep breath, and strode forward, power from his Cultivation base suddenly exploding out. It was the power of the mid Foundation Establishment stage, but it seemed somewhat weak. He was reaching the end of his longevity, so his Qi passageways had long since begun to wither. With effort, he could display the power of the mid Foundation Establishment stage, but in doing so, would actually harm his life force.

“The matter today has to do with the Xiao Clan, not any outsider,” he said, his entire body seeming to grow taller. “This person wasn’t invited here by the Xiao Clan, he’s only passing through. If the disappearance of the Xiao Clan is the will of the Heavens, then take this Spirit lake! But if you intend to take any of my Clan members, then you must treat them well. Otherwise I’ll make you pay, even if I have to die in the process!” His words echoed out with great power, causing Xu Luodi’s brow to furrow.

As for Sang Luo the midget, he emitted a shrieking laugh.

Meng Hao looked over at Xiao Chang’en, and suddenly his feelings toward the man changed. He nodded, and then coolly said, “Fellow Daoist Xiao, didn’t you give this lake to me as a gift? In that case, it belongs to me. Does anyone here dare to attempt to take it away!?” The vines in front of him shot toward Sang Luo and Xu Luodi.

Sang Luo let out an ear-piercing laugh which was filled with contempt and disdain. He flipped his sleeve grandly, and from within a black sealing stone flew out. It expanded as it shot forward, emitting a strong pressure that caused all of the vines to stop in their tracks. Only the main trunk vine continued onward, howling.

Sang Luo's piercing laughter accompanied him as he took a step forward. He lifted his right arm to reveal a hand much smaller than an average person's. He waved it toward the approaching main trunk vine; a black wind sprang up and whistled toward the vine.

At the same time, Xu Luodi's laughter filled the air. His body flashed as he made a beeline toward Meng Hao, his eyes shining with fierce killing intent. The instant he took to motion, however, Xiao Chang'en suddenly leaped to obstruct his path. A look of disdain covering his face, Xu Luodi flicked his wide sleeve. A roaring sound filled the air, and Xiao Chang'en was pushed back.

"I'm not going to kill you for now," he laughed. "We'll be relatives by marriage soon, and still have wedding wine to drink." He shot toward Meng Hao. "And now I'll help you to understand that what Shaman Cultivators fear most is being beheaded!" He laughed arrogantly.

Meng Hao's face, on the other hand, was the same as ever. It hadn't changed even the slightest bit as he allowed Xu Luodi to approach.

When Xu Luodi was roughly nine meters away, Meng Hao's eyes suddenly shone with a cold light. He didn't retreat, but instead flickered, and suddenly appeared directly in the path of Xu Luodi. He lifted his hand, and a billowing Flame Sea appeared along with a roaring, three hundred meter long Flame Dragon.

When the Flame Dragon appeared, Xu Luodi's expression suddenly changed to one of complete disbelief.

"That... that..." It was almost as if he didn't dare to believe what he was seeing. But he felt the intense pressure exuded by the Flame Dragon, which far exceeded that of the late Foundation Establishment stage.

A sense of life-or-death danger filled his entire body, inundating his head with a booming drone. It was as if his body had been struck with countless lightning bolts. His face continued to be filled with disbelief.

"Late Foundation Establishment!!" His body began to tremble, and intense dread shone from his eyes. How could he ever have imagined that the young man of the early Foundation Establishment stage could possibly erupt with the power of late Foundation Establishment? As for his so-called beheading, the person he thought he could so easily defeat had suddenly transformed into a violent beast who could slaughter him hundreds of thousands of times over!

It wasn't just him who was shocked. Xiao Chang'en gasped and stared, dumbstruck. He was literally incapable of reacting to what he was seeing. His mind filled with buzzing. And then, his eyes filled with wild joy.

When the Flame Dragon appeared, the vines that had been suppressed by Sang Luo the midget suddenly shook and lifted up. Within the black robe, two eyes emanated shock.

All of this takes some time to describe, but actually happened in an instant. Even as Xu Luodi's voice could be heard, it was replaced by a blood-curdling scream which sounded out throughout the whole area. The three hundred meter long Flame Dragon slammed into him, instantly transforming his body into bits of ash which floated in the air. Only his scream remained behind, echoing through the air.

His bag of holding flew into Meng Hao's hand.

As the scene played out in front of everyone, Xiao Chang'en's expression grew excited. Next to him, Xiao Caifeng gazed at Meng Hao, her eyes filled with a strange glow.

There is no need to even mention the rest of the Xiao Clansmen, who stared at Meng Hao with excited inspiration.

Sang Luo's expression was unsightly. Having witnessed Xu Luodi's death, his heart now was now thumping. He was a cautious person by nature, so he immediately retreated. He was of the late Foundation Establishment stage, but he wasn't the type to risk himself. His body flashed as he attempted to flee. In his mind, his opponent would most likely have some apprehensions, and wouldn't pursue.

If his opponent didn't pursue, it would be evidence that he viewed himself as inferior. In that case, Sang Luo could make a sudden reverse attack to kill him. This was a tactic that he had frequently employed, and had practiced until the proverbial furnace flames burned blue. However, as soon as he began to fly off, Meng Hao gave off a cold harrumph and then leaped into the air, transforming into a prismatic beam that shot after Sang Luo.

Seeing this, Sang Luo's face immediately fell.

“The fact that he’s chasing me proves that he thinks he can kill me. This can’t be right!” His heart trembled as he raced forward. He waved his right hand, causing the black sealing stone to emit a buzzing sound as it shot toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao could fight with late Foundation Establishment Cultivators who had nine Dao Pillars, although he couldn’t do so lightly. Sang Luo, however, only had a mere seven Dao Pillars. Meng Hao had the luxury of being able to look down on him. His right hand flickered with an incantation gesture and the two wooden swords appeared. One shot toward the black seal, the other became a colorful beam that shot in pursuit of Sang Luo.

A boom filled the air as the black sealing stone was shattered into pieces. Sang Luo let out an angry howl. He eyed the approaching wooden sword, and his body trembled. He quickly snapped a jade slip between his fingers, and then made an incantation gesture with both hands, after which he waved the index of his right finger in the air in front of him.

As he did, everything around him seemed to grow dark, as if his finger were sucking in some strange power from around him. His body began to emanate an annoying, prickly aura that caused Meng Hao to frown.

The first time he had sensed a aura similar to this was back in the Black Sieve Sect. This aura, however, was much weaker, like a firefly compared to a full moon. Actually, now that he thought about it, he had experienced a similar reaction when he was in the cave in the mountain valley.

A booming sound once again filled the air as the wooden sword came screeching to a stop in mid-air. A rushing wind blew back the midget’s robes, revealing an ugly, scarred face and two strange eyes filled with fear. Beads of sweat dripped down his face.

“Fellow Daoist, let’s talk things through,” said Sang Luo nervously. He could tell that whereas he was using all the power he could muster, his opponent was acting casually.

The differences between masters are usually instantly obvious!

Meng Hao took a moment to sense the aura emanating off of the midget. His heart thumped. He had his speculations regarding this aura, and now that he had seen it once again, he lifted his hand and extended a finger.

“Demon Sealing, Eighth Hex!”

As his finger descended, everything grew dark. Sang Luo suddenly began to tremble, and his eyes shone with astonishment. He immediately sensed the Qi of heaven and earth changing. Suddenly, his Cultivation base was suppressed. A whizzing sound could be heard as the wooden sword in front of him shot forward; in the blink of an eye, it would plunge into his neck.

His eyes filled with despair. However, at this exact moment, Meng Hao flicked his sleeve. The wooden sword, instead of ripping his head off, spun down and then carried Sang Luo with it back toward Meng Hao. Meng Hao reached out and grabbed Sang Luo by the neck.

At this moment, Sang Luo's Cultivation base was restored and he could move his body again. His face was pale, though, his eyes filled with terror. He didn't dare to move even an inch. The hand which clamped down on his neck emanated a feeling of death that caused his heart to tremble. In fact, being this close to Meng Hao caused his entire person to shake.

The feeling caused by the aura that emanated from Meng Hao caused his heart to seize with terror.

His face was pale as he stammered, "You're... you're..."

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the world, there was a mountain range that was covered in black clouds year round. Within a valley in this mountain range were two young people. They sat upright, gazing at the Go board which lay between them, seemingly lost in thought.

One of the young people wore white clothing along with an indifferent expression. This youth's features were beautiful to the extreme, almost otherworldly. The fan in his hand slowly waved back and forth.

The other person wore a blue garment. He looked to be about thirty years of age. He held a Go piece in his hands as he stared down thoughtfully at the board. Hanging from his face was a jade pendant. Suddenly, a popping sound could be heard, and a crack appeared on its surface.

When the crack appeared, the blue-robed young man frowned. He looked at the jade piece, and then back at the Go board.

"Is something wrong?" asked the white-robed youth in a light, tender voice.

“Nothing,” replied the blue-robed young man respectfully. “It’s just my good-for-nothing brother. He must have offended someone who he’s not a match for. He wants me to save him.”

“That would be Sang Luo, correct...?” The white-robed youth smiled. “Go ahead and check out the situation. I don’t have anything else to do, I’ll tag along.”

The blue-robed youth immediately stood up. “Your highness, your status as a Dao Child is so lofty, I don’t dare....”

“There’s no harm.” This white-robed youth was none other than a Dao Child of the Blood Demon Sect!

Chapter 172: Charging into mid Foundation Establishment!

Within the Xiao Clan mountain village, Xiao Chang’en’s face was filled with enthusiasm as he gazed at Meng Hao. His fellow clansmen stared with similar fanaticism. Meng Hao nodded toward them, but said nothing. He entered his shielded room next to the lake, holding Sang Luo by the neck. The lightning mist appeared.

He sat down cross-legged and loosened his grip on Sang Luo. He didn’t fight back, but instead stood there pale-faced in front of Meng Hao, a look of respect shining in his eyes. Inside, however, he was nervously waiting for his older brother to arrive and save him. His tiny eyes darted around, eventually falling upon the hat, which still stood next to the lake. He heard the hat’s garrulous voice, but didn’t dare to stare. He suddenly got the feeling that this place was incredibly bizarre, even more ghastly than his own remote, lonely mountain.

Meng Hao looked at Sang Luo for a moment, trying to decide what to do with him. Finally, he lifted his hand into the air and made a grasping motion. The aura emanating from Sang Luo’s body condensed into Meng Hao’s palm. It seemed invisible, but to Meng Hao, it was very prickly and irritating in nature.

He frowned, looking closer at the aura. His eyes flickered.

“Could this be Demonic Qi...?” he murmured to himself. He let the aura disperse, and then looked closely over Sang Luo. Sang Luo felt goosebumps underneath Meng Hao’s gaze.

“Fellow Daoist....” he said, but was interrupted by Meng Hao.

“There’s an evildoing Cultivator here who needs to be converted...” he said and then coughed lightly. Hearing this, Sang Luo gaped in astonishment. Suddenly, the meat jelly, which had been talking to the fish in the lake just now, leaped up and seemed to stare fixedly at Sang Luo.

“Who? Who is it?” said the meat jelly excitedly, rushing over. “You? My poor evildoer, you can’t do that! It’s immoral. In the name of Justice, allow me to convert you...” Before Sang Luo could even react, Meng Hao flicked his sleeve, pushing him backward and snatching his bag of holding. At the same time, the black net shot out and wrapped up Sang Luo tightly.

Then Meng Hao shot backward, putting some space between himself and Sang Luo, who watched stupefied as all of this happened. At that instant, the meat jelly hat landed onto Sang Luo’s head.

It sighed. “Child, there’s no need to fear. Just behave, and allow the mighty embodiment of Justice to lead you back from the path of wickedness...” It seemed to be fairly leaping with excitement. “What a well-behaved little child. There’s no need to resist, no need fight back, no need to feel perplexed. I will help you. Listen, the first thing you need to do is...” As the meat jelly prattled on, Sang Luo’s body began to tremble. However, he didn’t dare to fight back.

Meng Hao felt a bit sorry for Sang Luo. He erased the branding within Sang Luo’s bag of holding. When he opened it, his eyes shined brightly. There was quite an accumulation of Spirit Stones inside, many times more than that which had been given to him by the Xiao Clan.

“This should be just about the amount I need for duplication purposes. Plus, I have a handful of bags of holding that I acquired in the Black Sieve Sect’s Blessed Land. There are a few Sieve Earth Pills in those. Not many, but a few.” He waved his hand, causing the lightning mist to condense so that no one in the area could see inside. Then, he pulled out the copper mirror and began to duplicate.

Time passed, and soon dusk fell. From outside the lightning mist, enraged shouting could be heard coming out of Sang Luo’s mouth. It seemed to be filled with an indescribable torment and misery.

“Be quiet! Let me go! Aaahhhhhh! You damned hat! Shut up!!”

“Ai, don’t be like that, child. You know... you interrupted me. I forgot where I left off. Oh well, I’ll just start over. Listen well, okay? The path of evil is filled with thistles and thorns. But don’t worry, child, I’m here. I definitely will not allow the thistles and thorns to stab into your tender buttocks...”

Meng Hao glanced outside, feeling a bit sympathetic for Sang Luo. Then he looked down at the several dozen or so Sieve Earth Pills in front of him. He took a deep breath, and then picked one up and placed it into his mouth.

It dissolved as soon as it entered, turning into a wave of spiritual power that Meng Hao had not felt enter his body in a long time. His body was like a parched desert suddenly inundated with nourishing water; his face lit up, and he closed his eyes to begin doing breathing exercises.

Slowly, he filtered out the sounds of the outside world and sank into Cultivation. One pill. Two pills. Three pills.... As he swallowed the pills, beams of moonlight in the night sky began to twist and turn. They descended down toward the earth, and onto Meng Hao.

From a distance, it had the appearance of a massive sheet of silk descending upon the Xiao Clan.

The Sieve Earth Pill really did deserve to be called a divine pill of the Black Sieve Sect, and one of the five most effective pills in the Southern Domain for the Foundation Establishment Stage. It was powerfully effective, much more so than Meng Hao had imagined. When he put the seventeenth pill into his mouth, his body instantly began to shake. The indistinct image of a rapidly congealing fourth Dao Pillar was suddenly visible inside him. When it was complete, Meng Hao's Cultivation base would have broken through to the mid Foundation Establishment stage!

He took a deep breath, frowning as he looked up at the shining waterfall of moonlight above him in the sky.

"It's really a bit too conspicuous. This is an amazing pill, but it's definitely going to attract a lot of attention...." There was nothing to do about it, however. The only thing he could do was try to break through as quickly as possible, form the fourth Dao Pillar and reach mid Foundation Establishment. He took a deep breath and picked up the eighteenth Sieve Earth Pill. When he placed it into his mouth, his three Perfect Dao Pillars trembled, sucking in boundless spiritual power. The fourth Dao Pillar was rapidly becoming solid.

Outside, in the darkness of the night, the sheets of moonlight had indeed attracted attention within the Xiao Clan. Xiao Chang'en might be nearing the end of his longevity, but his eyesight was sharp. His eyes narrowed, and he immediately moved over to the shielded area within which Meng Hao was practicing Cultivation. He sat down cross-legged to keep guard.

Meng Hao had showed great kindness to the Xiao Clan. Xiao Chang'en knew that after his own death, the only chance for his clan to survive had to do with Meng Hao. Therefore, he had resolved that no matter what, he would not allow Meng Hao's Cultivation to be disturbed.

Meanwhile, outside the Xiao Clan, the sheets of moonlight had caused quite a stir in the various Cultivation Clans in the area. More than a few people flew up into the air to investigate the area where the moonlight was cascading onto.

This was especially true of Sang Luo's older brother, the blue-robed young man. He flew along together with the white-robed youth. They flew through the air unhurriedly. It seemed as if they weren't going very fast, but in fact, they shot forward several hundred meters with each burst of flight.

When they saw the falling sheets of moonlight, the white-robed youth's eyes narrowed. The blue-robed young man frowned.

"That appears to be the same place where Sang Luo is...."

"Interesting. Someone in Blood Demon Sect territory is consuming a Sieve Earth Pill from the Black Sieve Sect. And from the look of it, more than one pill..."

At this exact moment, deep in a forested region some distance from the Xiao Clan, was an enormous tree. Within the tree was a group of ten Cultivators sitting closed-eyed in meditation. Each member of this group had a sword strapped to his back, and they all wore identical clothing. It was very quiet; not a crow or sparrow could be heard. But when the sheets of moonlight appeared, the ten people opened their eyes to look at it.

Chen Fan was among the group. He looked off into the distance, frowning. Hushed discussion immediately broke out among these Cultivators, all of whom were all disciples of the Solitary Sword Sect.

"That area is near the border of the Blood Demon Sect. What is that phenomenon...?"

"That's the sign of someone consuming a Sieve Earth Pill from the Black Sieve Sect. It can't be covered up. Someone in that area must be consuming medicinal pills."

"Just how many pills did that person consume? That amount of moonlight is shocking...."

Within the Xiao Clan manor, Clan members all began to grow nervous, as if they were about to face up against a powerful foe. The past days had been a mixture of both pleasant surprises and horrifying dread. Once and again, they had faced extermination as a clan, and repeatedly had been saved. As of this moment, their hearts pounded. This was especially true when they saw the conspicuous cascading moonlight. It only served to cause them more anxiety and nervousness.

Xiao Caifeng was pale faced. She had a talent for talismans, but was hindered by her Cultivation base, and couldn't fully employ their power. She could only stand off to the side, silently watching Xiao Chang'en sitting cross-legged as he guarded over Meng Hao.

Not much time passed before beams of multi-colored light filled the night sky, screaming toward the Xiao Clan from all directions. From the look of it, there were at least ten figures. They floated there in the sky, eyes glittering as their gazes fell onto the Xiao Clan, and Meng Hao's secluded meditation area, upon which poured sheets of moonlight.

An old man of the early Foundation Establishment stage approached, laughing loudly. "Interesting. I think I'll just have to see who exactly is in secluded meditation, causing such a scene." From his expression, it was clear he did not have good intentions. Greed flickered in his eyes. Obviously, he intended to disturb the meditation and snatch away the luck of whoever sat within.

It seemed everyone in the area had similar plans; the Xiao Clan was by no means weak. However, the Xu Clan was not the only one in the area who had coveted the lake. Many of the surrounding clans had eyed it like a tiger eyeing its prey.

The newly arrived Cultivators watched the old man as Xiao Chang'en looked up at him. The power of Xiao Chang'en's Cultivation base suddenly exploded out. He took a deep breath and shot up into the sky.

A boom rang out, and the old man spun backward out of control, coughing up some blood along the way. Xiao Chang'en's face looked deathly pale as he hovered in the air, glaring around.

"I, Xiao Chang'en, already have one foot in the coffin," he said coolly. "Life and death mean little to me. Anyone who wishes to tread the path of death with me, please, step forward." His Cultivation base was not incredibly high, but his words contained a powerful threat.

Underneath the shield, the growth of Meng Hao's Cultivation base had reached a critical juncture. As he continued to consume the Sieve Earth Pills, his fourth Dao Pillar was more than half solidified. It wouldn't be long before it was complete. When that happened, Meng Hao would not

be infinitely more powerful than before, but he would be able to sweep effortlessly across the Foundation Establishment stage!

That was the power of a Perfect Foundation!

Chapter 173: Rejected by the Heavens? Plunder!

Meng Hao was focused on breaking through to form his fourth Dao Pillar. However, regarding what was happening on the outside, it was no surprise to him. He had anticipated that such circumstances would come about. The cascading moonlight had focused attention on his increase in level. Although it hadn't attracted universal attention, it had certainly caused quite a disturbance.

Meng Hao was well aware that as more time passed, the situation would grow more volatile. The best method to bring matters to a conclusion was to finish breaking through as quickly as possible.

However.... a Perfect Foundation could not absorb the spiritual energy of heaven and earth. He was only able to rely on the Sieve Earth Pills, and despite their extraordinariness, the process was becoming more difficult. He could clearly sense that they were losing their efficacy.

Based on his current momentum, it didn't seem they would be enough to complete the fourth Dao Pillar.

As Meng Hao silently continued to Cultivate, outside, Xiao Chang'en's words echoed out amidst the moonlight. Everything was silent for a moment afterward, and then cold laughter rang out. Three figures shot forward.

Their features were indistinct within the darkness of night, but their Cultivation bases rippled, making it clear that one of their numbers was of the mid Foundation Establishment stage.

In the surrounding Cultivation Clans, even the mid Foundation Establishment stage was considered quite powerful. Were it not so, the Xiao Clan would not have been able to occupy the Spirit Lake for so long. It was only now that Xiao Chang'en was reaching the end of his longevity that the current situation had come to be.

The three figures whistled through the air toward Xiao Chang'en. A boom exploded out as the four people collided in battle. Xiao Chang'en coughed up a mouthful of blood. His face was pale as he flew backward like a kite with a broken string. The mid Foundation Establishment Cultivator laughed coldly and proceeded forward.

The other two shot toward Meng Hao's shield, laughing.

It seemed to be a moment of crisis. Xiao Chang'en was torn; he knew that Meng Hao must be at a critical juncture; unfortunately, he was currently powerless to intervene. Even burning some of his life force to gain extra power would be useless.

The two early Foundation Establishment Cultivators reached the shield; as soon as they touched it, a rumbling sound emerged. Within the space of two breaths, the shield collapsed.

The shield had been created by Xiao Caifeng, who was only at the Qi Condensation stage; for it to hold up against the early Foundation Establishment stage for the space of three breaths testified to the outstanding latent talent of the one who had created the talisman.

Booming echoed out as the shield was destroyed. As the two early Foundation Establishment stage Cultivators slammed into the lightning mist, miserable screams echoed out. In an instant, their bodies were surrounded by lightning; cracking sounds could be heard as they were thrown backward, blood spewing from their mouths. Expressions of shock covered their faces as their Dao Pillars trembled on the verge of collapse.

The lightning mist roiled; its protection extended about thirty meters out from Meng Hao in all directions, creating a no-man's land which no one could enter.

Xiao Chang'en heaved a sigh of relief. The mid Foundation Establishment Cultivator with whom he had been battling paused, looking over his shoulder at the lightning mist, astonishment filling his eyes.

Within the lightning mist, Meng Hao opened his eyes. They glowed brightly as he frowned and looked down at his last three Sieve Earth Pills. As for his fourth Dao Pillar, it was about ninety percent complete. These pills would be insufficient to complete the last ten percent.

"These Sieve Earth Pills are only so effective.... Perhaps I won't be able to reach the mid Foundation Establishment stage after all...." A stubborn look shone within his eyes. He knew that his path of Cultivation was different from that of others; he had acquired incredible battle prowess, but the Cultivation he practiced was much more challenging. Even as he thought of these things, a racket could be heard coming from the outside.

“Fellow Daoists, this person’s Cultivation has stirred up such power, I’m afraid that once he emerges, all of our Cultivation Clans will be at his mercy. Let’s take advantage of this opportunity to destroy him now to prevent future troubles.”

“Correct. The Xiao Clan is weak. Their existence is meaningless. The extermination of such Clans is the natural order, it can’t be changed!”

“Let’s attack together. This lightning mist can’t hold up against all of us!”

The ten or more Foundation Establishment Cultivators outside began attacking the lightning mist in unison.

All of these people were from local Cultivator Clans; as they attacked, booming sounds lifted up to fill the sky. The lightning mist seethed violently.

“An evil heart, is a useless life.” Meng Hao’s eyes sparkled icily as he looked out through the lightning mist. He quickly gathered up the remaining three pills and popped them into his mouth.

They immediately dissolved, and the cascading moonlight grew stronger, as if a river were pouring down into Meng Hao’s body. Although their effectiveness was waning, his fourth Dao Pillar was now just a hair away from being complete.

Just as the Dao Pillar was about to appear in full, Meng Hao’s suddenly sensed an inexplicable roaring within his body. His expression flickered as he realized that his body was starting to wither, as if his flesh and blood and life force, even his Cultivation base, were being sucked into the fourth Dao Pillar.

He had just unlocked another of the secrets of the Perfect Foundation. It was with unbridled power that the fourth Dao Pillar began of its own will to suck in everything into it.

It seemed that the fourth Dao Pillar would form at any cost, even if it caused the death of Meng Hao!

His face flickered at this sudden turn of events. He had never imagined that something like this would happen. It was at this exact moment that the lightning mist finally collapsed under the attack of the ten Foundation Establishment Cultivators. They rushed in.

Meng Hao eyed them approaching, his face grim. His body was withering, and his life force was trickling away. The hair on his head had already begun turning white. His Cultivation base was still there, though. Suddenly, an early Foundation Establishment Cultivator appeared in front of him. Before the man could react, Meng Hao's hand shot out and grabbed him by the throat. He squeezed, and the Cultivator's eyes filled with disbelief. The man's neck shattered.

Even as he died, Meng Hao's body trembled, and his eyes filled with a strange light. The man's corpse suddenly began to shrink and wither. Within the blink of an eye, it was a mere skeleton. The man's Cultivation base rushed in through Meng Hao's hand and entered the fourth Dao Pillar.

"So that's how it is!" Meng Hao's eyes grew brighter. "I have a perfect Foundation, but when my first three Dao Pillars formed within the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament, there was more than enough spiritual energy to absorb, so I couldn't even sense the potency of the Dao Pillars. But now, things are clear. After reaching a certain point, the fourth Dao Pillar reaches a phase in which only death can stop its progress. When this happens, it will even consume my own life force. The reason is because it can't absorb spiritual energy from the outside world, only from my flesh and blood!

"Perfection. Perfection is so potent! But such potency is also a weapon. I've been rejected by the Heavens. Therefore, I must plunder from the living! The bodies of Cultivators are filled with spiritual energy that does not belong to heaven and earth! Therefore, it can be pillaged away! Now I understand. It seems that in the future, it will be like this every time I form a new Dao Pillar!

"Today... my fourth Dao Pillar will appear!"

These thoughts ran through Meng Hao's head in an instant. He loosened his grip, then looked around at the surrounding Cultivators, his eyes radiating icy cold. His body flashed as he shot toward them.

Miserable screams rang out. All of these people had Cultivation bases at the mid Foundation Establishment level at the highest; most were at the early Foundation Establishment stage. Could they possibly match up against Meng Hao? As Meng Hao passed each person, his hand would snake out, and with no effort on his part, the fourth Dao Pillar would feed, thirstily sucking in energy.

Body after body turned into bones. Before the death of each Cultivator, their Cultivation base would be sucked rapidly into Meng Hao, consumed by his Dao Pillar. Soon, Meng Hao was no longer withered, and his flesh and blood began to rebuild.

As Xiao Chang'en observed this happening, dread appeared on his face. The Cultivators who had moments ago been charging forward, suddenly began to retreat at high speed.

In their eyes, Meng Hao was no Cultivator; he had transformed into some type of evil demon. Wherever he passed, blood-curdling screams could be heard, and he left behind only ragged corpses. Their minds reeled, and expressions of unbridled horror appeared on their faces.

“What magic is this!?!?”

“What is he doing!?!?”

“This guy... he's sucking up the life and Cultivation bases of all those dead Fellow Daoists!?!?”

The remaining twenty or so Cultivators were scared witless and retreated in chaos. Meng Hao caught up with one of them. As he placed his hand on the crown of the man's head, a blood-curdling scream echoed out. His body began to shrivel, and then he died.

Meng Hao's face was no longer pale and bloodless; it was now ruddy and filled with life. He took a deep breath, and in his mind he suddenly recalled the scene in Patriarch Reliance's Immortal's cave, when Patriarch Reliance had absorbed the Core Formation Cultivators

“The Great Art of Demonic Life?” thought Meng Hao, his eyes flickering. It seemed that what he was doing now was very similar indeed to the Great Art of Demonic Life that Patriarch Reliance had used. “Or perhaps this is some type of enlightenment that comes from being in a kill or be killed situation. The Great Art of Demonic Life. Demonic Life....” Meng Hao sighed inwardly as he suppressed his deeply-ingrained Confucian way of thinking. His body flickered with the power of the fourth Dao Pillar. He sighed as his hand clasped around the throat of another Cultivator. The fourth Dao Pillar sucked in the man's Cultivation base. Soon, the fourth Dao Pillar would complete its circle and be complete.

“The path of my Perfect Foundation will be strewn with mountains of corpses and seas of blood. I... understand.” He sighed again, and yet continued forward without hesitation. His heart did not grow soft. Confucianism would always exist within him, and he would never be truly merciless. However, when the circumstances required, he could act without mercy.

Chapter 174: Perfect Mid Foundation Establishment!

Moonlight shone over the savage scene. It wasn't just Xiao Chang'en whose heart was filled with icy dread; the rest of the Xiao Clan members looked at Meng Hao, terrified.

The other surrounding Cultivators retreated as quickly as possible, knowing that the slightest hesitation could result in a horrifying death. However, Meng Hao was faster. He looked like a specter, his hair floating around his head as he pursued his quarry. He sucked in a Cultivation base and life force, then loosened his grip, dropping the shrivelled, trembling skeletal body to the ground.

It wasn't as if none of the Cultivators tried to fight back; unfortunately, their resistance was futile. To Meng Hao, they were like nothing. Even before the emergence of his fourth Dao Pillar, Meng Hao could easily battle the late Foundation Establishment stage. Now that his fourth Dao Pillar was almost complete, he was on the very threshold of the mid Foundation Establishment stage.

What could these outcasts from the Blood Demon Sect possibly do to resist him?!

It was their doom to be here today, a deadly choice on their part. They had chosen to destroy the lightning mist, and in doing so, had unleashed the spirit of death!

Meng Hao was more than half recovered now. His hair was no longer white, nor was his skin withered. Everything that his Dao Pillar had sucked away from him was now restored.

His fourth Dao Pillar emanated a demonic aura, as if it desired to plunder and consume all spiritual power!

I am cut off from heaven and earth, so I will take it upon myself to plunder! This potency is Perfection!

Boom!

Meng Hao closed in on two early Foundation Establishment Cultivators. They turned around, roaring as they unleashed the full power of the might of their Cultivation bases. They used magical arts, they used magical treasures, going all out against Meng Hao.

A booming echoed out, and then Meng Hao was standing directly in front of one of them. His palm pushed lightly against the man's face. A dessicated corpse dropped to the ground.

His body flickered; another miserable cry echoed out. Everyone who remained alive trembled as they watched a middle-aged man grow old. His hair became white and then fell out. His flesh and blood wilted away. His eyes clouded over as he took one last breath and then passed into death.

Meng Hao sighed. He had no deep grudge against these people. However, they had appeared here and had attacked him with the intention of wiping him out and preventing him from making a breakthrough in his Cultivation. Although they were targeting him because of the Xiao Clan, the fact was: they were here. To suddenly be facing Meng Hao, was simply their fate.

Meng Hao understood; his eyes flashed with enlightenment, and he continued to attack without hesitation.

He sucked away the life force and Cultivation base of an old man of the mid Foundation Establishment stage, whereupon a loud roaring filled his body. It emanated out, filling the air, causing everyone to look on in shock.

The fleeing Cultivators trembled in dread. Everything that was happening was like a horrible dream, a nightmare which they would never be able to forget for the rest of their lives.

The image of Meng Hao had been branded indelibly onto their very souls, and would stay with them until their deaths.

As the boom rang out, a tremor ran through Meng Hao's body. He suddenly began to emit a golden light. It spread out, causing Meng Hao to appear as if he were covered with golden armor!

At the same time, the fourth Dao Pillar appeared in full; the roaring was coming from the Dao Pillar itself. Up above in the sky, dark clouds began to congeal. It seemed as if within them, an invisible pair of eyes was staring down onto Meng Hao.

A feeling like that of Tribulation Lightning suddenly appeared. It disappeared almost immediately, as if it were simply observing, waiting until Core Formation to unleash its destructive punishment!

Though there was no wind, Meng Hao's hair whipped about his head wildly. With the appearance of his fourth Dao Pillar, he had now broken through to the mid level of Foundation Establishment!

With the power of the Perfect Foundation, Meng Hao was now the most powerful person of the Foundation Establishment stage among the five Sects and three Clans of the Southern Domain!

The moment he broke through, the blood drained from the faces of the surrounding Cultivators, and their bodies trembled. The Dao Pillars within their bodies suddenly began to quiver. In fact, cracks appeared on the Dao Pillars of some of the Cultivators, causing them to cough up blood, faces filled with astonishment.

It seemed like their Dao Pillars were ashamed to be in the presence of Meng Hao's Perfect Dao Pillars. With his Perfect Foundation, he was a sovereign among the Foundation Establishment stage. His incredible might and power caused the hearts of all other Foundation Cultivators to tremble, and their Dao Pillars to become unstable.

In fact, because of the influence of Meng Hao's Dao Pillars, the trembling Cultivators began to prostrate themselves toward him. This was not their idea; it was veneration toward their sovereign from the Dao Pillars themselves!

Their bodies were not even under their own control as they lowered their heads. Their minds were filled with roaring emptiness.

This was true crushing pressure; this was a power that had reached such a level that it created a relationship like that between heaven and earth.

In the Cultivation world, a crushing pressure is a power that exists because of the vast difference between different Cultivation levels. However, this crushing pressure emanating from Meng Hao came from the Dao Pillar itself!

Perfect Dao Pillars can exhibit crushing pressure onto all other Dao Pillars. If a Cultivator who had completed the circle of Foundation Establishment had merely Fractured Dao Pillars, he could do nothing but tremble in front of Meng Hao.

This... this was the power of four Perfect Dao Pillars. It would be hard to imagine the power Meng Hao could wield after he created his fifth, sixth, and even ninth Dao Pillars! What crushing pressure would he then be able to employ?!

At that time, it wouldn't matter if he faced a Cracked Foundation or even a Flawless Foundation; they would all be as weak as ants to Meng Hao. After completing nine Perfect Dao Pillars, then perhaps Meng Hao would be able to pass into Core Formation!

Meng Hao had no way to predict what that would be like, but his heart filled with increasingly powerful anticipation nonetheless.

It was at this time that just outside of the Xiao Clan, two beams of prismatic light shot through the air. One flickered with blue light, the other white as they flew forward and caught sight of Meng Hao.

“So it turns out to be a Chosen!” said the white-robed youth. The Blood Demon Sect’s current Dao Child looked down, eyes glowing. They were filled with battle, seemingly kindled into burning. They flashed like lightning as they examined Meng Hao.

To the side was the blue-robed young man, the brother of Sang Luo. As he gazed upon Meng Hao, his eyes narrowed and his heart filled with an indescribable sense of danger!

At this same moment, in a location not too far away, but not too near, existed an enormous basin in the earth. There were actually ten such basins, each one filled with richly ornamented buildings and pagodas. Each basin also contained a lake.

From a distance this place looked... mysterious and dark. This land... was none other than one of the five great Sects of the Southern Domain... the Blood Demon Sect!

Within the center of the ten basins was a tree. One half of the tree was wilted and dry, the other half was lush and flourishing. It was a very bizarre sight, and clearly something beyond ordinary. This tree was a precious treasure of the Blood Demon Sect!

Underneath the tree, an indistinct figure sat cross-legged. Suddenly, the figure raised its head. Its vision pierced through everything until it reached the Xiao Clan, and Meng Hao.

A smile appeared on its face, and an indistinct murmuring could be heard.

“So, it was not in vain that I helped you those three times,” the indistinct figure said, its voice husky. “This kid has certainly grown up.... It seems Yu’er is there too. Perhaps this is the tribulation that violet-robed Cultivator spoke of the day she was born?” Thunder rumbled above in the sky.

“The Dao of the Heavens is not dead, I shall not enter the yellow springs of the underworld!” The figure looked up into the sky, and its face suddenly emitted two beams of ferocious, red light. This was none other than... The blood-red figure who had appeared that year at the Reliance Sect!

This was the blood-red Demon Lord who had flashed through the sky to save Meng Hao from obliteration at the hands of Lord Revelation.

In the air above the Xiao Clan, a golden light glittered. The surrounding Cultivators trembled in fear. Meng Hao turned his head, his gaze sweeping to fall upon the white-robed Cultivator.

He could only be described as beautiful. His body was covered with a voluminous white robe, and he emanated a demonic aura. However, in addition to the demonic aura, there was a refined and cultivated air. He floated there, and though he was accompanied by another Cultivator, all eyes were on him. Even if there were countless thousands upon thousands of people present, he would be the center of attention.

His beauty, coupled with his demonic air, made it such that even most women would have trouble surpassing him. Were he wearing women’s clothing, he would be a beauty unmatched in his generation.

As Meng Hao’s looked upon the white-robed youth, their gazes locked. Instantly, Meng Hao could sense the desire for battle within those eyes. Next to the beautiful Blood Demon Dao Child was a blue-robed Cultivator. His gaze immediately fell upon Sang Luo, who laid entangled in the black net on the ground not too far of. He was just about to spring into action when the white-robed youth held out a hand to stop him.

“You’re not his match.” The white-robed youth smiled. “I find this person... very interesting.” His smile was warm and calm. Were this person to be wearing women’s clothing, this consummately elegant smile would make flowers grow dim!

After smiling, the white-robed youth took a step forward. This step landed on air, but as it did, Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed. It felt as if the step had landed directly on his heart. His entire condition changed, as if he were suddenly under great pressure.

A wave of power rippled out from the white-robed youth, clearly caused by a completed circle of late Foundation Establishment.

“These are my Seven Demonic Lotus Steps. Each step is unbreakable. Take care, Fellow Daoist.” With a smile, the white-robed youth began to take a second step. His power suddenly surged to immense heights, as if the power itself contained his will. It spread out in all directions.

Meng Hao’s eyes gleamed. As the white-robed youth approached, a strange aura seemed to be building up in the area. It circled around, emanating a mysterious aroma. It smelled pleasant; however, it could cause bewilderment which could lead to total loss of oneself.

As the second step descended, Meng Hao began to shake, and the gleam in his eye grew sharper. Smiling, the white-robed youth began to take a third step. As it fell, the power in the area grew exponentially stronger. His body seemed to transform into something invincible. It was only the third step, but in Meng Hao’s perception, time itself seemed to suddenly whiz by. It was as if the entire world were being replaced by something else.

Chapter 175: Li Shiqi

A strong feeling filled Meng Hao. It was as if the area surrounding him was cut off from everything else. It felt like his Cultivation base was about to degrade and he would soon fall back to the early Foundation Establishment stage.

At the same time, an incredibly realistic vision appeared in his mind. He returned to Mount Daqing, to Yunjie County, to the window of his room, underneath the moonlight. He saw himself sitting there reading.

Meng Hao had never experienced a magical technique such as this. This was his first time. His eyes narrowed.

The white-robed youth’s fourth step was just beginning!

As it did, Meng Hao’s mind reeled, and more visions appeared. He suddenly realized that the state caused by his opponent would be impossible to break once the seventh step was reached. That was the pinnacle, and when that last step descended, his opponent would be able to employ a pressure so intense that he wouldn’t need to attack.

That pressure contained a power that could sweep away the Foundation Establishment stage!

“If the art is unbreakable, then I must break the situation!”

Meng Hao's eyes glittered, and his head tilted up. He lifted his right hand and pointed down toward the ground. The earth seemed to shake, and yet, what was shaking was not the earth, but Meng Hao. Ghost images appeared everywhere; the only thing that didn't have a ghost image, was Meng Hao!

"This is the Eighth Hex, Body-sealing Finger," said Meng Hao coolly. "Take care, Fellow Daoist." He lifted his hand and pointed forward.

Suddenly, Meng Hao's body stopped vibrating. The ghost images all overlapped and descended toward the white-robed youth. They merged into his body, and suddenly, a conspicuous ghost image of the young man himself appeared. The fifth step that he had been about to take could no longer be completed.

The white-robed youth's mind trembled; he looked at Meng Hao with eyes glowing, his expression dignified.

Meng Hao didn't attack. This battle was more of an exchange of techniques, not a battle to the death. Meng Hao stood there indifferently, calmly looking at the young man.

After the space of a single breath, the white-robed youth recovered. However, the power caused by the overlapping momentum of his steps had dissipated, nullified by Meng Hao.

The Seven Demonic Lotus Steps was an art that utilized the power of momentum. Once unleashed, even high-level Cultivation bases would have difficulty breaking it. From the time he had emerged as a figure in the Cultivation world until now, the white-robed youth had never encountered someone of the Foundation Establishment stage who could break the Seven Demonic Lotus Steps; not even Dao Children of the other Sects or Clans were able to.

But today, in this place, he had witnessed an unprecedented occurrence. His eyes shined with a strange light as he gazed at Meng Hao. His face filled with respect; this was an esteem that only powerful experts of the same generation would feel for each other.

"To receive without giving is not a principle by which I live," said Meng Hao coolly. "I also have an attack to share. Please prepare." He lifted his left hand, using the nail of his thumb to slice his middle finger. Blood flowed out, causing his middle finger to become crimson. His hand moved in a casual motion, but his eyes were filled with ferocity.

As he attacked, observers could not see anything special happening. However, the white-robed youth's pupils instantly constricted. From his perspective, everything had suddenly turned to the

color of blood. His expression flickered slightly, and a sense of imminent, fatal danger welled up in him. His right hand shot up to slap his bag of holding. A branch appeared in his hand upon which grew three withered leaves and three luxuriant leaves. He waved it in front of him.

No sound could be heard, but faint ripples circled out. Meng Hao gave a bored snort and retreated backward a three paces. As he did, his power began to decline, so he stopped and took a step forward.

The step descended, seeming to trample directly on the heart of the white-robed youth, whose mind shook. His body swayed, as if a massive, invisible force were pushing down on it. He retreated backward a few paces, the blood draining from his face despite the aid of his magical item. As the color slowly returned to his face, he gave Meng Hao a deep look.

“Senior, I am Li Shiqi.” It seemed this white-robed youth actually had a girl’s name. He stared at Meng Hao as he asked in a soft voice, “Fellow Daoist, would it be possible for me to enquire as to your illustrious name?”

Meng Hao got an odd feeling when looking at the white-robed youth. There was something strange about him. He thought for a moment, then replied, “Meng Hao.”

“Brother Meng, the person you have in your custody is actually a blood relative of my Junior Brother. I hope you can release him. If he did anything to offend you, I offer my sincere apologies.”

Meng Hao looked at blue-robed youth who stood by Li Shiqi. He was currently looking at Sang Luo off in the distance. Meng Hao raised his right hand, and the black net loosened. Sang Luo, face pale, shot away with all the power he could muster. Meng Hao’s hat pursued him at top speed.

“Eee? Don’t run away. Meng Hao, how could you do such a thing?” The meat jelly roared angrily as it shot after Sang Luo. “You can’t do that, it’s immoral! You can’t just let him go. I haven’t rescued him from the path of evil yet....”

Sang Luo’s body trembled as he raced to the side of the blue-robed Cultivator. His face was covered with terror as he clutched at his older brother’s clothes and stared in horror at the approaching hat.

Li Shiqi stared in shock at the hat.

The meat jelly's voice suddenly sounded surprised. "Eee? What are you looking at? You're a female? Heavens, you look like a guy, but you're actually a girl. Strange, very strange. No rod, no rod!" It returned to Meng Hao, plopping down onto his head and once again changing color to bright green.

Li Shiqi's face suddenly looked extremely unsightly as she glared at the hat, and then Meng Hao. All the good feelings from moments before suddenly evaporated.

Meng Hao made a wry smile. The meat jelly had suddenly made everything very clear. Meng Hao suddenly had an acute understanding of why people called the meat jelly Ultimate Vexation.

Ignoring the looks on the faces of Meng Hao and Li Shiqi, it started to prattle on, apparently preparing to talk for at least three days and three nights without stopping. "Strange, so strange. You're actually a female... huh?" In the midst of its excitement, the meat jelly seemed to have found something else interesting. It looked off into the distance.

It was at this exact moment that off in the Blood Demon Sect, sitting cross-legged underneath the strange tree, the Demon Lord's body suddenly quivered. He immediately retracted his vision, cutting off all connection to the outside world.

"Dammit," said the indistinct image of the Demon Lord, panting. "How could that abominable thing have appeared. Didn't his excellency suppress it? And yet, there it is, attached to the body of a disciple of the Demon Sealing Sect!!

"I cannot get entangled with it. According to the legends, there were many powerful experts in ancient times who were driven insane by it.... It looks weak though, it must not have been able to sense me...."

Back in the Xiao Clan mountain village, the meat jelly hat gazed off into the distance. It seemed to be lost in thought for a moment, after which its body flickered, and it looked back at Li Shiqi.

Li Shiqi gave a cold snort and then glared angrily at Meng Hao. Without another word, she spun and flew off. The blue-robed Cultivator gave a dry cough, then picked up Sang Luo and transformed into a colorful beam that shot off into the distance.

"Eee? You're leaving, little girl? Don't leave! I haven't finished talking...."

Meng Hao's face once again filled with a dark expression. The surrounding Cultivators wanted to leave. Unfortunately, their Dao Pillars trembled, and they were incapable of even moving. They stared nervously at Meng Hao.

"From this day forward, none of you are permitted to step a foot into the Xiao Clan," said Meng Hao coolly. He flicked his sleeve, unbinding the Cultivators. They immediately gave deep bows to Meng Hao, and pledged to follow his instructions. After that, they fled at top speed.

When they were gone, pale-faced Xiao Chang'en approached. Clasp hands, he bowed deeply to Meng Hao.

"Many thanks, benefactor!!"

All of the Xiao Clan members approached and began kowtowing to Meng Hao. Xiao Caifeng stared at him blankly for a moment, and then nodded.

Meng Hao looked around at the Xiao Clan. "I can't stay here," he said gently. "I must leave in a few days. The only help I can provide is what I've already done."

"It's enough," said Xiao Chang'en, bowing deeply. "Fear of benefactor will keep the Xiao Clan safe for dozens of years to come. Once the Xiao Clan produces another Foundation Establishment Cultivator, then our position will be secured permanently." The death aura which emanated from his body had grown stronger. Most likely, he would reach the end of his life within a year.

Meng Hao said nothing. After a long moment, he nodded, then returned into the lightning mist.

Three days later, Meng Hao chose to leave. Before departing, he severed two vines and left them in the Spirit lake. He helped Xiao Caifeng to brand them to herself; in the future, they would belong to the Xiao Clan. Xiao Caifeng watched with a smile as Meng Hao left.

Her eyes followed him as he disappeared into the distance. Who knew how long his shadow would rest on her heart? Her gaze rested on the spot where he had disappeared; she knew inside that there was no possibility of anything happening between the two of them.

Xiao Chang'en looked at Xiao Caifeng and sighed. His body seemed even weaker in the early morning sun. He was only growing older and older.

Several days later, Meng Hao sped through the sky, flying along the border territory between the Blood Demon Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect. A frown covered his face because of the incessant yammering of the meat jelly hat. It hadn't stopped talking at all during the previous days.

“A female. Wahaha! It turned out she was a girl. Meng Hao, don't you think it's strange? Hey, why aren't you saying anything? You can't do that, it's immoral. It turns out you fought with a girl! Heavens.... You know, I'm an elder of the senior generation, with ever-changing forms. How can you treat me this way? Acting like this is very wrong, very immoral....”

Veins of blood filled Meng Hao's eyes, along with a look of despair. He really couldn't deal with this type of torment. The hat's endless chattering was enough to drive a person crazy. Meng Hao could feel his temper growing worse and worse.

But attacking the meat jelly was useless. Cursing it did nothing. It couldn't be thrown away. It was stuck to him like dog skin plaster, seemingly attached to him for life. Meng Hao couldn't think of any other alternative than to simply go insane.

He proceeded forward wearily. Suddenly, his eyes flickered as he caught sight of eight bright beams shooting toward him. They were all Cultivators of the Foundation Establishment stage. The beams of light were all the color of blood. Several of the Cultivators were maintaining a spell, within which was the indistinct image of some sort of enormous blood-colored beast. It floated above them as they proceeded forward.

Seeing these eight Cultivators, Meng Hao's eyes flashed, and he suddenly spoke to the meat jelly. “You say you have ever-changing forms? I don't believe you.”

“You don't believe me!?” cried the meat jelly furiously. It seemed incapable of accepting this. Its dignity and honor had been trampled upon!

Chapter 176: Believe Your Granny

Originally Meng Hao had planned to speak placatingly, but then opted to sound scornful and disbelieving. “If you can transform into a shiny bag of holding that obviously contains a precious treasure, then I'll believe you,” he said. He worked hard to make himself sound as antagonistic as possible.

In a rage, the meat jelly instantly transformed into a shining, golden bag of holding. It was transparent, and within could be seen a square cauldron as well as four circulating demonic swords.

The four swords revolved around the cauldron, and at a single glance, it was obvious that it was a precious treasure.

Even more realistic was how the cauldron and four swords seemed to be trying to push their way out of the bag of holding, as if they wanted to escape.

“Well, what do you think...?” The voice of the meat jelly emanated out from the bag of holding.

Inside, he was surprised, but on the outside, a look of disdain covered his face. “There’s no glow!”

There was a rustling sound, and even as the words left his mouth, the bag of holding began to emit a blinding glow which shot up into the sky. The golden light shined up, instantly catching the attention of the eight Cultivators. Immediately, they flew in Meng Hao’s direction.

“Do you believe me n....?” came the voice of the meat jelly from within the bag of holding. Before it could finish speaking, Meng Hao grabbed the bag of holding and threw it toward the approaching Cultivators.

“Believe your granny!!” Meng Hao had been raised not to curse, but in this case he couldn’t help it. He shot away from the meat jelly as quickly as possible.

He had thrown the glowing, golden bag of holding away from himself with all the power he could muster from his Cultivation base. As it neared the approaching eight Cultivators, they stared open-mouthed. They all had slightly different expressions. Some were suspicious, some were cautious, some even looked pleasantly surprised. However, each and every one reached out with outstretched arms to snatch the bag of holding.

“You tricked me! That pisses me off!” sounded out the voice of the meat jelly. Just when it was about to be grabbed by one of the Cultivators, it vanished. Then it reappeared off in the distance, directly on Meng Hao’s head. It once again transformed into a green hat.

As if that didn’t satisfy it, popping sounds rang out as one hat after another piled up on his head, over and over again, high up into the air...

Soon, the stack of hats was taller than Meng Hao’s entire person. The eight Cultivators looked on, completely dumbfounded. They had never seen something like this in their entire lives.

Meng Hao's face grew even more unsightly. He felt like he was about to go nuts. If the meat jelly took this shape, then he would be the center of attention no matter where he went...

"Fellow Daoist with the green hats," said one of the Cultivators coldly, a middle-aged man with a frown. "This is Blood Demon Sect territory. Outsiders are not welcome. Even less welcome are people who come here to make fools of us. Take your green hat and get the hell out of here!"

Meng Hao had just been about to leave when the words reached his ears. He suddenly stopped, turning to look at the eight Cultivators. His eyes shone fiercely. At the moment, he was in a horrific mood, and these words did not please him whatsoever.

"You still dare to turn your head back?" said the middle-aged Cultivator with a cold laugh. "In that case, why don't you leave your eyes with me after you leave. With those green hats, you'll be a laughingstock anyway." With that, he and his companions shot toward Meng Hao.

"Screw off!" said Meng Hao, suddenly lifting his hand and waving his sleeve toward them. The power of his Cultivation base exploded out. A massive wind screamed out and then slammed into them.

A booming filled the air, and blood sprayed from the mouths of the eight patrolling Blood Demon Sect disciples. Their bodies trembled. A look of disbelief covered the face of the man who had taunted Meng Hao, and his pupils constricted. From what he could see, Meng Hao was at the mid Foundation Establishment stage, but his attack just now had been filled with the might like that of the late Foundation Establishment stage. Blood oozed out of his mouth as he skidded backward in retreat. When he saw the cold look in Meng Hao's eyes, his heart shook.

Realizing he had been rash, the middle-aged Cultivator said, "Fellow Daoist, this...." Even as he began to speak, however, Meng Hao's eyes shone with even more ferocious iciness.

The man's face fell. He and his companions turned into beams of prismatic light that shot away into the distance. When they were far away from Meng Hao, they finally came to a stop and exchanged glances.

"That guy is just too aggressive. Where did he come from? Elder Brother, let's report him to Master. Master will surely dispatch some people to apprehend him!"

“Correct. Elder Brother, this is Blood Demon Sect territory. Can we really allow that guy to just run amok?”

“Shut the hell up!” growled the middle-aged man, his face dark and unreadable. “He’s young, and with just a single sweep of his hand, look at what he did to us. Do you really think he’s just some random person? He’s obviously not a Cultivator of the Solitary Sword Sect. With war brewing between our Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect, we can’t afford to provoke the wrath of additional Sects! He’s obviously just passing through and doesn’t want to make enemies, that’s why he went easy on us. All of you, shut your mouths. Forget about what happened here. There will always be friction among Cultivators like us. There’s no need to report some trifling incident like this to the Sect.” Having made his decision, he continued on into the distance, his fellow Cultivators in tow.

After they were some ways away, the vines on the ground beneath them that they hadn’t noticed this entire time, burrowed into the earth and disappeared.

Back in Meng Hao’s location, Meng Hao stamped his foot onto the ground. The soil seethed as the dark red vines emerged to sway back and forth in front of him. Moments later, they transformed into a small, dark red fruit, which he placed into his bag of holding. Finally, he turned his attention to the hat on his head.

“You can’t do that! It’s wrong. If you let them go, you should trust them completely. You can’t secretly dispatch something to follow them. That’s wrong. That’s immoral. Eee? I just remembered something. You cussed at me just now!!

“Cussing is wrong. It’s immoral. My granny never did anything to offend you. Why did you have to bring her up? It’s very strange. What relationship do you have with her? Unless...” Suddenly, the meat jelly’s pedantic voice filled with a strange tone. “Unless the two of you...”

Meng Hao ignored it. He slapped his bag of holding to produce a set of clothing. He ripped off some strips of fabric and stuffed them into his ears. Immediately, the meat jelly’s voice became quieter. But then, the meat jelly gave a dry cough. It started to talk, and this time, its voice could be heard directly inside of Meng Hao’s head.

Meng Hao’s expression was somewhat haggard. He stared off into nothing for a while, then finally sighed and tossed the strips of cloth away.

“Now I know why people call you Ultimate Vexation,” he said. Immediately, the meat jelly began to tremble with excitement.

“Why? Why?! This name was given to me a very, very, very long time ago by an old friend. I asked him about it many times, but he would never tell me what it means.” The meat jelly’s full and undivided attention was now focused on Meng Hao.

Meng Hao didn’t say anything. Instead, he pondered why the person who named the meat jelly wouldn’t explain the meaning of the name. Then he thought of the meat jelly’s long-windedness, and he shivered. He understood. By providing an answer regarding the name, it would give the meat jelly a conversation topic that would certainly last for months.

The thought of that made his scalp go numb. Anyone who had no experience dealing with the meat jelly couldn’t comprehend the nature of the torment it brought. He decided to change the topic.

“With you looking like this, we really can’t proceed onward,” said Meng Hao. “Is there any way you can take some form other than a pile of hats?” He was careful in his wording, fearful of agitating the thing. He could only imagine what it would look like if it decided to become a mountain of green hats perched on top of his head. What would happen then?

His tone was non-argumentative, but inside, his heart was filled with helplessness. He thought of the Blood Mastiff, and suddenly missed it terribly. Unfortunately, it was sleeping now.

Actually, Meng Hao’s words seemed to excite the meat jelly. “Eee? If I’m not a hat, then what shape should I take?” Meng Hao was used to this, so he didn’t say anything at first. He sat cross-legged within the mountain forest and retrieved the Time-refining jade page. He cast his Spiritual Sense into it and began to study the contents.

Some time passed, and then Meng Hao’s eyes glittered. He began to mutter to himself. “Time of Spring and Autumn requires a Spring tree and the frost of Autumn. The fire of mid-Winter, the spirit of Summer. Refine the four seasons, fuse with the Cultivation base. Refine the four seasons again to produce a small sword.

“This sword must be carefully nurtured. With enlightenment of Time, the veins of a hundred years can fill the sword. After the hundred years, a thousand years will pass, and it will take shape. In ten thousand years, it will appear to shake heaven and earth, the first Sword of Time.” Meng Hao frowned as he gazed at the jade page. The sword contained no small might, but the time involved in its creation seemed too vast.

“Han Bei is really focused on this sword, so it can’t really take that much time, can it...? There must be other methods that can be used to speed up the appearance of the sword.” Lost in thought, Meng Hao thought to the third jade page that the meat jelly had swallowed, as well as the first jade page, which had been sucked back into the circular cauldron.

“The answer must be on the third page. Too bad this damned meat jelly ate it.” Meng Hao lifted his head and looked at the meat jelly. About an hour had passed since he began studying the Time refining information. Of course, the meat jelly had been talking the entire time.

“What do I change into? What do I change into? What do I change into?” It had flown off of Meng Hao’s head and was now hopping back and forth in front of him. It looked very excited.

“Can you change into that jade page you swallowed?” Meng Hao said suddenly.

“Huh? Ok...” It agreed, and then immediately changed its mind. “Eee? Wait a second. What are you trying to pull? No way! It’s mine. You’re not getting your hands on it.”

Chapter 177: Using its Strength

Meng Hao’s eyes narrowed when he heard the words.

“Could it be that the things it swallows don’t get digested, but are just collected?”

“Trying to fool me? Quit dreaming. Hmph.” The meat jelly’s tone became sagely, “Child, you’ve walked too far down the path of evil. Repent and be saved.”

“Change into whatever it was that left the most profound impression on you,” Meng Hao said blithely. He was still thinking about what the meat jelly had said just now, and what it meant. He had to figure out a way to trick the meat jelly into coughing up the jade page.

“The most profound impression? There’s no need to even think about it. The thing which had the most profound effect on me in my entire life is this!!” The meat jelly seemed to be gnashing its teeth. There was a popping sound, and suddenly it transformed into....

A brightly colored parrot! It was about half the size of his arm, glistening as if it were covered with rainwater. It was somewhat emaciated, with a curved beak and triangular eyes. It had a somewhat perverted demeanor, and seemed to be filled with an immoral air.

It stood there in front of Meng Hao, looking at him with its perverted, triangular eyes. It lowered its head and pecked a few times at its body.

Meng Hao gaped at the parrot. In his entire life, he had never seen such a perverted looking bird. Its triangular eyes and the brightly colored feathers which covered its body were especially strange.

The parrot coughed dryly, looking at Meng Hao out of the corner of its eye.

“This is what left the most profound impression on me: that damned bird. In my last life, I just wasn’t able to get it to give in and convert. In this life, I will definitely convert it! That immoral, perverted creature who likes things with fur and feathers!!” The meat jelly sounded like it was gnashing its teeth. Its appearance and words just now instantly made this form seem even more lifelike.

Seeing the parrot and hearing the words caused Meng Hao to take a deep breath. He thought back to the day he had almost put on the blood-colored mask, and had heard a bird cry come from the copper mirror.

He thought about how fervently the copper mirror would attack furred creatures. His mind spun with various images. He didn’t really understand. Just what was this bird that the meat jelly kept talking about...?

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment before retrieving the copper mirror from his bag of the Cosmos. “You’re talking about this?” he asked. The instant it appeared, the meat jelly parrot let out a squawk. Wings fluttering, it shot forward and grabbed the copper mirror in its claws and began to viciously peck at it.

“Dammit! Yes, this is it. I can sense its aura inside. I’ll peck you to death, you damned mass-murdering bird! Peck you! Peck you...!” The meat jelly parrot seemed to have gone crazy. Its feathers stood on end as it squawked and pecked at the copper mirror.

Meng Hao watched on in a daze. He recalled the time he had acquired the mirror, and then when he had discovered its ability. From the very beginning, he had always wondered about its fantastical nature, but had never discovered any clues.

Meng Hao felt like he was going to be quickly driven insane by the meat jelly parrot. It was squawking madly and radiated a look of hatred. Meng Hao himself felt like venting a bit. He suddenly had an intense desire to meet the parrot that resided within the copper mirror.

“The parrot must be incredibly extraordinary to be able to make the meat jelly so angry. Maybe when it comes out, it can take care of the meat jelly for me.” Meng Hao’s eyes glittered as he suddenly reached an understanding. “Didn’t the meat jelly say earlier that when I reach Core Formation, the parrot can come out? Perhaps... it’s like the mastiff, a type of Weapon Spirit!”

“Why don’t you fight back? Hmm?” The meat jelly parrot blustered as it pecked at the mirror. “I won’t let you off this time, I’m going to convert you! Hahaha! You can’t come out. You can’t come out! I can piss you off as much as I want and you can’t come out.” The meat jelly quivered with excitement. However, it was at this point that the mirror suddenly flickered, and the meat jelly let out a cry. It released its claws and flew away. The copper mirror flew after it, repeatedly sending out invisible attack rays.

Meng Hao watched on contentedly, doing nothing to stop the copper mirror. However, it quickly became apparent that the meat jelly wasn’t being hurt at all. He flicked his sleeve, returning the copper mirror to the bag of the Cosmos.

The meat jelly parrot flapped its wings as it flew back over and landed on Meng Hao’s shoulder. It began to chatter into his ear like usual.

At least this form looked better than a stack of hats. Meng Hao’s desire to reach Core Formation was now even more intense. He took a deep breath. Ignoring the prattle of the meat jelly, he flew into the air and shot off toward the horizon.

“The poison within me is a big problem,” he thought. “I really need to figure a way to infiltrate the Violet Fate Sect and see if I can find a way to become Grandmaster Pill Demon’s disciple. Then I can get rid of the poison once and for all.” His eyes glittered as he proceeded onward. He had considered this the last time he was in a city controlled by the Violet Fate Sect. The Spring and Autumn tree could only alleviate the symptoms of the poison and buy him some time.

The only way to truly dispel the poison was to get into the Violet Fate Sect.

“Besides, if I want to form a Perfect Gold Core, I first need to have a Violet Core. To form a Violet Core requires a suitable technique. That technique is none other than the Violet Fate Sect’s Violet Qi from the East!” Meng Hao frowned. It was a good idea, but he couldn’t think of any way to infiltrate the Violet Fate Sect. He had offended too many people there. There was Wu Dingqiu and

Chu Yuyan, as well as the disciples he had met in the State of Zhao, who were surely members of the Inner Sect by now.

“I need to switch identities. I need a way to become someone else.” He sighed. Obviously it was all a flight of fancy that should just be forgotten. Suddenly, his expression changed. He looked at the bag of the Cosmos, and his eyes shined with intelligence.

“The mask.... If I had an appearance-changing mask, then I could do it. As for a mask...I do have one! But who knows if the mask has that power? Furthermore, my Cultivation base needs to be at Core Formation before I can use it. Also, what if the mask just doesn’t work that way....” He slowly turned his head to look at the chattering parrot on his shoulder. His eyes glittered.

“What are you looking at me like that for?” said the meat jelly parrot with surprise, staring at him.

Meng Hao ignored it. He flew down to the ground and sat cross-legged. He smacked the bag of the Cosmos and retrieved the blood-colored mask.

As soon as the meat jelly saw the mask, its eyes went wide and it flapped its wings violently, flying around Meng Hao in a circle and letting out raucous squawks.

“What’s that? What’s that? Heavens! What is that evil thing? Child, you’ve trodden too far down the path of wickedness. Fear not, I can pull you back. I will convert you. Eeeeeee? What’s that inside? Why am I seeing an old man? Waaah! This old man looks so miserable. Child, you can’t do this. It’s wrong. It’s immoral. Eee? This old guy has performed possession! Old man, that’s immoral. That’s wrong....”

Meng Hao poured Spiritual Sense into the mask and was immediately able to see the blood-red form of the mastiff. It lay there sleeping, its aura majestic and boundless and growing even stronger. Meng Hao looked at it, and his expression grew soft.

“Hurry up and awaken...” he said with Spiritual Sense. The mastiff’s body twitched, and warmth emanated from it, a reply of sorts. Meng Hao’s smile grew warmer, and he thought back to everything that had happened during the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament.

“I’m waiting for you to wake up,” said Meng Hao softly. His eyes flashed as they fell upon the flag with three streamers. He was fully aware that his Cultivation base was not high enough to use the flag. He could only pour some Spiritual Sense into it and brand it to himself.

“Core Formation.... If I can become a Core Formation expert, then I should be able to use this flag...”

Last, Meng Hao touched the Li Clan Patriarch with his Spiritual Sense. He sat recoiled in the corner, his body illusory and transparent, and his face wan and sallow. It seemed as if at any moment he might dissipate into nothing.

As Meng Hao looked at him, he raised his head and glared back. His gaze was as fierce as ever, sinister to the extreme.

“There’s a question I can’t stop thinking about,” said Meng Hao calmly. “Why did you help Li Daoyi? The first time I saw you was in the sixth matrix, and you were a statue. The second time I saw you, you had become Li Daoyi’s Blood Divinity. Why?”

The Li Clan Patriarch laughed coldly, refusing to respond.

“It turns out you possessed the Blood Divinity. That makes me curious. Before possessing the Blood Divinity... who were you!?” His voice was as calm as ever. However, when the Li Clan Patriarch heard his words, his heart shook. His identity was his biggest secret, and no one had any clue about it. Even Meng Hao could only speculate about his relationship to Li Daoyi. Any details would be difficult to ascertain.

The Li Clan Patriarch laughed disdainfully. “You want to know? Beg me for a year, then maybe I’ll think about it.” He didn’t care about anything, not even death. After facing the loneliness of the Blood Immortal Legacy zone for four thousand years, he had incredible strength of will. Even Meng Hao’s previous threatening methods couldn’t really affect him now.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever. He glanced one last time at the weak form of the Li Clan Patriarch, and then narrowed his eyes and retracted his Spiritual Sense. He gazed at the surface of the blood-colored mask, and then looked at the meat jelly.

“You like to convert people, right?” asked Meng Hao.

“No,” the meat jelly responded solemnly, “I don’t like to convert people, I like to persuade them. Understand? Persuade.”

Meng Hao sighed. “The old man in this mask lived a life of extreme wickedness. He’s performed the most evil of acts and is completely corrupted by immorality. He loves to bully the weak, and is extremely vile in all ways. I captured him and put him in here out of mercy, because I wanted to admonish him. However, his magic is just too powerful. I just can’t influence him...” Before he could even finish talking, the meat jelly parrot’s eyes grew wide and it began to fume.

“Do you dare!? This type of person should only be converted by me! I hate nothing more than evildoers! I must convert him!” It suddenly looked extremely excited at the prospect of converting a bad guy such as this. Without waiting for a response from Meng Hao, its body flashed and it entered the blood-colored mask.

Chapter 178: An Old Friend

As soon as it entered the mask, the meat jelly cried out in alarm.

“Th-th-that’s ... a Yellow Springs Nine Burials Flag!! It already has three streamers! Evil! Profound evil!” Looking very stern, the meat jelly approached the gaping Li Patriarch. “Old man, it turns out you are evil incarnate! In the name of Justice, I shall convert you! You can’t be like this, it’s immoral. You won’t meet a good end this way...”

Meng Hao coughed lightly and then put the mask away. He let out a deep sigh, and his eyes glittered sharply.

“Yellow Springs Nine Burials Flag?” Lost in thought, Meng Hao was just about to fly out of the concealment of the forest, when he stopped. He hid his Cultivation base and narrowed his eyes.

His Cultivation base was at the mid Foundation Establishment stage, which meant that he could contend with Dao Children. However, he had no reason to do so. This area was the border region between the Blood Demon Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect. He must be very cautious, and not get carried away. He resolved to not forget this.

After the space of about ten breaths had passed, several colorful beams of light appeared in the sky overhead. Ten Cultivators appeared, each and every one standing on a flying sword. They all wore identical outfits, and looked very impressive and dignified. Their passage sent a roaring sound into the air.

Of the ten people, the three in the front were the most conspicuous. They wore robes of interlocking black and white. Sheathed swords were strapped to their backs, and the sword auras beneath their feet shined brightly, seemingly capable of slicing effortlessly through anything.

One of the three was a stately looking man of about forty years of age. He was at the late Foundation Establishment stage, and as he flew, his black hair whipped around him, interspersed with occasional strands of white hair.

Behind him was a young man of about thirty years of age with thin lips and a harsh expression. He had curved eyes like a red phoenix that radiated coldness. He was incredibly good looking, but seemed cold-blooded in nature. The sword under his feet issued a frigid pressure. He was at the mid Foundation Establishment stage, and seemed to be the picture of imposing power.

The last person appeared to be about twenty-seven or twenty-eight. His features were ordinary, but he radiated an air of righteousness. He was only at the early Foundation Establishment stage, but his eyes glowed brightly. He seemed to be filled with a powerful aura.

When Meng Hao caught sight of him, his mind flooded with memories. This man filled with righteousness was none other than... Meng Hao's Elder Brother from the Reliance Sect, who had been taken away by the Solitary Sword Sect.

Years had passed. Yet here, right in front of him, was Chen Fan. He thought back to the day they had parted, and it seemed like a very, very long time ago. The Reliance Sect was no more, and the State of Zhao was gone. Meng Hao wondered if Chen Fan was still the same person he had been before.

He was silent as he observed the group of people. They were all disciples of the number one Sect in the Southern Domain, the Solitary Sword Sect. It wasn't anything remarkable for the Solitary Sword Sect to appear here. After all, this area was a region of contention between the Blood Demon Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect.

Meng Hao knew about the constant friction between the two great Sects, as well as the occasional skirmishes that occurred.

Just as the group of people was about to disappear in the distance, Meng Hao's expression flickered, and he looked back up into the sky.

Soon, he caught sight of ten beams of blood-red light whistling through the air. They were moving at top speed, kicking up a wind that buffeted the mountain forest below. Above the group of ten people were a handful of enormous creatures, flying along with them.

These ten Cultivators had grim expressions, filled with death. Killing intent circled around them and up to the beasts above them, who seemed to be feeding on it. The beasts roared and howled.

These, of course, were disciples of the Blood Demon Sect. Their speed was incredible as they passed over Meng Hao. From the direction they were heading, it seemed they were pursuing the Solitary Sword Sect Cultivators.

As they disappeared over the horizon, Meng Hao emerged from the forest. Muttering to himself, he looked at the direction the Cultivators from the two Sects had gone. Instead of flying after them, he stayed down into the cover of the trees to follow.

Meng Hao sped through the trees for the time it takes two incense sticks to burn. It was then that he heard the sounds of explosions ringing out. He increased his speed, and before long, caught sight of the Solitary Sword Sect and the Blood Demon Sect Cultivators locked in fierce magical combat. Booms echoed out, and ripples of magic spread out through the air.

To the Solitary Sword Sect people, a single sword was an instrument of death, incomparably sharp. As for the Blood Demon Sect people, their magic was ever-changing. Surprisingly, it wasn't dominated by the color of blood; rather, they used an endless stream of techniques. The phantom beasts they controlled possessed extraordinary strength. There were only three of them, but they charged about violently, making them impossible to approach.

There were no Core Formation experts in the two groups of people. The strongest among them was of the Pseudo Core stage. The rest were all of Foundation Establishment. They fought back and forth wildly, surrounded by a bloody glow. Meng Hao watched as a few among them perished. At the moment, the Blood Demon Sect seemed to have the upper hand. Suddenly, though, the eyes of the Pseudo Core Cultivator from the Solitary Sword Sect flickered with a cold light.

“Solitary Sword Spell!” he shouted. The Solitary Sword Sect disciples, including Chen Fan, flew toward him. Their swords glittered shockingly. In the blink of an eye, the sword merged together to form a single enormous sword, three hundred meters in length. The massive sword shot toward the three phantom beasts.

An explosion rang out in all directions. The phantom beasts trembled and roared, and then one by one, disintegrated into nothing. The massive sword then transformed into hundreds of glowing sword beams, which shot toward the remaining Blood Demon Sect disciples, as well as... toward the ground, where Meng Hao stood.

Meng Hao frowned, and then leaped up into the air. He waved his right hand, causing a gale force wind to spring up. The approaching sword beams instantly broke apart into pieces.

Meng Hao's appearance, and his quick dispatching of the sword beams, immediately attracted the attention of the surrounding Solitary Sword Cultivators. This was especially so of the harsh-looking young man of the mid Foundation Establishment stage, whose eyes radiated iciness. The sword beams that had shot toward Meng Hao just now had been under his control.

"This Blood Demon Sect villain harbors evil designs," said the young man coolly. "Junior Brothers, hear my command. Snuff him out!" He seemed disinclined to even verify Meng Hao's identity. His appearance here was enough for the young man to pass judgement on him.

As soon as the words came out of his mouth, the forty-year-old late Foundation Establishment Cultivator frowned. However, he didn't intervene. The eyes of the surrounding Cultivators flickered with coldness as they charged toward Meng Hao.

At this moment, however, Chen Fan caught sight of Meng Hao. After a moment passed, his eyes filled with joy.

"Stop!" he cried, rushing forward with all the speed of the early Foundation Establishment stage. He passed the others, flying directly up to Meng Hao. "This is my Junior Brother!" he cried excitedly. "Everyone stop!"

His expression was one of intense happiness, almost trance-like, as he gazed at Meng Hao and recalled the past.

Meng Hao looked at Chen Fan and smiled. Chen Fan's expression and words were filled with sincerity, and now Meng Hao was certain... he hadn't changed. He was the same person he had been seven or eight years ago.

Meng Hao took a deep breath and then said, "Greetings, Elder Brother." He clasped hands and bowed deeply.

Chen Fan laughed. He looked a bit different than he had seven or eight years ago, but his personality was the same. He stepped forward and embraced Meng Hao.

“Junior Brother Chen,” said the harsh-looking young man with a hypocritical smile. “How come I’ve never seen this Junior Brother of yours? I didn’t know the Solitary Sword Sect had a disciple such as this.” His voice was filled with sinister accusation.

Chen Fan frowned, standing protectively in front of Meng Hao. “Elder Brother Zhou, he’s not a Solitary Sword Sect disciple. He’s my Junior Brother from when I was in the Reliance Sect.”

Meng Hao didn’t say anything, and his expression was the same as ever. He wanted to see how Chen Fan would handle the situation.

“So he’s a disciple from a tiny, backwater Sect,” said Zhou, his voice sinister and yet leisurely. “He would normally be inconsequential. Yet here he is spying on us. He must take responsibility!”

The surrounding Solitary Sword Sect disciples exchanged glances, then moved backward silently. It seems this was not the first time they had seen conflict erupt between Zhou and Chen Fan.

The middle-aged Pseudo Core Cultivator sighed, looking at the two of them with an annoyed expression, and then glancing down at Meng Hao.

“Take responsibility?” said Chen Fan coolly. His eyes were cold as he stood there in front of Meng Hao. “Zhou Shanyue I would very much like to know exactly how you expect my Junior Brother to take responsibility? With me here, which one of you dares to cause problems for him!?” He slapped his bag of holding, and a small black blade appeared, about the size of a hand. It flew up to circle around his head.

Meng Hao’s expression changed to one of shock the instant he saw the blade appear. So did the faces of the surrounding Cultivators. The Pseudo Core stage man gasped.

Zhou Shanyue’s face immediately grew extremely unsightly. A look of jealousy filled his eyes as he glared at Chen Fan. His heart, however, filled with dread.

The blade emanated the fearsome power of Core Formation!

“Zhou Shanyue, I’m waiting for your response,” said Chen Fan calmly.

Chapter 179: Sect Brothers

“That’s my father’s flying dagger!” said Zhou Shanyue with a cold snort, staring at the black blade hovering around Chen Fan’s head.

“It’s a gift from my Master,” replied Chen Fan, his expression cold. Immediately, Zhou Shanyue’s expression darkened. He flicked his sleeve and began to move toward Chen Fan.

“To take responsibility is simple,” he said as he strode forward. “I want both of his eyes. Let’s see if you dare to try to kill me. If you do, you have my respect. But how will you explain that to your Master, my father?!”

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as always. He watched calmly as the scene unfolded. In front of him, Chen Fan gazed coldly at the approaching Zhou Shanyue. He lifted his right hand, and the flying dagger immediately began to glow.

Everything seemed ready to dissolve into chaos. Zhou Shanyue proceeded forward, a savage expression covering his face.

“I can’t believe that you would dare to attack me over an outsider!”

“To you, he’s an outsider, but to me, he’s a Junior Brother.” Chen Fan waved his hand, and the flying dagger shot toward Zhou Shanyue.

Zhou Shanyue’s hair stood on end, and he suddenly stopped moving. The black dagger had come to a stop right in front of his face.

“Don’t push me, Zhou Shanyue,” Chen Fan said softly.

Meng Hao was just about to take a step forward when the Pseudo Core stage Cultivator suddenly said, “Just what do you two think you’re doing?! Zhou Shanyue, stand down! Chen Fan, if this is your Junior Brother from your former Sect, then you’ll need to vouch for him. You will be responsible for all his future mistakes.” The words obviously contained a threat. While it seemed on the surface that he was trying to smooth over the situation, he was actually making a small matter into a bigger one.

Meng Hao was quite experienced, so obviously he understood what was being said. He laughed coldly.

“My affairs have nothing to do with my Elder Brother,” he said. “If you don’t take your words back voluntarily, your excellency, then I’ll be forced to make you take them back.” His voice was ice cold. When the middle-aged man heard them, his eyes grew icy and he stared back at Meng Hao.

Chen Fan, of course, had never imagined that Meng Hao would dare to speak. Without another word, he flashed an incantation sign, and the flying dagger re-appeared at his side.

“Chen Fan, it’s not that I didn’t try to give you some face. Your Junior Brother here needs to be taught a lesson.” With a grim smile, the middle-aged man flicked his sleeve and began to move toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever. His Cultivation base had four Dao Pillars. He could contend with the late Foundation Establishment stage and could even stand up to Dao Children with Flawless Foundations. There was no need to even mention this middle-aged man who clearly had a Cracked Foundation at best.

Meng Hao could slay him with ease.

Granted, the man was a fellow Disciple of Elder Brother Chen. However, Meng Hao couldn’t allow people to level threats against him that could affect Elder Brother Chen later. That was why he had tried to separate himself from Chen Fan.

The surrounding Solitary Sword Sect disciples watched on with cold smiles, eyeing Meng Hao with looks of disdain. They obviously thought Meng Hao was being arrogant and conceited to think he could stand up to someone who had completed the great circle of Foundation Establishment.

Various thoughts ran through the minds of the surrounding disciples.

“I never imagined Elder Brother Chen would make friends with someone who so easily overestimates himself.”

“He’s relying on Elder Brother Chen’s presence, like a fox exploiting the might of a tiger.”

“He’s looking to die!”

A sinister smile appeared on Zhou Shanyue's face. He moved backward a few paces, contentedly watching the commotion.

Meng Hao looked as calm as ever as the middle-aged man raced forward. A slight smile appeared on his face, and he was about to step forward, when Chen Fan held his arm in front of him.

“Elder Brother Li, my Junior Brother is young and insensible. Please give me some more face, and don't take offense. Let's just drop the matter.” Having said this, he clasped Meng Hao's shoulder and gazed at him warmly. “Listen to Elder Brother,” he said. When the four words entered Meng Hao's ears, they were filled with a gentle warmth that he hadn't experienced in a very long time. He looked into Chen Fan's eyes and then nodded.

The man named Li stopped in his tracks, glaring coldly at Meng Hao for a moment, and then looking back at Chen Fan. Slowly, his face relaxed. A long moment passed, and then he said, “You need to help your Junior Brother learn not stop overestimating himself. If he doesn't, he'll end up a mutilated corpse sooner or later.” He flicked his sleeve and began to leave. Zhou Shanyue smiled mockingly and followed, along with the other Solitary Sword Disciples.

“We'll wait for you up ahead,” came the voice of Li. “You have the time it takes an incense stick to burn to catch up with your Junior Brother.”

As they disappeared into the distance, Meng Hao looked hesitantly at Chen Fan.

“Elder Brother, I....”

“You don't need to say anything,” said Chen Fan, his face covered with a wide smile. He embraced him warmly again.

Laughing happily, Chen Fan looked Meng Hao over, eyes filled with excitement because of their reunion. “You've grown up big and strong, I see! Haha! You're not the little scholar you used to be.”

In a voice as earnest as it had always been, he grabbed Meng Hao's arm and said, “Can you believe it? Here we are, fellow Brothers who've run into each other yet again in in the Southern Domain. We have to celebrate! Come come, tell your Elder Brother what you've been up to these past years. A while back, I heard that the State of Zhao disappeared! Ai....” He didn't even give Meng Hao a chance to respond.

His personality had always been like this. He talked and talked, and before long, enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn. The entire time, Meng Hao didn't have a chance to even say a single sentence. It was just like it had been back in the Reliance Sect.

Chen Fan was definitely long-winded, but even were he more so, Meng Hao wouldn't mind. Meng Hao's heart filled with warmth as he realized that everything Chen Fan was saying was out of concern for him. He was considerate, excited, and happy.

“That fatty Li Fugui, do you remember him? He used to follow you around all the time. Well, he's a pretty important person in the Golden Frost Sect now. Last time I went with Master to pay a visit to the Golden Frost Sect, I saw him swaggering around. He's definitely a darling of the Sect. If anyone dared to mess with him, a crowd of Golden Frost Sect disciples would instantly rush to help him....

“Junior Sister Xu is in sore straits, though. The only thing I could do was ask some people I know in the Black Sieve Sect to watch out for her. She's been stuck at the ninth level of Qi Condensation for years now. She needs a Foundation Establishment Pill. In the past years, I've performed some meritorious services for the Sect. I think it won't be long before I can get a Foundation Establishment Pill from Master to send to her.

“Oh, and then there's Wang Tengfei.... You'd best not provoke him again, he has an impressive amount of power backing him. Oh, right. You wouldn't believe the latest gossip. Rumor has it that his fiancée, Chu Yuyan from the Violet Fate Sect, is intimately involved with some stranger.

“The news is out, and all the Sects have heard about it. There was an eyewitness who saw Chu Yuyan wearing the clothing of some other man. There was obviously something shady going on.... Who do you think that guy could be? Whoever he is, I sure admire him. He was able to steal Chu Yuyan right from under Wang Tengfei's nose....” Meng Hao wasn't able to get a word in edgewise. When the topic of Chu Yuyan came up, a strange expression suddenly appeared on his face.

“So,” he thought, “that Zhou Daya fellow did exactly as I predicted and immediately began to spread rumors....” He gave a dry cough, not admitting to anything. Instead, he said, “Wow, that guy really is amazing. I hope I have a chance to meet him some day and maybe be friends.” His face was covered with an expression of admiration similar to Chen Fan's.

About this time, the clear sound of a sword could be heard ringing out in the air. Meng Hao looked up to see a Solitary Sword Sect disciple off in the distance, clearly urging them to hurry up.

Taking advantage in the break in Chen Fan's dialogue, Meng Hao scratched his head and said, "Elder Brother, maybe you should...." Before he could finish, he was submerged by more words from Chen Fan.

"Little Junior Brother, have you found a suitable beloved yet?" he said suddenly.

"Uh...." Meng Hao stared in shock. Chen Fan's question seemed to have come completely out of the blue. Before he could respond, Chen Fan nodded.

"Oh, I understand. You're still hung up on Elder Sister Xu. Junior Brother, listen to me carefully. There are a lot of female Cultivators in the Southern Domain, but there are four who are considered to be the most dazzling.

"Chu Yuyan is one of them, but you might as well forget about her. She belongs to Wang Tengfei and that other mysterious guy. However, the other three are really a match for your good looks and Cultivation base." Chen Fan's eyes shined brightly as he looked at Meng Hao. He sounded almost like a match-maker.

This topic completely exceeded Meng Hao's powers of prediction. He stared blankly at Elder Brother Chen. How could he have imagined that after all these years, Elder Brother Chen would suddenly have taken up this new interest? Meng Hao cleared his throat a few times. "Elder Brother, I...."

"Don't be so shy! Look, your Elder Brother has a lot of experience. There may be some things you don't understand about this kind of thing, but don't worry. I'll take care of everything. There's still plenty of time, plenty of time."

"Er... plenty of time, plenty of time...." Beads of sweat broke out on Meng Hao's forehead.

"Alright, you come with me to the Solitary Sword Sect. When we get there, the two of us can have a proper reunion." Not even giving Meng Hao a chance to refuse, Chen Fan grabbed him and made to leave.

"Elder Brother, this...."

"Listen to your Elder Brother, okay? Besides, pretty soon one of the three great Clans, the Song Clan, is going to have a big get-together. They've invited Chosen and Dao Children from all over

the Southern Domain. I'm going, so why don't you come along? It will be a good chance to meet some of the current generation of Chosen from the Southern Domain. You just stick with me, and I'll arrange everything.

"The State of Zhao is gone, and the Reliance Sect is no more. Throughout all these years, what I've worried about most is you! A few years ago, I sent someone with a message to find you, but by that time the State of Zhao had disappeared, and I feared that you had been killed.

"Let's not bring that up. Little Junior Brother, even now, what concerns me most is still you." He looked at Meng Hao earnestly. "You're on your own, without a Sect! That won't do. You listen to your Elder Brother, okay?"

Meng Hao's heart filled with warmth that spread out throughout his whole body. Unable to make himself refuse Chen Fan, he slowly nodded his head.

Chapter 180: Shan Ling

Chen Fan looked at Meng Hao and laughed heartily. Hearts filled with happiness, he and Meng Hao transformed into beams of prismatic light that shot off toward the other Solitary Sword Sect disciples.

When the man named Li saw Meng Hao approaching with Chen Fan, he frowned.

"My Junior Brother is acquainted with my Master and wishes to visit him," said Chen Fan coolly in explanation. "He will accompany us back to the Sect."

The man named Li said nothing. He simply turned and transformed into a colorful beam that shot up into the sky.

"Little Junior Brother, after we get to the Sect, I'll go implore Master to take you as a disciple. Then we can be fellow Brothers of the Solitary Sword Sect. It shouldn't be a very big deal. I've never asked anything of Master, so there's an eighty to ninety percent chance he'll agree. Of course, I expect he'll only accept you as a novice. However, his Cultivation Base is at the Nascent Soul stage, so being one of his novitiates is still a high position within the Solitary Sword Sect." It seemed Chen Fan already had Meng Hao's future planned out meticulously.

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Elder Brother, for the moment, I don't think that's necessary. I actually have some matters I need to take care of."

“Little Junior Brother!” said Chen Fan, his expression suddenly very solemn. “I understand that you don’t want to join another Sect. I felt the same way back then. I only wanted to be a member of a single Sect for my entire life. However... we are Cultivators. Our Sect is the foundation of everything, especially in the Southern Domain. Anyone who is not a member of a Sect is a rogue Cultivator. Regardless of Cultivation base level, rogue Cultivators make progress only with great difficulty. Years can be wasted, and the results can be in vain.

“You need to listen to me in this matter. The Solitary Sword Sect is the number one Sect in the Southern Domain. Its Dao Reserves are incredibly profound. It’s a place where both of us can grow up.”

Meng Hao didn’t respond.

As they traveled, Chen Fan continued to give him advice, all the way until afternoon of the next day. Eventually, the Solitary Sword Sect’s main gate appeared up ahead. Finally, Meng Hao nodded.

Chen Fan’s smile grew wider as he gazed at Meng Hao with the kind warmth of a member of the elder generation looking at a junior. Although he wasn’t very much older than Meng Hao, in his eyes, Meng Hao was still that young scholar who had just joined the Sect.

The Solitary Sword Sect was comprised of an enormous mountain, visible from far off in the distance. This mountain was the number one mountain in the entire Southern Domain, a hundred times larger than any other mountain.

The name of this mountain was... Solitary Dao Mountain!

Floating above it in the sky was another mountain that seemed to be a mirror image of it. From a distance, they made an outline like that of an hourglass. Anyone who caught sight of it for the first time would surely be shocked.

The name of the second mountain was... Solitary Sword Mountain!

The mountains were so large that it was almost impossible to look from one end to the other in a single glance. Meng Hao had never seen mountains as large as this in his entire life. He couldn’t help but tremble inwardly at the sight of them.

If it were only these two mountains, then it wouldn't be a very big deal. But... in the center the two mountains was a massive sword, piercing through them into the ground!

The hilt of the sword protruded above the mountains and stretched up into the sky.

Boundless rays of morning sunlight filled the area, giving it a truly celestial feeling.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. Having laid eyes on the Black Sieve Sect and the Solitary Sword Sect, he had now seen two of the great Sects of the Southern Domain. The Black Sieve Sect was undeniably influential. The dread caused by their power would cause anyone to bow before them.

However, the Solitary Sword Sect's sheer, raw might didn't cause others to bow before them, but to fear them!

"I wonder what the other great Sects look like..." thought Meng Hao to himself as he gazed at the Solitary Sword Sect.

The group of people flew along quickly. As they approached Solitary Dao Mountain, they reached an area that was protected by a beautiful field of colorful light. Up ahead, the man named Li looked back coldly at Meng Hao and then gave a cold snort. With that, he disappeared into the light.

Meng Hao watched coolly as he left. In his estimation, the man was someone who couldn't really see to the heart of things. If Chen Fan hadn't stopped him earlier, the man would either have been injured or killed. It all would have depended on Meng Hao's mood.

"Don't worry," said Chen Fan, clearly worried for Meng Hao. "Once Master accepts you as a novice, then Elder Brother Li won't dare to bother you." He gave a comforting smile, and then pulled Meng Hao in through the colorful field of light. He pulled out a glowing jade slip. The light swirled up around the two of them. It flickered, and then they disappeared.

When they reappeared, they were at the foot of Solitary Dao Mountain. The air was filled with the scent of blooming flowers and the sounds of birds singing. Gurgling streams could be seen. There were quite a few Solitary Sword Sect disciples going to and fro. When they saw Chen Fan, each and every one gave him respectful salutes.

Chen Fan led Meng Hao to the courtyard of a house. "Little Junior Brother," he said, "you wait for me here. I'm going to go pay my respects to the Elders. After that, I'll go look for Master. I

probably won't return until after nightfall. You rest a bit here, or go walk around if you'd like. Don't go too far, though. When I get back, we can stay up all night chatting." He clasped Meng Hao's shoulder, and then turned and flew off in a beam of colorful light.

Meng Hao watched him depart, then looked around at his surroundings. He opened the gate of the courtyard and entered the house. It was decorated tastefully, although not extravagantly. Everything emanated refinement. This was especially true of the vast collection of scrolls. Meng Hao selected one of the ancient texts and sat down cross-legged to examine it.

After some time passed, he put the ancient scroll down, and a thoughtful look gleamed in his eyes.

"Maybe I should join the Solitary Sword Sect..." he thought, his brow furrowed. It wasn't his first choice. However, the Black Sieve Sect surely wouldn't just let go the matter of the meat jelly. Entering the Solitary Sword Sect might not be a bad choice.

His eyes glittered stubbornly at the thought of the Violet Fate Sect. Dispelling his poison wasn't the only reason he wished to do so. "I'm still inclined toward the Violet Fate Sect," he thought. "I really want to learn Violet Qi from the East..." With that technique, he could form a Violet Core, which was the pinnacle of Core Formation.

"Furthermore, I need to study alchemy. I can't rely on others to do it for me every time I need a pill concocted. That's especially true of the Perfect Core Pill..." Meng Hao sat there for some time lost in thought. Soon, evening began to fall. Sunlight streamed in from outside. Meng Hao took a deep breath and, seeing that Chen Fan hadn't returned, decided to step outside of the house for a bit to look at Solitary Dao Mountain.

The setting sun shone onto the mountain, giving it a somewhat hazy appearance. Mist began to rise up around the mountain, and as Meng Hao looked closer, his eyes narrowed.

He suddenly caught sight of a woman wearing a blue-green garment, floating down a path on Solitary Dao Mountain.

The appearance of this woman made the haziness of the surroundings suddenly seem clear. The sound of people dropping to their knees and prostrating themselves to her could be heard.

"It's Elder Sister Shan Ling."

“It’s really Elder Sister Shan Ling. I’ve heard that on the ninth day of every month, at dusk, she descends the mountain to collect dewdrops...”

“Greetings, Elder Sister Shan Ling.”

The sound of voices drifted down to Meng Hao. He watched as the woman slowly floated down the mountain, and his heart trembled as suddenly, the voice of the Demon Sealing Jade sounded out in his head.

“A stone of the Ninth Mountain descended and became a new mountain (山.) The mountain (山) has a spirit (灵,) and the spirit (灵) is demonic. Its will is not of this world. If you encounter it... allow it to transform magically if it is good. Seal and exterminate it if it is violent. Make your choice after careful consideration.”

The sound echoed out in Meng Hao’s mind. He stood there silently for a moment recovering his composure. He was used to the bizarreness of the Demon Sealing Jade. He looked at the woman, and his eyes shone with a strange light.

Quite a large group of Cultivators had flown over and were bowing to the woman and offering respectful words. One of them was none other than the middle-aged man named Li, who bowed toward her politely.

The moment that Meng Hao’s gaze fell upon the woman, she looked down at him and seemed to pause in mid-air. A sharp look filled her eyes as she looked at him.

Their gazes locked for the space of a few breaths. The woman’s brow furrowed slightly, and then she looked away and continued off into the distance. She left, but the man named Li seemed to have taken notice of the look that had passed between the two of them.

He had also noticed Shan Ling’s furrowed brow. He gave a cold harrumph, and then his body flashed, and he shot down toward Meng Hao.

This aroused the attention of the surrounding Solitary Sword Sect disciples. In the blink of an eye, the man named Li arrived to float above the courtyard where Meng Hao stood. He looked down, a cold gleam in his eyes.

“You again!” he said coldly. “First you overestimate your strength, and then you dare to be disrespectful to the Solitary Sword Sect’s Elder Sister Shan Ling! Just what is your purpose in coming here?!” This caused many of the surrounding disciples to look at Meng Hao.

“Who is this guy?”

“He looks a bit familiar, but I don’t think I’ve seen him before....”

“I remember him. That’s the guest who Elder Brother Chen brought with him earlier this afternoon. I wonder what Elder Brother Li wants with him?”

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever as he looked up at the haughty Li character.

“What exactly do you mean, your excellency?” said Meng Hao coolly.

“Whatever your purpose here, you’re in the Solitary Sword Sect. Considering your actions here, I think I need to take your Elder Brother’s place in teaching you a lesson.” He obviously wasn’t interested in providing any sort of education to Meng Hao. Meng Hao had left him with a bad impression originally, and when combined with the Shan Ling’s frown, caused him to be filled with ill feelings. He lifted his right hand, whereupon the power of the great circle of Foundation Establishment exploded out.

“Ridiculous,” said Meng Hao coolly. The Li man’s hand descended, and the illusory image of a large sword appeared. It descended toward Meng Hao, bursting with the power of the great circle of Foundation Establishment.

Meng Hao’s eyes flashed coldly, and he lifted his own hand. He didn’t have any good feelings toward this person, after all. However, before he could actually do anything, a small black dagger shot toward them and slammed into the Li man’s phantom sword.

A boom rattled out, and the phantom sword disintegrated. The Li man’s face flashed as Chen Fan shot toward them in a beam of colorful light.

“Elder Brother Li, you continue to harass my Junior Brother. With a Cultivation base at the Pseudo Core stage, must you really cause me to lose so much face? I’m one of the Seven Solitary Sword Sons. Just who the hell do you think you are?”

