

The Heavens 211

Chapter 211: A Despicable Name

Soon, the old man brought Meng Hao and the young woman to their destination. It was a very large mountain valley, filled with a variety of buildings. Off in the distance were areas devoted to growing medicinal plants. As soon as they arrived, Meng Hao could smell a fragrant aroma wafting through the air.

There were many young people in the valley, all of whom wore short, light yellow garments. Some were picking medicinal plants and others were lost in thought as they studied jade slips. Some sat beneath the evening sunshine, staring at medicinal plants which they held in their hands. The plants swayed back and forth in a very bizarre fashion.

After landing, the old man flicked his sleeve and cried, “Bai Yunlai!” [1] The young people nearby all looked up. Catching sight of the old man, their faces filled with respect, and they saluted with clasped hands.

An average-sized young man ran out of one of the buildings and approached them. He looked to be about thirty years of age.

“Master Xu, sir, I’m here,” he said in a flattering tone. “What orders do you have? I can help you with absolutely anything.”

The old man glared at him. “These are two new apprentice alchemists who just joined the Sect. Explain things to them and then take them to get their medallions.” With that, the old man turned to look at Meng Hao and the young woman. He nodded encouragingly, then transforming into a beam of light and shot away.

Now that the old man was gone, the surrounding youths ignored Meng Hao and the others and continued on with their various activities. They didn’t seem to have any good or bad will toward Meng Hao whatsoever. Their expressions were calm and even.

Meng Hao was going to have to get used to being in a Sect like this. Life in the Reliance Sect had been very different. This was now the second Sect he had joined. He sighed inwardly.

The young woman next to him clasped hands toward Bai Yunlai and said, “Greetings, Elder Brother Bai.”

“Hey, no Elders here, and no need for saluting.” Bai Yunlai laughed heartily, looking back and forth between Meng Hao and the young woman. “You two came just at the right time. Most of the apprentice alchemists in the Sect have been very busy with the Pill Auction. There aren’t very many people left behind. Alright, you two don’t worry. With Old Bai here, you’ll quickly get into the swing of things. Come come. Let’s walk around a bit, and I’ll introduce the place to you.” After asking their names, Bai Yunlai led the way as they began to walk around.

“If you want a description of the Violet Fate Sect’s East Pill Division, well, that’s a massive topic. There are no less than a hundred valleys just like this one. Each one is home to nearly a thousand apprentice alchemists. Most of our time is spent growing medicinal plants, memorizing the names of various medicines, and occasionally harvesting the plants. Do you know who the most tired people in the whole Southern Domain are? Us Violet Fate Sect apprentice alchemists, that’s who!

“One hundred thousand apprentice alchemists, each with their own work to do. Actually, we have to participate in all the different activities. We need to memorize the names of over one hundred thousand medicinal plants, we have to care for the growing plants, plus we have to find time to practice Cultivation. If we didn’t do that, then we wouldn’t be able to catalyze the plants into growth. As for you two, well, you’ll figure everything out eventually.

“Us apprentice alchemists are real peons. Only if you stick out like an awl poking through a sack, and distinguish yourself in some way, can you possibly become a master alchemist and study true alchemy. Then Inner Sect disciples will come looking for you to concoct pills. According to Sect rules, they have to provide compensation to us when we concoct pills for them. It’s always a good day when that happens.

“Too bad there are one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists. How many do you think become master alchemists? There are only a thousand in the entire Sect! It’s so difficult!”

Bai Yunlai spoke very quickly as he led Meng Hao and the young woman through various valleys.

“See here? This is one of the places where only master alchemists can go. We aren’t allowed in...” They continued on. “This area belongs to the Violet Qi Division, although it’s not the Inner Sect, just the Outer Sect.” Bai Yunlai had led the two of them to one of the valleys toward the front of the Sect. Here were congregated quite a few Cultivators of the Violet Qi Division. Courteous expressions appeared on their faces when they saw Bai Yunlai. It seemed he was a relatively influential person within the Sect.

Meng Hao cleared his throat and then said some flattering things to Bai Yunlai, who instantly looked very happy and said, “You know, I know almost everything about the Sect, and there aren’t many things I can’t take care of. Junior Brother Fang, if you ever have any problems in the future, you just come look for me and I’ll take care of everything for you.”

Suddenly, Bai Yunlai stopped in his tracks. He pointed up toward the center of the valley, where an iron spear was stabbed into the side of the mountain. The spear was bent, and having been exposed to the wind and rain, was covered in rust.

Bai Yunlai looked around, then lowered his voice and said, “Do you see that iron spear? There’s a story behind it.”

A strange expression appeared on Meng Hao’s face. He had noticed this valley when they’d flown past earlier. He looked up at the spear, coughing slightly, and feigning extreme interest.

“Do you know who put that spear there? It was Wu Dingqiu of the senior generation. They say that ten years ago, on a dark and stormy night, Elder Wu returned to the Sect in a foul rage, with that spear in his hand. He threw it with all his might, and it landed right there!

“According to the rumors from that year, he wanted all the Outer Sect disciples to remember the shame caused by that spear. He said, ‘You fools are always stupid to the point of death! If you keep being this stupid, you really will die one day!’” Bai Yunlai’s voice was very quiet as he spoke, and yet extremely vivid. The young woman’s eyes went wide as she listened.

Meng Hao spontaneously gave another light cough.

“Where did the spear come from?” asked the young woman.

“Where did it come from? Heh heh. You might not believe it. According to the legend, ten years ago, a group of Outer Sect disciples participated in an Outer Sect promotion test. It was held in an extremely dangerous location, where they met a vile creature of a man. That guy ended up selling the iron spear to the two strongest of the disciples!

“The price they paid reduced them to poverty and ruin. They even borrowed Spirit Stones from fellow disciples to pay for it. They thought it was a precious treasure, which was why they bought it. Ai, it wasn’t until a few years ago that they finally paid back all the Spirit Stones. Anyway, when

Wu Dingqiu heard what happened he felt it was an utter humiliation. And he was the leader of the group! What do you two think, was that man despicable or what?"

The young woman had been listening with wide eyes and gaping mouth. She looked up at the iron spear, which looked in all respects to be completely normal. She couldn't understand why the two strongest of the disciples would waste so much money on it.

Meng Hao felt a little guilty. Then he noticed that Bai Yunlai was looking at him, so he nodded and solemnly said, "That fellow is definitely matchlessly despicable. It's enough to make one's hair bristle with anger!" Actually, after meeting Qian Shuihen and Lu Song back in the Song Clan, he had guessed that the matter from that year had had a profoundly negative effect on the two of them, which continued on down to this day.

What he had never imagined was that it actually affected the entire Violet Fate Sect. Suddenly, he felt a bit sorry for Qian Shuihen and Lu Song. And now he understood why they had been gnashing their teeth with fury back at the Song Clan.

Bai Yunlai sighed and shook his head. "The spear is here as a reminder to all Violet Fate Outer Sect disciples. They are never to forget this matter...."

"Who was the person who sold them the spear?" asked the young woman, her curiosity piqued.

"His name is Meng Hao," said Bai Yunlai quietly. "Have you heard of him? Recently, everybody in the Southern Domain has been talking about him. At the Song Clan search for a son-in-law, he revealed himself as the successor of the Sublime Spirit Scripture. He's the same person who was involved in that scandal with Chu Yuyan."

"Meng Hao?" said the young woman, gaping.

"Quiet!" said Bai Yunlai quickly. "That name is taboo in the Violet Fate Sect! No one dares to speak it aloud...."

Meng Hao stood off to the side, feeling even more guilty. He continued to clear his throat. He suddenly had the feeling that coming to the Violet Fate Sect might not have been the best decision.

It was at this time that his facial expression suddenly flickered. He had just caught sight of a beam of light approaching from the distance. It transformed into a grim-faced young man who stared ferociously at Bai Yunlai. This was none other than... Qian Shuihen.

“Bai Yunlai, what are you doing sticking around here?! Why haven’t you moved on?!”

Bai Yunlai suddenly shivered, and a flattering expression appeared on his face.

“Elder Brother Qian, I’m just showing these two apprentice alchemists around the Sect. We were just leaving, just leaving.” With that he grabbed Meng Hao and the young woman and hurriedly led them away.

“Did you see? That was one of the two who bought the spear that year. In the future, you must never under any circumstances utter the name Meng Hao in front of him. If you do, he’ll fly into a violent rage.” He continued on with some more earnest exhortation: “Furthermore, if you two ever leave the Sect to do training in the future, you must be extremely careful if you ever run into Meng Hao. His deviousness knows no bounds!”

The wide-eyed young woman’s face was covered with disbelief. However, she quickly nodded, clearly placing the warning deep in her heart. Inside, Meng Hao laughed bitterly. Now he knew why they had looked so wary back in the Song Clan when they heard his name, and yet he didn’t even recognize them.

“Remember,” Bai Yunlai repeated, “the name Meng Hao is taboo in our Sect. Don’t forget that! Okay, now we need to go get your identity medallions and handle your living arrangements.” As of now, the girl clearly viewed Meng Hao as a fearsome tiger. Meng Hao could only laugh bitterly inside as Bai Yunlai led them away.

Soon they arrived at a valley which was relatively large and crowded.

“Since you’ve joined the Violet Fate Sect, you’re obviously from local Cultivator Clans. As you know, we all have limits to our Cultivation bases. As apprentice alchemists, you must master the first technique of alchemy. Pay attention.

“This technique is called Violet Cloud Spirit. With this technique, you can feed a plant with your spiritual energy, and catalyze its effectiveness, which is based on its medicinal age. Depending on your skill and the nature of your Cultivation base, the catalyzation will produce different results.”

There were several hundred people here. Most sat cross-legged, looking at the medicinal plants rocking back and forth in their hands. In the very front was a solemn, middle-aged man who was currently giving a lecture about some alchemic technique. He held up his hand, within which was a growing medicinal plant. In the blink of an eye, it grew up two inches.

Meng Hao looked around, focusing especially on the medicinal plant in the hand of the middle-aged man. His eyes gleamed with a strange light. Bai Yunlai led them to the center of the valley, where an unimposing man old man in a gray robe sat there with eyes closed. He looked like he was asleep. It was impossible to tell the level of his Cultivation base. Seemingly out of habit, Bai Yunlai walked over and retrieved two medallions and a bag of holding from the old man's side. He pulled out two violet-colored jade slips which he then handed to Meng Hao and the young woman.

“Give it a try,” he said solemnly as the two looked at the jade slips. “The technique is very simple. You should be able to master it very quickly. Then, you’ll have a chance to try catalyzing for the first time. It’s very important, though. It will reveal your aptitude toward alchemy, and we have to record the results.”

Chapter 212: Nature Talent Appears!

The young woman, whose name was Chen Ling, seemed nervous when she heard what Bai Yunlai said. With an anxious, earnest expression, she examined the jade slip. Perhaps her latent talent was average. After looking at it for the space of about ten breaths, she reached out her hand, which began to glow with a purple light...

Bai Yunlai's eyes began to glow.

“Not bad, Junior Sister Chen! Okay, take out a medicinal plant seed.”

Chen Ling quickly opened her bag of holding and took out a seed. She placed it on her open palm, then, her face very serious, began to catalyze it. The violet Qi in her hand grew denser, until it seemed it couldn't grow any stronger. The seed began to wriggle, and then three leaves sprouted out of it.

Many of the surrounding onlookers noticed this, and then looked at Chen Ling. Her face grew red, and she was clearly excited. She looked at Bai Yunlai expectantly.

“To produce three leaves on your first try shows that you have pretty good latent talent. Junior Sister Chen Ling, according to my calculations, you have a ten percent chance of becoming a

master alchemist in the future.” He sighed emotionally, looking a bit jealous. It seemed that someone who could produce three leaves was uncommon among the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists. Bai Yunlai quickly recorded the results of her catalyzing.

After that...

The voice of the man lecturing about alchemy techniques drifted over. He sounded calm and solemn. “You will join District Two Valley Thirteen.” His face was austere as he looked at her.

In a low voice, Bai Yunlai offered an explanation: “The hundred thousand apprentice alchemists of the Eastern Pill Division are separated into Districts One to Four. Generally speaking, only those with outstanding latent talent can enter District Two. Junior Sister Chen, go on over there to Master Uncle Zhou. Good fortune is with you today!” Looking excited and nervous, Chen Ling immediately ran over.

“Junior Brother Fang, it’s your turn now,” said Bai Yunlai with a sigh. He looked at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao stood there thoughtfully for a moment. The technique described in the jade slip was simple, but obviously, the implementation of it was fantastic. Essentially, it could catalyze the medicinal age of medicinal plants, and as such, could be viewed as a force of nature.

“It seems only simple medicinal plants can be catalyzed using this technique,” thought Meng Hao. “Basically, you use spiritual energy to nourish the medicinal plant. Even still, this technique is extraordinary. I wonder how the Violet Fate Sect prevents it from being stolen...” He silently retrieved a medicinal plant seed from his bag of holding and placed it on his palm. He looked at it for a moment, then used the technique described in the jade slip to begin catalyzing it.

He had two Core Seas, the first one of which contained five Perfect Dao Pillars. Before arriving at the Violet Fate Sect, he had used the Sublime Spirit Scripture to once again form the second one.

At the moment, the only Cultivation base visible to outsiders was the aura of his second Core Sea. Its power caused the purple glow to appear on his hand. It was immediately apparent that the glow was thicker and brighter than that created by Chen Ling.

Immediately, the seed in Meng Hao’s hand began to wriggle. Then it sprouted one leaf, two leaves, three leaves... in the blink of an eye it had already sprouted seven leaves!

The purple glow in Meng Hao's hand grew blinding, filling the air. Instantly, all the surrounding apprentice alchemists looked over, shocked. All eyes were on Meng Hao.

The blinding rays of light were unthinkable, unbelievable. The man lecturing about alchemy techniques looked over wide-eyed, staring openly at Meng Hao. Next to him, Chen Ling stared in shock.

As for Bai Yunlai, his jaw dropped, and he rubbed his eyes vigorously before staring in complete shock.

Everything was quiet as all onlookers stared at the violet glow and the medicinal seed plant in Meng Hao's hand. Then, Meng Hao continued to use the technique. He fell into a strange state, as if he himself had turned into nature, and this seed had become a part of him.

It was a marvelous feeling, and as Meng Hao immersed himself in it, the seed suddenly sprouted an eighth leaf, then a ninth.... A cracking sound pealed out as the seed continued to grow. The emerald green leaf sprouts grew larger, wrapping up and around Meng Hao's right arm.

The white-haired, wrinkled old man who had been dozing behind Bai Yunlai opened his eyes. They glowed with an ancient light as he looked at Meng Hao. At the same time, they filled with excitement.

Meng Hao hadn't just caused new leaves to sprout, he had grown an entire plant. Meng Hao's mind reeled as the cracking sounds from moments ago pulled him out of the bizarre state he had just been in. His eyes flickered, and he frowned. He hadn't intended to show off such talent, and actually, he had been completely immersed in the strange state just now, which had somehow led his actions.

He hesitated for a moment, his face pale. His Cultivation base was dried up, and following the reduction in his spiritual power, the medicinal plant also began to slowly wither up. Soon it died, and then fell off of Meng Hao's arm.

Panting, Meng Hao stepped back a few paces, eyes shining with confusion.

Everything was deathly silent. It seemed like Bai Yunlai couldn't understand what was going on. He had been in the Violet Fate Sect for years, and had never seen someone perform such an astonishing feat the first time they practiced catalyzing. He looked at Meng Hao as if he weren't even human.

All of the surrounding apprentice alchemists were completely shocked. What they had just witnessed exceeded their imaginations. The middle-aged man panted as he looked at Meng Hao, his eyes shining with passion.

“Umm....” said Meng Hao, hesitating for a moment. He was a little bit scared, unsure of what he should say. At this moment, the old man behind Bai Yunlai stood up and walked forward to stand next to Meng Hao. He reached a hand out to grab Meng Hao’s wrist. His spiritual power burst out, flowing through Meng Hao’s body, examining him.

The power was incapable of completely examining Meng Hao. Despite having some suspicions, he could only see Meng Hao’s second Core Sea, which contained the power of the sixth level of Qi Condensation.

He wasn’t able to see the true color of the Core Sea either, as it had been completely transformed by the frightening power of the meat jelly. As far the man could see, everything was normal.

Eventually, he released his grip. He picked up the withered medicinal plant and looked at it carefully for a moment. Then he returned his gaze to Meng Hao. His eyes were now filled with the glow of praise.

“First rate latent talent! You will join District One Valley One!” A wide smile covered the old man’s face as he clasped Meng Hao’s shoulder. Then he flew up into the sky, taking the withered medicinal plant with him.

As he flew off, the entire valley broke out into a huge commotion.

“First rate latent talent!! No wonder his catalyzing is so astonishing!”

“With latent talent like that, he’s destined to become a master alchemist, which we haven’t seen for years....”

“Wow, I’ve heard of people having first rate latent talent, but I’ve never heard of someone as inhuman as this! He catalyzed full plant growth!”

As the air filled with conversations, Bai Yunlai approached Meng Hao, eye shining with excitement. “Junior Brother Fang,” he said, “make sure to watch out for yourself from now on. You have first rate latent talent!”

“Could there have been a mistake?” asked Meng Hao, still hesitating.

“There’s no way! Elder Wang tested you personally. How could he possibly make a mistake? It seems he took that medicinal plant to go show other Elders. Haha! Junior Brother Fang, you’re going to be famous! Come come, I’ll take you to District One Valley One. It’s like a celestial paradise. I look in every time I pass it, but I’ve never been able to go in.” He pulled Meng Hao along with him, leaving behind the hubbub and shining eyes. Even after they were gone, the commotion continued to echo out.

Time passed. Soon half a month had gone by. Meng Hao was now much more familiar with the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect. Division One Valley One wasn’t very large, but was occupied by few people, clearly much less than other valleys.

The scenery was enchanting. The mountains were lush, and a small mountain stream flowed down from up above. Fish swam within its depths, which Meng Hao could see from his house, located just north of the stream. It was a small house with a courtyard outside.

Within the courtyard was a small garden where he could grow medicinal plants. Currently, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in the courtyard, holding a scroll of bamboo slips. The scroll was filled with handwriting and pictures, all describing various medicinal plants.

Meng Hao sat all morning and into noon reading the scroll. Finally, he looked up. He smelled the medicinal aroma that filled the air and listened to the gurgling of the stream. A light mist filled the area, causing the valley to truly seem celestial. Maybe that was somewhat of an exaggeration, but there was no denying that this was an ideal place for Cultivation.

This was basically the number one valley for apprentice alchemists in the entire Sect. Meng Hao had found out that including him, less than fifty people in the entire Sect had the requisite latent talent to live in here. Everyone had their own living quarters where they could study, grow plants and practice pill concocting.

It was a quiet location, and Meng Hao felt very at home. He was especially happy to read books that weren’t jade slips but actual scrolls. It reminded him of his life as a scholar back in Yunjie County.

“One hundred thousand medicinal plants, all different and organized into different categories. Not only do I need to memorize them, I also need to remember their habits and characteristics, how to

plant and harvest them, and how to store them. I need to remember which medicinal plants cannot be mixed together, where and how to grow them, and also the proper ratios when using them.

“Furthermore, it’s not just the whole plant itself. The leaves, stems and sap of various plants are all different. Splicing plants together can lead to countless variations. They talk about one hundred thousand medicinal plants, but actually, when you combine everything together, it’s more like a million.” Meng Hao rubbed the bridge of his nose. For the past half month, he had been studying information about medicinal plants every day.

As an apprentice alchemist of the Violet Fate Sect, he must remember all such information. Of course, there was simply so much information, it was essentially impossible to magically brand it all onto the mind. The only method was rote memorization.

The more he memorized, the more prepared he would be. Forewarned is forearmed, so to speak; there was no trickery about it. Besides, Meng Hao didn’t find it annoying. He was a born scholar, after all, and this type of environment suited him quite well.

There was no killing, no danger and treachery, no dealing with the wind and rain of the outside world. Meng Hao attempted not to think about the past, and instead fully immersed himself in the role of Fang Mu. He was in the Violet Fate Sect now, and he intended to take advantage of the peace and quiet. As he examined all the information available to apprentice alchemists, his mind began to swirl with many images. Now he knew that this sort of knowledge, was nature talent.

Chapter 213: Violet Fate Celestial Land

Time flashed by, and soon two months had gone by. Meng Hao was now completely accustomed to life in the Violet Fate Sect. Because of testing in with first rate latent talent, he had been able to enjoy some special perks, although it wasn’t anything as amazing as others might have expected of some important person.

In fact, during the two months, he didn’t see the white-haired old man at all. Bai Yunlai, on the other hand, frequently came to visit. It was with his help that Meng Hao came to understand the Violet Fate Sect so quickly.

There were lectures regarding alchemic techniques every day, which Meng Hao almost always attended. In the midst of the hundreds of others also in attendance, Meng Hao didn’t stick out at all.

Different senior members of the Sect would give the lectures; they would rotate every few days. It seemed everyone's understanding of matters was slightly different. By listening to all of them, Meng Hao quickly began to have a much deeper understanding of the catalyzing techniques.

In addition, when it came to growing medicinal plants, the Sect had a special area to distribute medicinal plant seeds, much the same as the Reliance Sect had distributed Spirit Stones. The purpose, of course, was to allow the apprentice alchemists a chance to practice planting.

The various lectures by senior members of the Sect gave the whole place a very tranquil atmosphere. There was no fighting to the death. Meng Hao couldn't help but think that the Reliance Sect had been extremely different. To him, this place was in some ways more like an institute of higher learning than a Sect.

Every month, there would be a special sermon regarding medicinal scriptures. The officiators were always veteran master alchemists. Each and every one had risen up from the ranks of the apprentice alchemists. When it came to pill concocting, their skill was by no means shallow. Their alchemy lectures were not always limited to the topic of medicinal plants; they sometimes spoke of concoction techniques, too. Meng Hao learned a lot after only listening to a few such sermons.

In addition to all of the studying and planting of medicinal plants, apprentice alchemists also had monthly catalyzing quotas to meet. Every month, a certain amount of catalyzed medicinal plants were required to be delivered up to the Sect.

This was the life of an apprentice alchemist in the East Pill Division. Life was a never-ending cycle.

Currently, Meng Hao sat amongst throngs of apprentice alchemists, listening to a middle-aged man supposedly discuss methods of distinguishing between several easily misidentified medicinal plants. "Apprentice alchemists are involved in the growing, catalyzing, and picking of various medicinal plants, as well as other related tasks. In essence, your purpose is to serve the great system of alchemy instituted by our Sect. In actuality, the most direct way to serve the Sect, is by means of assisting the nearly one thousand master alchemists."

Meng Hao sighed. "I think joining the Violet Fate Sect was the right decision. In all the Southern Domain, this is the only place where I can study true alchemy. Also, only the Violet Fate Sect can produce true Grandmasters of the Dao of alchemy! The Violet Fate Sect's Dao of alchemy is such that the fame of the alchemy division actually exceeds that of the other division. All Sects and Clans in the Southern Domain recognize this." Meng Hao sat there thoughtfully, his eyes shining with anticipation.

“If I want to have any contact with Grandmaster Pill Demon, and get his help in dispelling my poison, then I have to be a disciple here!” Meng Hao’s eyes glittered with ambition.

His true goal in joining the Violet Fate Sect was to become a novitiate of Grandmaster Pill Demon and study the most powerful Dao of alchemy in the entire Southern Domain. Then he would create his own branch of alchemic arts. Afterward, any medicinal pills he needed, he could create himself, and not have to go through great pains to acquire by other means.

He was lost in thought when suddenly, the sound of bells filled the air. The sound rang throughout all of the valleys of the East Pill Division, causing everyone to immediately lift their heads. Even the master alchemist giving the lecture immediately stopped and looked up.

Each and every apprentice alchemist in the Eastern Pill Division raised their heads. Their faces were filled with excitement.

“The furnace bells! Violet Fate Celestial Land day has arrived!”

“The last time was a year ago. I can’t believe a whole year has already passed. Finally, we can go back into the Celestial Land!”

As the excited voices echoed out, the peal of bells continued to ring out. Meng Hao’s eyes flashed as he looked up into the air, where suddenly appeared an illusory shape.

It was an enormous violet-colored pill furnace floating in mid-air, imposing to the extreme, tens of thousands of meters in diameter. Next to it, dozens of beams of prismatic light shot up from nearby valleys to sit cross-legged around it, as if to guard it.

At the same time, the glow of spells interlaced in the air, as if the entire area was being sealed. A radiant light filled the area, casting brilliant colors upon the massive pill furnace and the Cultivators who floated nearby it.

An archaic voice rumbled out, seemingly from nowhere. “Apprentice alchemists, enter the Celestial Land. Harvest nine mature leaves.” The enormous pill furnace began to glow, and suddenly, what appeared to be one hundred thousand strands of light snaked out and shot down. Meng Hao’s apprentice alchemist identification medallion began to glow, as did those of all the other apprentice alchemists.

The glowing strands and the medallions seemed to have some sort of connection. One of the glowing strands approached Meng Hao and fused into the medallion. A gentle power seemed to take hold of Meng Hao and pull him up into the air.

From the hundred surrounding valleys, one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists all lifted up into the air, carried by the glowing strands. They transformed into beams of prismatic light that shot toward the gigantic pill furnace.

The massive pill furnace seemed to be like a bottomless pit which instantly swallowed them all up.

Meng Hao's vision grew blurry for a moment. When it cleared, and he saw what lay in front of him, he gasped. The scene was difficult to comprehend. The expression which appeared on Meng Hao's face was one of complete and utter shock.

In front of him stretched endless fields of medicinal plants. This place was a different world; there were no clouds in the sky. However, nine suns could be seen. Next to each sun, was a moon. This place had nine suns and nine moons.

This incredible sky was the perfect place beneath which to grow medicinal plants. The whole world seemed to be under some sort of sealing; as soon as Meng Hao appeared inside, an indescribable medicinal aroma washed over him. It was intoxicating.

Most of the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists had been here before. All of them were excited, but few were as shocked and moved as Meng Hao.

Even more shocking to Meng Hao was that within the endless fields of medicinal plants, were thousands of enormous, three hundred meter tall trees. And there were giants. These giants seemed to be remnants of an ancient past. They carefully strode through the fields, occasionally reaching down to plant seeds.

Up in the sky were several hundred war chariots, which emitted an archaic aura. The chariots were enormous, and overlapped with each other to form what almost looked like clouds that cast shadows down on certain areas within the world.

Further off in the distance, Meng Hao could see another type of tree that appeared to be three thousand meters tall. Its trunk was violet, and its top was not dense with foliage, but rather an enormous, solitary eye. The eye was dozens of meters wide, and it looked around the area

attentively. As Meng Hao looked around more carefully, he saw that there a few hundred other trees similar to this one amidst the fields of medicinal plants.

Meng Hao wasn't sure when, but Bai Yunlai had appeared at his side. With an emotional sigh, he said, "The Violet Fate Celestial Land is a Blessed Land of the Violet Fate Sect's East Pill Division! According to the legends, this place was once a Celestial Land of Immortals. However, Reverend Violet East moved it here to create this endless medicinal plant garden. There are some things growing here that are extinct in the outside world. Every once in a while, we apprentice alchemists are teleported here to harvest medicinal plants, which gives us a good chance to practice our skill in identifying them. This is the only place in the entire Southern Domain where you can see so many different types! They're virtually endless!"

Suddenly, a roaring sound filled the air, along with the archaic voice. The various conversations of the apprentice alchemists all ceased.

"You have one month to harvest at least nine mature medicinal plants. You may only harvest plants which you recognize, and you must also be thoroughly familiar with their habits and characteristics. In one month, you will hand over your harvest, as well as a jade slip describing your findings. This will be one of the evaluation criteria for promotion to master alchemist. Now, you may begin." As soon as the voice finished speaking, the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists took a collective breath, and then scattered.

Bai Yunlai didn't follow Meng Hao, but instead went along a meandering route of his own toward some other location. Meng Hao's eyes glittered, shining with excitement. His recent days had been spent devoted to reading medicinal plant scrolls. He had read several times about the hundred thousand varieties of medicinal plants, and although he hadn't memorized all of them yet, he knew quite a few. Now, he would be able to test his knowledge. His body flashed as he shot off into the distance.

As the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists scattered in all directions, above them in the sky, in one of the rotating moons, appeared eight figures.

"See that kid? That's Fang Mu, the one who I tested two months ago and found to have first rate latent talent."

"First rate latent talent is quite rare. We examined the withered plant you brought, and it's definitely not fake. Because of his latent talent, his spiritual energy is extremely suited to growing medicinal plants."

“He’s just a seedling now. Let’s see how many medicinal plants he manages to harvest. If he has a talent for identifying medicinal plants, then perhaps we should consider including him in the next promotion examination.”

As the figures within the moon engaged in their discussion, Meng Hao walked away from the groups of other apprentice alchemists, out into the fields of medicinal plants. He took each step prudently, being careful not to step on any seedlings. He kept his head lowered, looking around in all directions.

“That’s... Spirit Shattering grass. I remember its description from the scrolls. However, why does it have more foliage on the right side...? Oh, right, it’s a hybrid. The right side is actually a Residence sapling.... This is Thunderbolt Elegance leaf, its shape is like that of a woman, and it sways back and forth entrancingly... When used medicinally, it can be concocted into pills suitable for the early Foundation Establishment stage.”

Meng Hao walked along, gradually identifying various medicinal plants and attempting to recall all the information he had read about them in the scrolls. The more he tried, the easier it became. A feeling of pleasure gradually filled his heart.

This feeling was different than that of making a breakthrough in Cultivation base. However, being able to master a branch of knowledge that had previously been elusive, filled him with a sense of profound confidence.

This was a Cultivation of the self!

From what Meng Hao could tell, his ability to identify all the different medicinal plants was a type of nature talent....

Meng Hao walked further and further away. Each time he saw a medicinal plant suitable for harvesting, he would immediately take it. At the same time, he would record a description and other information on the jade slip he had been given.

He continued to corroborate what he had studied recently; he was like a fish in water. He forgot about everything except the medicinal plants in front of him. His alchemy was advancing by leaps and bounds in this Celestial Land.

Meanwhile, outside in the Southern Domain, the name Meng Hao had caused an enormous search to begin among the great Sects and Clans. In recent days, everyone was looking for him. Soon, Meng Hao's name came to be known to more and more Cultivators.

Of course, the Violet Fate Sect was one of the Sects participating in the great search. However, no one had been able to find even the slightest trace of Meng Hao. It was as if he had completely vanished.

Chapter 214: We Finally Meet Again....

No one could possibly know that the same Meng Hao who had stirred up such waves in the outside world, was currently carefully looking over medicinal herbs in the Violet Fate Sect's Celestial Land, an innocent student confirming the validity of his studies.

Time passed by, and Meng Hao lost track of how many medicinal plants he had harvested. As long as he recognized a plant, it counted toward his quota, and he placed it in his bag of holding.

At one point, Meng Hao found himself about three hundred meters away from one of the giants. For quite some time, he observed how it planted the seeds, moved the seedlings around, and cared for the plants.

Later, he stood beneath one of the Cyclops trees, watching the enormous eye gazing about. He even climbed up one of them to harvest some of the red grass that grew on its trunk.

Eventually, he was far, far away from where he had started. The fields of medicinal plants seemed to have no end. In Meng Hao's estimation, these more remote areas would most certainly have even more amazing medicinal plants, perhaps even some of the legendary extinct variety.

However, everything was simply too big. Around him stretched never-ending fields of medicinal plants. As he proceeded, he started to realize that he actually only recognized about one medicinal plant out of one hundred.

"The Dao of alchemy is endless," he thought with a sigh. "It's just as difficult as Cultivation, a road without end, an almighty facet of Heaven and Earth. At first I thought that memorizing a bit more than half of the hundred thousand medicinal plants would be enough. But now I can see that those one hundred thousand plants are simply the threshold." However, stubbornness glinted in his eyes. This type of Cultivation had nothing to do with his Dao Pillars. His excitement actually became even stronger.

“I’m a scholar at heart,” he said, reassuring himself. “Although my aspirations were never realized, when it comes to studying, I definitely have an advantage over all the other apprentice alchemists.” He would focus, do his best to remember everything he saw, and then go back to do more research in the ancient records.

It was in this fashion that time slipped by. Soon, the sound of bells filled the Celestial Land; the one month time period had passed quickly. Time was up, and Meng Hao wasn’t content. He felt as if he had just started. However, the strands of light appeared in the air, and he sighed. He gave one last look at the Celestial land before a strand of light whisked him away.

When they reappeared in the various valleys, there were a variety of expressions on the faces of the hundred thousand apprentice alchemists. Meng Hao wasn’t the only one to have grown during the month inside the Celestial Land. All of the apprentice alchemists had.

Soon, people came to collect the medicinal plants they had harvested, along with their jade slips which contained information about the harvest. Meng Hao chose not to secretly duplicate any of his spoils. He was fully devoted to his Violet Fate Sect identity, and wouldn’t do the slightest thing that might give himself away. He handed over all the medicinal plants, then slowly headed back to the valley that contained his house.

Once back in his courtyard, he immediately took out some scrolls and began to study. When he found areas that he had overlooked before, his face would flash with excitement, and he would commit the information to memory.

Two more months passed. He had already been in the Violet Fate Sect for half a year. Already, the search for Meng Hao in the outside world was slowing down. The various Sects and Clans had searched throughout the Southern Domain, and still hadn’t been able to find a trace of Meng Hao. A variety of speculations began to circulate, but nothing conclusive could be determined.

Meng Hao heard all about the situation from Bai Yunlai, who well deserved his reputation for being well informed about everything. He wasn’t just familiar with the latest news about the Violet Fate Sect; he kept himself plugged into the events of the outside world as well.

One morning, Meng Hao walked out of his house to sit in the courtyard. He lifted up his right hand, within which was a small, growing plant. His medicinal plant garden was filled with quite a few plants, all in full bloom. A medicinal aroma filled the air. Suddenly, Meng Hao’s expression flickered, and he looked up.

Bai Yunlai was racing along the side of the meandering stream. Before he even arrived, he called out, “Junior Brother Fang, there’s an excellent opportunity! Your Elder Brother won a great opportunity for you!”

Meng Hao smiled. He waved his right hand, and the medicinal plant in his hand disappeared. At the same time, the courtyard door swung open, just in time for Bai Yunlai to rush in.

“What opportunity?” asked Meng Hao, smiling. Bai Yunlai’s Cultivation base was ordinary, only at the seventh or eighth level of Qi Condensation. However, he was viewed as indispensable within the Sect. He often came to visit Meng Hao, and they spent quite a bit of time together.

“There’s an Inner Sect disciple from the Violet Qi Division who requested Alchemist Li Tao [1] to concoct some pills for him,” gushed Bai Yunlai. “Alchemist Li wanted me to arrange for two apprentice alchemists to assist. I will go, of course. As for the second spot, you were the first person I thought of.

“Quickly gather your things and come with me. This will be an excellent opportunity to expand your knowledge of alchemy. Lots of apprentice alchemists would like to go, but Alchemist Li’s personality is a bit eccentric. Just don’t say anything, and follow my lead.”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered. He’d learned some time ago that Inner Sect disciples from the Violet Qi Division would often request master alchemists to concoct pills for them. Under most circumstances, the Violet Qi Division disciple would gather together the necessary medicinal plants, as well as some Spirit Stones. If this pleased the master alchemist, then work could begin.

As for Furnace Lords, who ranked above master alchemists, they were well versed in the Dao of alchemy, and had reached Foundation Establishment. There were only about one hundred of them in the entire Violet Fate Sect, and each one occupied a very prominent position. Generally speaking, Inner Sect disciples didn’t qualify to request their services. Only Conclave disciples and Sect Elders could request pill concocting from Furnace Lords.

As for Violet Furnace Lords, they could be considered to be virtually at the Grandmaster level. Each and every one was a precious treasure of the Sect, and all were Pill Demon novitiates. Only those with extremely high influence within the Sect could request pill concocting services from them.

The Alchemist Li who Bai Yunlai referred to was naturally not a Furnace Lord, but one of the one thousand master alchemists. Considering how things were arranged, and considering how few master alchemists there were in the Sect, it was only natural that they would seek apprentice alchemists to act as assistants when concocting pills for Violet Qi Division disciples.

Meng Hao immediately rose to his feet. This really was a rare opportunity. He had joined the Sect more than half a year ago, and this was his first time to encounter such a chance. After clasping hands in thanks to Bai Yunlai, the two of them left. Soon, they arrived at the valley that connected the East Pill Division with the Violet Qi Division. Waiting there somewhat impatiently was a man in a blue robe who appeared to be about thirty years of age. It was none other than Alchemist Li.

Standing next to him was another Cultivator whose Cultivation base was at the early Foundation Establishment stage. He was smilingly engaged in conversation with Alchemist Li, his demeanor extremely courteous.

As Meng Hao and Bai Yunlai approached, Meng Hao's eyes glittered slightly. He recognized the Cultivator next to Alchemist Li. It was none other than Lu Song

Meng Hao's expression was calm as he and Bai Yunlai walked over. "So," he thought, "it turns out he's the one who wants the pills concocted."

Alchemist Li frowned as he looked at them. "Well, you're finally here."

Bai Yunlai hurriedly moved forward to say a few words of explanation, offering a few words of subtle flattery. Alchemist Li's expression softened a bit, and he flicked his sleeve. Together, they all followed a very courteous Lu Song out of the valley. As they passed through several valleys within the Violet Qi Division, Meng Hao examined the surroundings calmly. There were quite a few Violet Fate Sect disciples to be seen.

These were not disciples who cultivated the Dao of alchemy. When they saw Meng Hao and the others, respectful smiles filled their faces, and they clasped hands in greeting.

Soon, Lu Song led them to his Immortal's Cave, which was located halfway up one of the mountains. It had an excellent view, and was quite spacious inside, as well as excellently decorated. Once inside, Lu Song clasped hands and bowed to Alchemist Li.

"Brother Li, many thanks for your assistance," he said. "This batch of medicinal pills will be very useful." With that, he produced a bag of holding which he offered to Alchemist Li.

"You're too kind," said Alchemist Li, nodding. He smiled vaguely. "Unfortunately, this is my first time concocting pills for someone, and I'm worried I might not be the most suitable choice for you.

However, considering you insisted, I really couldn't refuse." He scanned the bag of holding quickly with Spiritual Sense, and then tossed it to Bai Yunlai.

Lu Song looked a little embarrassed. Inwardly, he cursed the master alchemists for their tricky thievery. If they weren't invited out to concoct pills, where they could be observed, they would usually secretly pilfer some of the concocted pills. If they claimed success and returned some, then so be it, but if they claimed complete failure, there would be no way to confirm their story. This type of thing often occurred in the Sect.

"If it wasn't for the fact that I can't concoct my own pills," Lu Song said to himself, "and the Sect doesn't distribute them, then I wouldn't have any dealings with these alchemists...." His face, however, was covered with a smile. He bowed again, and then glanced at Meng Hao and Bai Yunlai. They were not of the Foundation Establishment stage, however, he knew that among the apprentice alchemists were people who would one day be promoted to be master alchemists.

Meng Hao's face was calm, but inside he was laughing. If he showed his real face, Lu Song would surely go crazy. Instead, Lu Song stood there smiling politely.

Alchemist Li laughed, knowing full well what Lu Song was thinking. He cleared his throat, and then produced a pill furnace. At the same time, several crimson-colored Spirit Stones flew out and embedded themselves into the ground. The pill furnace floated in the air above them. Alchemist Li's face instantly became somber.

"I looked over the pill formula. With my mastery of the Dao of alchemy, there's only a forty percent chance that I can successfully concoct the Six Harmonies Pill. Watch carefully during the process so that you don't suspect me of hiding anything should I fail." With that, his left hand pressed down onto the pill furnace. After a moment, it turned red and began to emit waves of heat.

"Take six blades of Seven Sieve grass and extract the veins. They must not be broken. Approaching Music flower petals, seven of them. I need them with stamen attached; catalyze if necessary. Red Apricot leaf, maturity level seven years, seven months, seven days. A deviation of more than ten days is unacceptable." Alchemist Li's words came faster and faster. In one breath he spoke out ten different medicinal plants.

Bai Yunlai immediately opened the bag of holding, which was full of a variety of medicinal plants, and began to produce the required plants. By the time he finished preparing the Approaching Music flower, Meng Hao had already catalyzed the Red Apricot Leaves with his left hand, and extracted the veins from the Seven Sieve grass with his right hand. He handed them over to Alchemist Li.

Alchemist Li looked up at Meng Hao for a moment, then nodded slightly and began concocting. Occasionally he would say the name of a medicinal plant that he needed. Bai Yunlai sat there mutely for a moment. It was with a wry smile that he realized that Fang Mu was Alchemist Li's assistant, whereas he had become Fang Mu's assistant.

Whatever was required of him, Meng Hao would produce almost instantly. Not only was he fast, he didn't make any mistakes. Furthermore, when it came to catalyzing, he seemed to barely need to think before it was completed, and with utmost accuracy.

Alchemist Li continued to cast glances at Meng Hao, which eventually turned into looks of shock. Very quickly, it seemed as if he was no longer looking down on Meng Hao, but rather viewed him as an equal.

Even Lu Song noticed that when Alchemist Li spoke, Meng Hao would complete the task almost as soon as the words were out of his mouth. He took a deep breath. "This assistant alchemist isn't even human...."

It was at this exact moment that suddenly, a woman's voice echoed into the Immortal's cave from outside.

"Lu Song, do you have any news about that thing I asked you to look into?"

As soon as Meng Hao heard the voice, the plant he was currently catalyzing suddenly trembled.

Chapter 215: Lift Your Head

He only paused for a moment. It would be undetectable by anyone else. His expression didn't change in the slightest, and of course, he completed catalyzing the medicinal plant, which he then handed over to Alchemist Li.

He didn't look over as the woman entered the Immortal's cave.

She wore a white garment, and was pre-eminently beautiful. Upon looking at her, any man would stare and be instantly infatuated.

Her skin was so delicate it seemed a breath could damage it. She was tall and slender, with white, clear skin and luxurious hair that hung about her like a cloak. She gave off an otherworldly aura,

and as she entered, a delicate fragrance filled the Immortal's Cave. Even Alchemist Li started to breath somewhat heavily, ignoring the pill furnace to watch her enter.

Chu Yuyan!

Her brow was slightly furrowed, and though her face was as beautiful as ever, it contained a hint of unpleasantness. No veil could conceal the bitterness which caused her to sigh lightly, and no wind could disperse it. Only she could understand the pressure, and the furtive glances, that she had endured recently.

After the events at the Song Clan half a year previous, Meng Hao's name instantly spread throughout the entire Southern Domain. That, of course, caused her name to be mentioned. Add in the fact that Wang Tengfei had participated in the Song Clan's search for a son-in-law, and the whole matter turned into a storm that had overwhelmed her. The engagement agreement between Chu Yuyan and Wang Tengfei instantly became a huge joke.

All of it was because of Meng Hao.

Chu Yuyan didn't hate Wang Tengfei. She could understand why Wang Tengfei didn't trust her, and had chosen to participate in the Song Clan's search for a son-in-law. She had picked the wrong person. Thankfully, they were only engaged, and had not become official beloved. Nonetheless, Chu Yuyan couldn't help but sigh emotionally. Regardless of the circumstances, in the end, it had helped her to see what kind of person Wang Tengfei truly was.

She could accept the end result. She didn't need Wang Tengfei to explain anything. After the events at the Song Clan, she immediately sent the engagement agreement back to the Wang Clan, putting an end to the childish arrangement.

The person she truly hated was Meng Hao. It was a hatred that had seeped into her bones. However, at the same time, she continued to dream about the events within the volcano. It had turned into a pestering torment to her.

"Greetings, Elder Sister Chu," said Lu Song hastily. Alchemist Li also greeted her with clasped hands. Bai Yunlai sucked in a breath and lowered his head in greeting. Meng Hao also offered her greetings, although inside, he felt a bit remorseful.

How could he not have a bit of a guilty conscience? In all truth, it was the same in regard to the matter with Lu Song and Qian Shuihen. However, of all the people in the Violet Fate Sect, the person he least wanted to run into had been Chu Yuyan.

In his heart, Meng Hao felt that he had been a bit excessive in the way he dealt with her. However, given the circumstances at that time, he hadn't had much of a choice. Furthermore, if Chu Yuyan hadn't chased him down and tried to kill him to begin with, then none of it would have happened.

In any case, Meng Hao still felt bad.

"I was planning to go look for you just after this," said Lu Song. "I made a lot of inquiries about that damned Meng Hao, but he seems to have disappeared into thin air." He couldn't help but grind his teeth when he said Meng Hao's name. "There's not a single clue to be found about him. In fact, some of the Sects have been watching the people he's made friends with, but in this entire half-year, he hasn't appeared. A lot of people think that that damned, despicable, wretched animal must have left the Southern Domain. He deserves to die by a thousand knife cuts!"

Chu Yuyan frowned. During the past half year, she had constantly sent people out to look for Meng Hao. Despite her insistence on tracking him down, he seemed to have thoroughly vanished.

"How could he have left the Southern Domain?" thought Chu Yuyan. "All his old Sect members are here. Unless he provoked some calamitous, irreparable disaster, why would he leave? Actually, what happened in the Song Clan was really a stroke of good fortune on his part. He could join any Sect, hand over the Sublime Spirit Scripture, and turn a dangerous situation into a position of safety. Meng Hao is bizarrely crafty, there's no way he would fail to realize that, is there?"

"In my estimation, he is most certainly still in the Southern Domain. We just don't know where he's hiding. If I ever find him..." She gnashed her teeth. She was just about to turn and leave, when her gaze fell upon Meng Hao. She stared at him, and then suddenly spoke. Her voice was no longer warm, but filled with coldness. "Lift your head."

Meng Hao was astonished. "I've changed my appearance," he thought, "and yet she still focuses on me." Despite his astonishment, his face was blank and confused as he looked up at her.

Chu Yuyan's brow furrowed. She wasn't sure why, but when she looked over this young man, her heart filled with an unexplainable irritation. Looking at him, though, she was sure she had never seen him before.

Her eyes flickered as she thought, “Something’s wrong. Why would I instantly be annoyed with someone for no apparent reason?” She studied Meng Hao for a moment longer to no avail.

Meng Hao groaned inwardly. “How can this girl be so astute?” he thought. Despite his change in appearance, and the other people present, she had somehow sensed something and come to focus on him. His heart suddenly began to race. Suddenly, he shifted his gaze to look at her chest, and then deliberately gulped.

A somewhat dirty expression flitted over his face, and he intentionally blushed. Now, he didn’t look lecherous, but rather like a teenager seeing a beautiful woman for the first time. In such a situation, it would be a natural reaction to look so ill at ease.

His expression caused Chu Yuyan’s frown to deepen. A look of disgust appeared on her face, and she turned wordlessly to leave the Immortal’s Cave, ignoring the feeling of irritation which had welled up within her.

After Chu Yuyan left, everyone in the Immortal’s Cave breathed a sigh of relief. Lu Song quickly sealed the main door, and Alchemist Li shook his head. It was hard to tell what he was thinking, but after another sigh, he continued with the pill concoction.

“Elder Sister Chu has sure changed a lot recently,” murmured Bai Yunlai. “She never used to be like this. Now she’s completely cold and gloomy. I was shivering just now.”

“It’s all the fault of that Meng Hao,” said Lu Song, grinding his teeth. “That damned, despicable wretch deserves to die by a thousand knife cuts, ten thousand times! If I ever run into him, I’ll tear him to pieces! I’ll rip his flesh off the bone with my own teeth and grind his bones to pieces!” The depth of his hatred was visibly apparent. After he finished speaking, he looked at Meng Hao with a strange expression in his eyes, then suddenly smiled good-naturedly and nodded.

He had obviously noticed that Meng Hao was no ordinary apprentice alchemist, and there was no small chance that he would become a master alchemist in the future. Obviously, the sooner he made friends with him the better.

Meng Hao coughed dryly. He wasn’t exactly thin-skinned. However, moments ago Lu Song had been hatefully grinding his teeth and cursing, and with the next breath, was beaming with goodwill. Meng Hao had the feeling that he would have to get used to such things.

It took the entire day to finish concocting the pills. The moon was rising by the time the fragrant aroma wafted up from the pill furnace, and the medicinal pills that Lu Song needed emerged.

Because it had been a relatively hasty concoction, the medicinal plants which should have produced seven or eight pills ended up only producing two. Meng Hao could easily tell that it had something to do with Alchemist Li's technique.

This was the first time he had participated in pill concoction. The entire time, he had been observing Alchemist Li's concocting techniques, and had learned quite a bit. It seemed it would soon grow dark outside. Lu Song happily escorted them out of the Immortal's Cave and all the way back to the East Pill Division, before clasping hands and leaving.

In the following days, Meng Hao continued his studies regarding medicinal plants. However, because of the deep impression he'd left on Alchemist Li, he had a new daily task. Whenever Alchemist Li concocted pills, be it in his own Immortal's Cave or someone else's, he would always send for Meng Hao to be his assistant. Li Tao found that with Meng Hao at his side, pill concocting went much smoother.

In addition, Li Tao would often give Meng Hao pointers regarding alchemy. Soon, Meng Hao no longer considered himself unfamiliar with alchemy. He was becoming more and more comfortable with it. The more he saw, the more he learned; he was steadily improving, bit by bit.

Dealing with others was not a complicated matter. For example, Meng Hao's relationship with both Bai Yunlai and Alchemist Li was very simple. It was all based on how they could help each other.

If it weren't for Meng Hao's skill as an apprentice alchemist, Li Tao wouldn't have been so impressed with him, nor would he constantly seek him out as an assistant.

The days passed like this for three months. Meng Hao was completely assimilated into life in the Violet Fate Sect. In the time he had been there, he had met a lot of people, and many people had come to know his name.

Whenever he went out, he would run into familiar faces with whom he could chat and joke. Everything was very harmonious and peaceful. Everyone greeted him with clasped hands. Not a soul knew that this up and coming apprentice alchemist named Fang Mu, was the person who so many months ago had caused a storm in the Southern Domain, Meng Hao.

One day, Meng Hao found himself in Li Tao's Immortal's cave, assisting in pill concocting. After the pill concocting was finished, Li Tao escorted Meng Hao to the mouth of his Immortal's Cave. Suddenly, he spoke.

"Fang Mu, I want you to know that to me, you are no apprentice alchemist. Your skill with medicinal plants places you in the rank of master alchemist as far as I'm concerned."

Meng Hao stopped walking and looked at Li Tao. He clasped his hands and bowed. It was a completely sincere bow. Li Tao was at the early Foundation Establishment stage, but in the time they had spent together, Meng Hao had found him to be, not cold and haughty, but actually very approachable, even kind.

Meng Hao's understanding of alchemy had significantly improved as a result of their relationship.

"In one month," continued Li Tao enthusiastically, "there will be a promotion examination. I've made some inquiries, and found that only one apprentice alchemist will be selected for promotion. If that happens, and you are raised to master alchemist, then you will finally be able to learn the true Dao of alchemy of the Violet Fate Sect. If you become a master alchemist, you will be assigned your own Immortal's Cave, and your own furnace fire. You will no longer study medicinal plants, but pill concoction!"

"The only frustrating thing," he continued sincerely, "is that only people who have served as apprentice alchemists for ten years can participate in the exam this time. If you're interested in participating, though, I'll see if I can apply to get you a spot. You think about it. Perhaps you can come up with your own a method to join. If you manage to seize an opportunity like this, you might be able to save yourself ten years of time."

Meng Hao's heart began to thump, and he once again bowed to Li Tao. "Many thanks, Elder Brother Li."

They exchanged a few more words, whereupon Meng Hao bowed and took his leave. As he walked along the mountain paths, he looked up at the moon, and his eyes began to shine brightly.

"I can't spend ten years as an apprentice alchemist," he thought. "I must think of a way to seize this chance. My previous activities in the Sect must have drawn a bit of attention...." Continuing to ponder these matters, Meng Hao entered Division One Valley One. As he walked into his courtyard, his heart trembled, although his expression stayed the same. After pushing open the gate, he found that standing there in the courtyard was a white-haired old man. He immediately caused a look of surprise to appear on his face.

This was the same old man who had tested his latent talent the year he joined the East Pill Division. He was a Furnace Lord named Wang Fanming [1]. He stood there looking at Meng Hao's medicinal plant garden. As soon as Meng Hao entered the courtyard, he turned and gazed into Meng Hao's eyes.

Chapter 216: The Meaning of Grandmaster

The instant the old man turned and looked at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with a bright light and he said, "You joined the East Pill Division with a recommendation medallion from a Furnace Lord. What is your purpose here?!" A mysterious pressure locked onto Meng Hao's body.

As the man spoke the words, he took a step forward.

When the step fell, ghost images vibrated up everywhere, as if the area had been cut off from the rest of the world. Such a scene gave the feeling that any escape was impossible.

Even while his first words were still echoing out, he spoke again, "I've thoroughly investigated all of the Cultivators with the surname Fang in the entire State of Eastern Emergence. I couldn't find any record of you anywhere. As an alien in the State of Eastern Emergence, tell me... why are you here?" It was obviously supposed to feel like an interrogation. Add in the display of power, and it seemed as if dark storm clouds were rolling Meng Hao's way.

Inside, Meng Hao was calm. However, his face visibly paled, and he stood in place, body trembling slightly. His chin, though, was set stubbornly.

"State your real name, and reveal your purpose here! This is your last chance. If you refuse to come to your senses, then don't blame me for being ruthless!" The old man took another step forward. When the step fell, the sound of rumbling thunder filled the courtyard. A fierce wind sprang up, and waves of pressure roiled out. The medicinal plants in the garden seemed as if they were being harmfully catalyzed; they were growing dark and ugly.

Meng Hao's face grew paler. However, inwardly, he was as calm as ever. This old man's Cultivation base was at the Core Formation stage, and his words seemed cold and merciless. In reality, though, he was obviously bluffing. Considering Meng Hao's path of Cultivation, and the level of his experience and training, how could he not tell?

He had already been in the Violet Fate Sect for the better part of a year. After all this time, the fact the old man chose today to come visit was telling. Meng Hao only had to think a moment to come to a fairly certain conclusion.

Obviously, the promotion day was approaching, and although Meng Hao didn't qualify to participate, his first rate latent talent had attracted quite a bit of attention in the East Pill Division. That was the whole purpose of this whole scene; the display of power was basically a warning of sorts.

All of these thoughts flitted through Meng Hao's mind in an instant. He also thought about how he had crossed the chain bridge to enter the Sect, and his heart grew even calmer. He took a deep breath and, continuing to keep his face pale, clasped his hands and bowed deeply to the old man.

His expression bitter, his voice light, he said, "Sir, my name really is Fang Mu, and I am not from the State of Eastern Emergence. I have long yearned for the Dao of alchemy, and that is why I thirsted to join the Violet Fate Sect. I have no other purpose. I wholeheartedly wish to study alchemy.

"Unfortunately, the Violet Fate Sect does not accept outsiders, so I had to figure out another way to get the recommendation medallion from a Furnace Lord. In order to enter the Sect, I had no choice other than to use subterfuge. I had no option. Sir, if you believe junior is in error, then I will accept any punishment the Sect deems fit." Meng Hao bowed down and held the bow, not lifting himself up straight.

Everything was quiet. The old man looked at Meng Hao. He had long since investigated Meng Hao, and knew there were some things about him that weren't quite right. However, there were one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists in the Sect. More than a few of them had things about them that weren't quite right. The fact that they had passed the Bridge of Truth, however, was evidence that they harbored no ill intent toward the East Pill Division. If they did have any such secrets, they would not be able to pass the bridge.

If Meng Hao was an ordinary apprentice alchemist without first rate latent talent, then the old man wouldn't have paid him the least bit of attention, and things would have run their course naturally. However, Meng Hao's latent talent had attracted not just the attention of this old man, but other Furnace Lords in the East Pill Division. When the question came up regarding his qualifications to participate in the promotion examination, he went against convention to acquire a spot for Meng Hao... which therefore led to the current scene.

Wang Fanming was quiet for a moment. Then, he looked at Meng Hao and coolly said, “Once you join the Eastern Pill Division, you may never forsake it, not for the rest of your life. Can you do so?”

Meng Hao finally stood up straight. Looking at the old man with determination in his face, he spoke in a voice that could chop nails and sever iron: “It is a great kindness on the part of the Sect to teach me about the Dao of Alchemy. As long as the Sect doesn’t kick me away, I will never forsake it!”

Actually, after living in the Violet Fate Sect for the better part of a year, being part of the East Pill Division, and studying alchemy, Meng Hao really had developed this view. As long as he could stay here and study alchemy, he would not leave the Sect.

The old man gave Meng Hao a deep look. “I don’t care about your background. If you say you’re Fang Mu, then you are Fang Mu. However, if you ever betray the Sect, I will take away your Dao of alchemy. If I am unable to, there will be another alchemist in the East Pill Division who can.” He flicked his sleeve, and a medallion shot toward Meng Hao.

It landed in Meng Hao’s hand, glowing mysteriously, radiating coldness.

“In one month, you may attend the examination for promotion to master alchemist. Only one candidate will be selected. Whether or not you are selected will depend on your luck.” With that, Wang Fanming turned and flew away, disappearing in the blink of an eye.

As he said, he didn’t care about Meng Hao’s background. There were many people in the Violet Fate Sect who had mysterious backgrounds. Even among the Furnace Lords were people who had previously been members of other Sects, or who had enemies in the outside world and joined the East Pill Division to hide.

Actually, Wang Fanming himself was not from the State of Eastern Emergence. It was only because of various circumstances that he ended up becoming a Cultivator of the East Pill Division.

This was the tradition within the East Pill Division, a tradition created by someone who commanded high prestige and universal respect in the Violet Fate Sect: Grandmaster Pill Demon.

Grandmaster Pill Demon had uttered the following words regarding the East Pill Division: “One must take the long view when traversing the great path of the Dao of alchemy. Any qualified alchemist may become a Cultivator of the East Pill Division. The only requirement is that he harbor no ill intentions, nor have the reckless ambition of wild wolves.”

Because of this, the traditions of the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect had existed for a very long time. Unfortunately, it had also led to circumstances in which disciples forsook the Sect. Despite that, the techniques of the East Pill Division had never been revealed. Many outsiders wondered about this mystery, and also why those who forsook the Sect were so sentimental about it afterward.

In actuality, from time immemorial, all disciples who forsook the Sect were eventually brought back. Except for two. Those two had rocked the Southern Domain, and were the only two people other than Pill Demon to become Grandmasters of the Dao of alchemy!

Both of them had once been novitiates of Grandmaster Pill Demon. Eventually, they brought forth new ideas and innovations. Regardless of what outsiders thought, these two never believed their skill could outmatch that of their Master.

The reason they had become famous, and the reason they never returned to the Sect, was also because of the words of Grandmaster Pill Demon, words that continued to be passed down to this very day.

“Along the path of the Dao of alchemy, if a hundred flowers bloom, who has the right to permit only the Mudan peony to exist? Cannot the lesser peony and the orchid also coexist? Thus is birthed the flower garden. If the medicinal plant garden only contained one medicinal plant, how could the Dao of alchemy come into being?”

“If those who inherit my Dao of alchemy are full of the ambitions of wild wolves, I will take back the Dao of alchemy. However, he who can weed through the old to bring forth the new, he who can tread the untrodden path, that person may establish his own school of thought. If he is able to bear the weight of the title Grandmaster, then it has nothing to do with me. In that case, there is no need to discuss returning to me.”

Because of this, there are three alchemists called Grandmaster. In reality, though, the Dao of alchemy in the Southern Domain has only one true Grandmaster!

Pill Demon!

Meng Hao watched Wang Fanming leave, and his eyes shone with a mysterious light. He never thought he would be able to secure a spot in the promotion examination so quickly. He looked down

thoughtfully at the jade slip he held in his hand. His eyes glinted, and he cast Spiritual Sense into it. His mind suddenly shook.

In his head suddenly appeared the words:

Alchemy Scripture!

He sat down cross-legged in the courtyard, holding the jade slip in hand. He closed his eyes and immersed himself in the Alchemy Scripture which had appeared in his head. It wasn't until the sun began to rise the following morning that he slowly opened his eyes. He took a deep breath, and looked off at the distant mountain peaks. His eyes were filled with reverence. He sat there quietly for a long time.

This so-called Alchemy Scripture was in fact not really a scripture. Actually, it was a record of events which had occurred in the East Pill Division in the thousand years since Grandmaster Pill Demon rose to fame.

There were many stories recorded, for example the origins of the two other Grandmaster alchemists of the Southern Domain, as well as various quotations from Grandmaster Pill Demon. After examining the entire Alchemy Scripture, an image appeared in his mind of a figure standing at the peak of the Dao of alchemy.

Now he understood why Wang Fanming was so quick to discard the issue of his hidden past.

Meng Hao slowly put away the jade slip. He took a few deep breaths, and then began his daily apprentice alchemist cultivation.

Time went by slowly. Soon, a month had passed. The news about the examination for apprentice alchemists with ten years of experience, spread like wildfire throughout the East Pill Division. It quickly became the only conversation topic among the apprentice alchemists.

Roughly eighty percent of the apprentice alchemists had ten or more years of experience. However, not all would participate in the promotion examination. Only thirty thousand slots were available for registration.

When the day of the test came, the entire East Pill Division bustled with noise and excitement. The furnace bells rang out, and an enormous pill furnace once again appeared up in the air. Tens of

thousands of strands of light reached out toward the qualified apprentice alchemists, who were all bursting with excitement. Meng Hao was among them as they shot toward the pill furnace.

In the blink of an eye, thirty thousand people vanished. When they reappeared, it was not in the Celestial Land of medicinal plant fields. Instead, they were in an enormous public square paved with limestone. In the middle of the square was a gigantic blue-green pill furnace. Medicinal aroma wafted out from it, filling the square with medicinal mists and clouds.

Arranged in the enormous square were thirty thousand worktables. On the surface of each worktable was a black jade slip. As the thirty thousand participants arrived, there was no hubbub or racket. They all looked nervously toward the pill furnace, which was surrounded by eight old men, sitting cross-legged.

One of them was Wang Fanming.

The crowd of people looked down at the eight men, who slowly opened their eyes. They looked over everyone with kind, gentle expressions.

“In the promotion exam of the East Pill Division, one person shall be selected from your midst to practice the Cultivation of the Dao of alchemy! The examination consists of two rounds. The first round is an elimination round which only ten participants will pass. The second round is the final round, from which one master alchemist will emerge!

“One hundred thousand medicinal plants. One million variations. Your task is to silently list them out. Write down as many as you can think of! In front of you are thirty thousand work stations. Please organize yourselves among them and prepare to begin!”

Chapter 217: Struggling for Plant Mastery

All thirty thousand apprentice alchemists were respectful and solemn. Quite a few had full heads of white hair. Other than Meng Hao, not a one appeared to be under thirty years of age.

They had all been apprentices for at least 10 years and had deep, profound understanding of medicinal plants. Practice had ingrained the knowledge so deeply that if they left the Sect for another on the outside, they would be rated as a medicinal plant Grandmaster.

Right now, they solemnly filed forward toward the workstations. Meng Hao took a deep breath as he looked around at the workstations, selected one, and sat down.

This was his first time participating in an examination for promotion from apprentice alchemist. However, the feeling was not strange to him. Actually... everything felt quite familiar.

The scene around him was very much like the examinations he had taken part in back when he was a scholar in the State of Zhao. He had participated in the preliminary rounds of the Imperial examinations on multiple occasions, and although he had never scored top marks, he was still very familiar with the process.

Meng Hao chuckled to himself. “There really are a lot of similarities between the two. This master alchemist promotion examination tests your knowledge of medicinal plants. The more plants you remember, the more details you recall, and the more accurately you do so, will determine how close to perfection your final score is. It’s not very different at all from the imperial examinations.” He felt like he was back in the imperial examination hall. Except this time, he was not aiming for a scholarly rank, but promotion in the Dao of alchemy.

He took another deep breath and looked around at all the apprentice alchemists as they peered down at the jade slip in front of them. Suddenly, magical glowing screens appeared in front of them, upon which could be seen various medicinal plants.

The task of all the apprentice alchemists was to identify the plants they recognized and then record their habits and characteristics, planting requirements, harvesting methods and any other details.

Seeing that many of the participants had already started, Meng Hao tapped his jade slip, and immediately, a magical screen appeared. He stared thoughtfully at the medicinal plant which appeared, and then began to record the name of the plant, its characteristics, and some other details.

Time passed. The square was quiet and peaceful. The eight old men who sat cross-legged by the pill furnace appeared to Meng Hao to be the test administrators. They looked around the examination square. Clearly, if anyone caused a disturbance, severe punishment would follow.

Meng Hao soon fell into a rhythm of answering the questions. He quickly recorded the information about the plants that appeared in front of him. Many of them he had seen with his own eyes in the Celestial Land. Others, he had even held in his own hands when assisting Li Tao in pill concoction.

Six hours quickly passed. Meng Hao was immersed in filling out his answers. His eyes shone with determination. He had discovered that this was an excellent method to verify how much he had

learned. All of the information he had studied about medicinal plants during the better part of the year once again floated up in his mind.

As he reached down into the depths of his memory, he began to experience the same feeling he had as a scholar all those years ago, the joy that can be found in the midst of hardship.

Soon, it became apparent that some of the surrounding apprentice alchemists were wearing out. Some frowned, obviously wracking their brains for answers. More time went by, another four hours. Some of the apprentice alchemists were pale-faced. Many were clearly encountering unfamiliar medicinal plants, which they would skip past quickly. However, soon, they discovered that the unfamiliar plants became more and more frequent. Eventually, people began to abandon their struggles and bitterly leave the examination field. They moved off to the side to observe.

Within a short time, more and more apprentice alchemists began to stare bitterly at the screens in front of them. They would stare blankly for a while, then stand and walk off to the side, heaving bitter sighs. Despite ten or more years of experience, many of these people had difficulty remembering so many medicinal plants. After all, there were one hundred thousand of them, with a million variations. If one's Cultivation base was high enough, Divine Sense could be used to brand the information in one's mind; without that ability, though, the only other method was rote memorization, which was incredibly difficult.

Meng Hao, of course, was by nature a scholar and an intellectual. From the moment he had begun to tread the path of a scholar, each and every day had been devoted to memorizing things.

His expression was calm, and his gaze was locked onto the screen in front of him. He zoned out everything else, focusing completely on the ever-changing medicinal plants. The more questions he answered, the happier he grew. His movements were like floating clouds and flowing water, natural and spontaneous. Soon, he began to attract the attention of some of the people who had given up, and were now observing the proceedings.

More time passed. The examination had now been underway for twenty hours. Of the original thirty thousand participants, only twenty thousand continued to fill in answers. The surroundings were as quiet as ever. Those who had abandoned their efforts did not leave, they stood by quietly, watching on.

By the time the thirtieth hour arrived, only seventy percent of the twenty thousand participants remained. The eyes of these more than ten thousand apprentice alchemists were bloodshot. Each and every one doggedly stared at their respective glowing screens, continuing to fill in information from their studies.

Meng Hao was as calm as ever. The speed with which he answered the questions caused Wang Fanning and the other old men to cast sidelong glances at each other.

By the fortieth hour, only thirty percent or so of the participants had not given up.

By the sixtieth hour, only six thousand remained in the square, continuing on madly with the examination. Already, quite a few were obviously about to give up. If they looked around, they would see that their compatriots were madly going all out, jaws clenched as they pondered the images of the medicinal plants in front of them, attempting to recall their habits and characteristics.

By the time eighty continuous hours of testing had passed, only three thousand participants remained. They had been answering questions for four days and four nights with no rest whatsoever. They were like mad devils who could remember everything.

When the one hundredth hour arrived, an older man who appeared to be about fifty years old coughed up a mouthful of blood and then collapsed to the ground. His previously gray hair was now completely white. The scene caused quite a commotion, and quite a few of the surrounding apprentice alchemists immediately stood pale-faced and gave up.

They knew that if they continued, they may very well die here this day. They walked off to the side, supported by fellow apprentice alchemists. Everyone was now watching the remaining thousand test takers, their eyes filled with fear and dread. They knew full well how fearsome these people were.

Only incredibly extraordinary individuals could remember so many of the hundred thousand plants and one million variations.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. His eyes felt gritty, so he closed them for a moment to rest. Then he opened them, focusing on the medicinal plants and continuing to fill out answers.

Time passed by in a blur. The number of people who remained answering questions grew smaller and smaller. One thousand, eight hundred, five hundred, three hundred... By the time one hundred and eighty hours had passed, only eleven people remained!

The eleven people all sat in different locations within the enormous square, competing with unbridled frenzy. Meng Hao was frowning. Some of the plants in front of him required a careful search of his memory to recall.

This was especially true of the medicinal plants that were easily misidentified. These could only be correctly identified by carefully examining various tiny details. In fact, in some cases, they could only be distinguished by taste; unfortunately only images were available, which meant that even further examination was required before any information could be recorded.

The other ten people all were pale-faced, and their eyes radiated with ferocity. Having endured all the way down to this point, they obviously were not willing to give up. This test was a trial by fire, and an unforgiving one at that. Only ten mistakes or oversights were allowed, and then, instant disqualification.

In this test, no one could masquerade as having ability. The best among the apprentice alchemists would be visible in a single glance.

Suddenly, one of the final eleven suddenly grew white as death. His expression changed as the screen in front of him suddenly disappeared. He stared mutely for a long moment, then staggered to his feet and laughed bitterly. A fellow apprentice alchemist held him by the arm as he left his workstation.

The observing apprentice alchemists began to breathe heavily. There were now only ten participants left; these ten had already passed into the second round of the examination.

However, not a single one stood up!

Despite being assured a pass to the next round, all of these apprentice alchemists aspired to be master alchemists. Being so ambitious and proud, they possessed the spirit of competition; they naturally wanted to see who would be the first among them all!

Each and every one of them possessed the same mentality. All of the surrounding thirty thousand apprentice alchemists were watching on with rapt attention. They were all wondering, in the end... who would place first?

Wang Fanming and the seven other old men watched on wordlessly. They said nothing to end the examination, and instead watched on quietly.

Time passed by. These ten people, including Meng Hao, were all well-known figures amongst the apprentice alchemists. All of them were clearly qualified to become master alchemists. Their eyes were completely bloodshot as they stared at the screens in front of them. None gave up.

Meng Hao closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. When he opened them, he found himself looking at a very rare medicinal plant. In fact, this was a plant that was not among the one hundred thousand medicinal plants, but rather, a hybrid grass that was one of the one million variations.

Even those Cultivators in the Southern Domain who considered themselves experienced and knowledgeable, would only be able to stare in frustration at such a plant.

“It’s getting harder and harder,” thought Meng Hao, sighing deeply. “But that only makes things more interesting.” His face radiated stubbornness. As of now, the aura of a Cultivator had grown faint around him, to be replaced by the implacability of a scholar. This was the stubbornness of someone who had repeatedly failed in the imperial examinations, and yet continued to participate.

After joining the East Pill Division, Meng Hao realized that he really was innately inclined to practice alchemy!

Perhaps in terms of Cultivation, his latent talent was not extraordinary. But when it came to alchemy, however, he possessed true genius! Whether it was memorizing medicinal plants, or catalyzing them, he stood head and shoulders above all others.

In fact, you could say that this was not innate talent, this was nature talent! Nature talent regarding all plants and vegetation!

Meng Hao suddenly recalled the words of Shui Dongliu. Gradually he came to realize that he didn’t always have nature talent. This nature talent came from the Resurrection Lily!

Meng Hao wasn’t sure how much time had passed. Soon, one screen after another went dark among the final ten. They had clearly made more than ten mistakes, and were out.

Soon the hour arrived in which only two people remained!

One was Meng Hao, the other was a grim-faced, middle-aged man. As they continued with the examination, the middle aged man would look up from time to time at Meng Hao. His eyes slowly filled with crazed determination.

Chapter 218: First Round First Place!

The middle-aged man's eyes were blood red as he stared at the medicinal plant in front of him. "I joined the Sect twenty years ago," he said "I've been an apprentice alchemist for half my life. Do you really think you can compare to me?" However, his face was gradually growing white. He had already made nine mistakes, so he now had only one chance left. Unfortunately, as for the plant in front of him... he didn't recognize it.

After a long time passed, the middle-aged man laughed sadly, then slowly stood up. He didn't record an answer. He took a long look at the medicinal plant, committing it to memory, then walked away.

As of now, Meng Hao was the only person left in the square!

The gaze of every single person, including Wang Fanming and the seven other old-timers, was focused solely on Meng Hao!

This was because... he was still filling out answers!

Meng Hao had no idea many how many answers he had provided. One hundred thousand medicinal plants, one million variations. Perhaps he had recorded half, perhaps more. He took a deep breath and focused on the medicinal plants on the screen in front of him. He gradually became aware that some of the medicinal plants were ones he had never seen before. However, after looking at them and thinking for a moment, the information regarding them would appear in his head.

The hundred thousand plants and one million variations that he had studied were simply a foundation. However, that foundation enabled him to awaken the nature talent of the Resurrection Lily that he acquired. That nature talent of plants allowed him to expand on what he had built in his head, using that accumulated knowledge to form answers.

Inside his bag of the Cosmos, the portrait of the Resurrection Lily painted by Shui Dongliu was trembling. It seemed to be struggling, resisting, screaming a noiseless scream. This was because as Meng Hao continued to answer questions and corroborate what he had learned, the endless images of plants that appeared in his head were all being plundered from the Resurrection Lily! He was wresting away the talent of the Resurrection Lily!

If that were simply it, perhaps it wouldn't be a big deal. However, as Meng Hao continued, he realized that the Demonic Core within his Dao Pillar seemed to be rotating. With every rotation, strands of invisible power would emanate out, entering into his mind, causing the nature talent from the Resurrection Lily to grow even more powerful.

This examination of plants and vegetation, was also a chance for him to steal away nature talent from the Resurrection Lily! There was no other method that could possibly be faster, that could push Meng Hao to such heights! This examination was essentially a huge stroke of good fortune!

He proceeded on, even more lost in thought than he was before. He continued to fill out more and more answers, more and more quickly. No one could hear the screams of the Resurrection Lily as its nature talent was wrested away and fused into Meng Hao, becoming his and his alone!

If someone asked Meng Hao to stop now, he would refuse.

His eyes were bloodshot. Sometimes he had to think, but he never made a mistake. As he thought and recorded his answers, everyone around watched with baited breath, stupefied at what was happening. Wang Fanming and the seven others exchanged glances. All of their eyes were filled with shock.

Some of the information Meng Hao filled out, even they would have difficulty with. Some of these hybrid plants required ten varieties of medicinal plants to be grafted together at different times to produce the final rare version.

Wang Fanming and the others exchanged excited glances and then began to transmit a conversation between themselves.

“One hundred thousand medicinal plants, one million variations, ten million hybrids. Three realms of plants and vegetations. Mastering even the first indicates one has the nature talent required to become a master alchemist...”

“In the Southern Domain, only Violet Furnace Lords have enough talent to master the second realm. As far as the third realm goes, there are only three: Grandmaster Pill Demon and the other two Grandmasters!”

“Just how skilled is this Fang Mu when it comes to plants? He’s simply inhuman! He’s already passed the second realm and has now encroached into the domain of the third realm.... If his alchemic skill is comparable to his talent with plants, then he... he will be able to rock Heaven and Earth!”

“Not necessarily. His talent with plants is inhuman. But skill in alchemy is different. However, if he does possess some skill, then even if he doesn’t become a Violet Furnace Lord, he will surely reach the pinnacle of the Furnace Lord rank!”

“It will all depend on the results of his alchemy, and the level of the medicinal strength he develops. Ordinary master alchemists can produce about thirty percent. Only Furnace Lords can draw out fifty percent or more of the medicinal strength. Violet Furnace Lords can extract seventy percent. In all the Southern Domain, only Grandmaster Pill Demon and the other two Grandmasters can refine ninety percent or more! And Grandmaster Pill Demon is the only one who can concoct pills of one hundred percent medicinal strength, pills that do not lose any effectiveness!”

As the eight men continued their discussion, the apprentice alchemists watched on, dumbstruck. Their minds reeled as they watched Meng Hao. The other tenth-place finalists also watched on, some with admiration and respect, others with jealousy and discontent.

Time passed, and Meng Hao continued on without stopping. As the medicinal plants flashed in front of him, his expression slowly grew more and more excited. More and more information flooded into his head, and the legacy Demonic Core inside him rotated even more rapidly.

Meanwhile, elsewhere within the Violet Fate Sect, on an isolated peak deep within the East Pill Division, an old man sat cross-legged, observing a pill furnace which floated in front of him. He wore a white Daoist robe, and his entire person emanated the aroma of medicinal pills. His eyes were focused completely on the pill furnace.

His features were not particularly impressive. However, his eyes were clear, like deep springs. At first look, his white Daoist robe seemed ordinary. However, on each sleeve was embroidered a pill furnace.

He was archaic, ancient, as if he had existed for countless years. As he looked at the pill furnace, he smiled. It was impossible to tell his Cultivation base, but his presence on the mountain seemed to cause the clouds to disperse and the wind to calm. It seemed that with him present, the world would always be like that.

Next to him was a young woman clad in a long, violet robe. She was consummately beautiful, although her brow was wrinkled in a frown. It was none other than Chu Yuyan.

The old man... was he who commanded high prestige and universal respect within the Violet Fate Sect. He was the Grandmaster alchemist whose name had dominated the Southern Domain for a thousand years. His two novitiates had forsaken him to become Grandmasters in their own right. This was... Pill Demon!

Demons can take countless forms, just like the variations of medicinal pills. The day this old man achieved his Dao, he took the name Pill Demon. This Grandmaster Demon whose name had filled the Southern Domain a thousand years ago, now spoke. "Were you able to concoct the Three Mortalities Pill?" he asked, shifting his gaze from the pill furnace to Chu Yuyan.

"I failed again," she replied, frowning. "Master, the Three Mortalities Pill is too difficult." She looked at the floating pill furnace.

The old man shook his head and chuckled. With an expression that seemed to be filled with the emotion of many years, he looked off into the distance, toward the enormous statue of Reverend Violet East. Eventually, he looked back to the pill furnace. After some time passed, he spoke again: "Your heart is unsettled, and is lacking in determination. It seems you still do not grasp the purpose for which Master asked you to concoct the Three Mortalities Pill. In that regard, you could really learn something from him." He pointed toward the pill furnace. As he did, the furnace grew blurry, then magically transformed into an image of the Meng Hao on the square.

When she caught sight of him, Chu Yuyan's brow furrowed instantly. She remembered him. She recalled how seeing him had for some unknown reason caused her heart to fill with irritation. It had filled her with an almost unstoppable impulse to beat some sense into him.

Even afterward, she couldn't explain it. Casting eyes on him again today caused that same irritated feeling to reappear.

"On the path of the Dao of alchemy," Grandmaster Pill Demon said coolly, "talent is only an assistant. Unswerving determination is even more important." He waved his right hand and the scene disappeared. The pill furnace was once again a pill furnace. "Go back. When you finish concocting the Three Mortalities Pill, then Master will permit you to leave the Sect." With that, he closed his eyes.

Chu Yuyan's lips curled into a pout. Clearly not happy, but unable to do anything about it, she stamped her foot as she turned and left. For some reason the face of Meng Hao, or rather Fang Mu, appeared in her mind, and her irritation rose again.

"I'm going to go see why this guy makes me so uncomfortable!" she thought, clenching her jaw and transforming into a beam of light that shot off into the distance.

Back in the master alchemist examination square, tens of thousands of eyes were all focused on one thing as the time slowly passed. When Chu Yuyan arrived, she saw Meng Hao, and once again frowned. She examined him intently for a while, but in the end, his features were unfamiliar. And yet within that unfamiliarity was something that she seemed to know.

More time passed. A day. Two days.... Eventually three days had passed.

Chu Yuyan's eyes were glued onto Meng Hao, but in the end, her eyes filled with frustration. Much the same as Wang Fanming and the others, she was familiar with the third realm of plants and vegetation. Seeing Meng Hao answer question after question, how could she not be filled with astonishment?

At the end of the third day, the screen in front of Meng Hao suddenly flickered. No more medicinal plants appeared. He slowly looked up.

Everything was completely silent. Everyone was staring at the screen in front of him. Wang Fangming gasped and stood up. The other old men also stood up one by one, their eyes filled with disbelief.

"He answered all the questions...."

"Grandmaster Pill Demon personally prepared all of the images of the medicinal plants. In one thousand years, no one has ever answered all the questions. What... just what inhuman talent does he possess...?"

As the words of Wang Fanming and the others echoed out, the excitement that had been suppressed for days by the surrounding apprentice alchemists suddenly exploded out. A deafening hubbub filled the air.

"No more questions.... How is that possible!?!? He answered all the questions!"

“From ancient times until now, no one has ever done that....”

“Is it possible that this Fang Mu will become another blazing sun of the East Pill Division...?”

Even as the commotion filled the air, exhaustion washed over Meng Hao and he closed his dry eyes. He had no idea how long he had been sitting there. Once the screen went out, his energy seemed to disappear. The knowledge of plants and vegetation in his mind seemed to surge with life, buffeting up against and overwhelming any ignorance that might have existed before.

It surged again and again until finally it began to stabilize. Now that the ignorance had been broken, Meng Hao wasn't sure the extent to which his skill with plants and vegetation would grow.

He had attained... Instantaneous Formula Scrying!

By simply placing a medicinal pill in his hand, he would be able to see the pill formula floating in his head. This was a realm that only Violet Furnace Lords could achieve.

Chu Yuyan took a deep breath as she stared blankly at Meng Hao. There was no doubt about it; just looking at him caused her to feel irritated. And yet, she had to admit that Fang Mu's skill regarding plants and vegetation was beyond human!

Chapter 219: Not Fair!

As everyone seethed with excitement, Meng Hao stood up. As he did, everything gradually grew quiet. All eyes were focused on him alone. Some filled with complicated expressions, some were purely envious, others were shocked or jealous.

A variety of expressions were directed toward Meng Hao, who appeared to be extremely worn out. He turned toward Wang Fanming and the others, clasped hands and bowed. Then, he left his workstation and found a place to sit cross-legged and meditate.

Wang Fanming took a deep breath. He glanced at Meng Hao for a moment, and then his gaze swept out across the crowd. “In twenty hours, the second round of the master alchemist promotion examination will begin. It is also the final round. Of the ten finalists, only one will become a master alchemist. The second round will consist of a test of the power of your catalyzing technique. You have twenty hours in which you may rest, but are not permitted to leave.”

Chu Yuyan had been watching Meng Hao the entire time. The shock had still not left her eyes. Even though looking at him still annoyed her, she had no choice but to admit that Fang Mu was someone she had to look up to in terms of qualifications.

“Skill with plants and vegetation is only part of being an alchemist,” she said, still unconvinced. “Let’s see if this guy really is qualified to perform alchemy. That includes catalysis, as well as control of the spiritual energy of the Cultivation base. Those are not things to be taken lightly. Let’s see if his skill in that regard is equally astounding.” The more she looked at Meng Hao, the more annoyed she got.

Not a single of the thirty thousand apprentice alchemists chose to leave. They continued to converse in low tones. Seventy percent of the conversations were about Meng Hao. The other thirty were about the other nine finalists who had passed the first round of the examination, and thus revealed their talent, like awls sticking out from a bag.

These other nine were all very nervous. They sat cross-legged, using each and every moment to rotate their Cultivation bases. They wanted to be in peak condition to face the second and final examination.

Meng Hao’s participation in the first round had crushed them down with a weight that made it hard to breathe. That having been said, there was no difference between first place and tenth. All would have a chance to pass the second round of the examination.

The second round was actually the focal point.

As far as they were concerned, there was still a chance to surpass Meng Hao. He might know more about plants and vegetation than them, but to catalyze medicinal plants required use of the Cultivation base, as well as significant practice. It demanded careful control of spiritual power; too much, and the medicinal plant would grow until it burst. Too little, however, and it would not grow healthily. It was difficult to find the perfect balance.

The nine other finalists breathed deeply as they sat in meditation. Images appeared in their minds from their years of experience catalyzing plants. Gradually, they began to fill with confidence.

Meng Hao sat there with eyes closed. Actually, he hadn’t wasted very much energy from his Cultivation base. The main reason he was tired was not because of his body, but because of the

effort in wresting away the legacy of the Resurrection Lily, as well as the rotating of the Demonic Core. His head felt like it was swollen. As he rested, his mind slowly began to simmer down.

Soon, the twenty hours had passed. Wang Fanming's voice suddenly rang out across the square. As he spoke, he moved his arm to rest on the pill furnace next to him.

"The time has come for the second round of this trial by fire. Would the ten final participants please approach!" As he spoke, the sound of furnace bells rang out, shaking the entire square. The eyes of the thirty thousand spectators focused intently on the proceedings.

The square was the same as before, but the thirty thousand workstations had been replaced by ten stone pillars, each one roughly nine meters tall. As they rose into the air, they glowed with an eye-catching light.

With the exception of Meng Hao, all of the final participants leaped up into the air, alighting nimbly onto the stone pillars, excited expressions on their faces.

All eyes were on them; after all, these were people who had distinguished themselves amidst thirty thousand peers. Considering their talent, they quickly covered up their excitement, replacing it with looks of determination.

Meng Hao opened his eyes, and they shone with a bright light. The swelling pain in his head was gone. The nature talent of plants and vegetation was now completely amalgamated, and was a complete part of him.

"I WILL become a master alchemist," he thought, his eyes shining with decisiveness. He stood up and strode forward. In a flash, he appeared on the final stone pillar. Instantly, everything grew completely quiet. Countless gazes came to be fixed upon him. Everyone would witness the promotion today and see... who would be promoted to master alchemist!

Whoever became master alchemist would instantly rise above one hundred thousand others!

In terms of status, position, remuneration from the Sect, and reputation, this person would no longer be in the same level as the apprentice alchemists. The difference between apprentice alchemists and master alchemists was like the difference between Heaven and Earth. After all, in the entire Violet Fate Sect, there were only about one thousand master alchemists. Later, if one could reach the realm of the Furnace Lord, then he could shake the entire Southern Domain. Any Furnace Lord occupied a

lofty position in the Dao of alchemy; be it in the Violet Fate Sect or the outside world, they would receive utmost respect and veneration.

Within the whole of the Violet Fate Sect, there were currently only around a hundred Furnace Lords.

Eight of that group were Violet Furnace Lords. They existed just beneath the three Grandmaster alchemists as the pinnacle representatives of the Dao of alchemy! All of the other great Sects and Clans thirsted to have any one of this group join them. They commanded extreme respect from one and all.

Everyone was watching as Meng Hao stepped onto the pillar. Wang Fanming and the others exchanged glances. One of the old men lifted his arm to push down onto the surface of the pill furnace. It began to emit a droning sound, and then opened up. Ten beams of light shot out and then came to rest, floating in mid-air.

The globes of light were blurry and indistinct, making it impossible to see what was inside.

“Ten different types of medicinal plant seeds, all of different categories. Candidates, make your selection. Whoever catalyzes theirs to the most mature degree, will be a master alchemist!”

With the exception of Meng Hao, the eyes of everyone on the stone pillars began to glitter brightly. They looked up at the ten indistinct medicinal plant seeds. It was completely impossible to tell what they were, causing the nine other participants to hesitate slightly. Then, one of them set his eyes in resolve. He lifted his hand and made a grasping motion, causing one of the glowing globes to shoot into his hand. It transformed into a blue-colored seed.

The other eight participants looked over. “That’s a Bluewater flower seed...” This flower could be used to concoct a variety of medicinal pills useful for the Foundation Establishment stage. It was relatively difficult to catalyze.

Without hesitation, the other participants reached up to lay claim to the various glowing globes of light. One by one, the globes descended into their hands. They looked around to examine which seeds the others had acquired. Some would be easier to catalyze, others more difficult. It would all depend on luck, considering that the differences between them all was not great.

After everyone made their choice, Meng Hao calmly lifted up his hand to retrieve the last glowing globe. The light transformed into a gray-colored seed.

When the surrounding tens of thousands of apprentice alchemists saw the seed in Meng Hao's hand, they were sent into an uproar. "That's Flying Ash leaf...."

"Of all the ten types of medicinal plants, Flying Ash leaf is least complex. That Fang Mu got really lucky...."

"You can't really say that. It's not necessarily easy to get the leaf to turn into ash."

As the sound of the discussions rose up, unsightly expressions appeared on the faces of the nine other participants. No one said anything, though. After all, Meng Hao was the last person to take a seed, so he obviously had no choice in the matter. They couldn't accuse him of cheating.

The old man standing next to Wang Fanming also started when he saw the Flying Ash leaf seed. He exchanged a look with the other old men, but no one said anything. Suddenly, he spoke out in a cool voice which rose up above the hubbub that filled the square: "Begin!"

There was instant silence. Meng Hao and the other nine people on the stone pillars all focused on the seeds in their hands. They circulated spiritual power, then, using the East Pill Division technique, began to nourish the seeds with it. The medicinal plant catalyzing had begun.

After the space of ten breaths, popping sounds began to ring out from the hands of all the participants, including Meng Hao's. Sprouts appeared, swaying gently back and forth and slowly beginning to grow taller.

Meng Hao concentrated fully, slowly pouring out power from his Cultivation base. He didn't squander a drop. This convergence technique was what he had learned in the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament. During the past months in the Violet Fate Sect, he had practiced the technique daily, especially when working with Li Tao. He channeled spiritual energy into the seed. Soon a gray-colored medicinal plant appeared in his hand, roughly two inches tall, with seven green leaves.

As it grew, gray veins began to appear within the leaves. "When the leaves turn completely gray, it means that the plant is fully mature. Eventually, the leaves will turn into ash. That ash is the true essence of the plant which is used as a medicinal ingredient." Information regarding this particular medicinal plant appeared in his head, as well as ten hybrid variations.

The plant began to grow taller. It was now three inches tall, and the leaves were about half gray. Now it had twelve leaves in total, which was actually the maximum number of leaves that a Flying Ash plant could have.

As for the other nine participants, none of them had grown their plant past sixty percent; obviously theirs were not as mature as Meng Hao's.

Their faces were dark and obviously filled with intense discontent. Even many of the surrounding tens of thousands of apprentice alchemists sighed. According to their understanding, it was obvious that Meng Hao's medicinal plant was superior.

"This test really isn't fair... If that Fang Mu had gotten any other medicinal plant besides Flying Ash leaf, then it wouldn't have been so easy...."

"It's not necessarily unfair. The Flying Ash leaf might just be particularly suited to Fang Mu's spiritual energy. If someone else got it, they might not necessarily find it so easy. Growing that particular plant isn't simple. In fact, to cause the leaves to transform into ash takes more spiritual energy than most other medicinal plants."

Voices began to echo out. The Flying Ash plant in Meng Hao's hand made a popping sound. It seemed to be burning. A gray flame covered it, and then gray ash began to spread out.

When this happened, the surrounding nine participants faces tightened. Their eyes were red as they frustratedly looked at Wang Fanming and the others. Nervously, they began to speak.

"Seniors, this isn't fair!!"

"The Flying Ash leaf that Fang Mu got is way simpler than my medicinal plant. If I'd gotten Flying Ash leaf, I could have done the same thing!"

"We worked hard for so many years for a chance at promotion. Don't tell me that we lose, not because of skill, but because of luck!? Elders, it really isn't fair!"

"Please, re-start the second round and give everyone the same medicinal plant. If we lose then, we will be sincerely convinced!"

Chapter 220: Promotion to Master Alchemist!

Meanwhile, outside the square, on a mountain peak in the East Pill Division, Chu Yuyan's master, Grandmaster Pill Demon of the Violet Fate Sect, looked away from the pill furnace calmly and lifted his hand. There on his palm was a small pile of gray powder.

This was none other than some of the ash created by the burning Flying Ash leaf that had been catalyzed moments ago by Meng Hao.

Pill Demon lifted his hand and closely examined it, his eyes thoughtful. He then waved his hand, and the ash dissipated.

"No seepage of spiritual power..." he murmured faintly after a while.

Down in the square, Chu Yuyan silently watched Meng Hao along with the other nine complaining finalists. She wasn't sure why, but she felt somewhat pleased to see what was happening. The sound of all the condemnation piling up against Fang Mu was quite pleasant to the ear.

As the nine other participants continued to make repeated requests, Wang Fanming and the seven others looked at each other, brows furrowed. After a moment of discussion, Wang Fanming stood up.

As he did, everything grew quiet.

"If all of you truly desire to be completely convinced, well, Fang Mu, do you agree to restart the round?"

Meng Hao smiled. He said nothing, but simply nodded.

Wang Fanming nodded back in admiration. "Very well. In that case, we shall restart the round. This time, all ten of you will receive exactly the same type of medicinal plant. Those who do not win, will have no grounds for complaint!" He waved his right hand, and ten identical seeds shot out toward Meng Hao and the others.

The seeds were crimson, and emanated a plant-like aura.

“Crimson Spirit sapling!” thought Meng Hao, his eyes glittering. The hearts of the other nine participants trembled. They frowned as they examined the crimson seeds in front of them.

A collective gasp could be heard from the onlookers as they peered forward.

“So, it’s a Crimson Spirit sapling. That’s a medicinal plant useful for the great circle of Foundation Establishment. It has the appearance of a fire type, but actually, all types of spiritual energy can be used to nourish it.”

“Considering the level of our Cultivation bases, catalyzing a medicinal plant like that would be just too difficult...”

On the pillars, all the participants except for Meng Hao hesitated for a moment, then clenched their jaws and grabbed the seeds which floated in front of them. Then they used all the power of their Cultivation bases to begin catalyzing.

Meng Hao reached up and took the seed into his hand. He looked at it closely, then closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, a violet glow appeared in his hand, encircling the crimson seed. Spiritual power emerged, and the catalyzing began.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, one of the middle-aged men on the pillars began to sweat profusely. His face was pale white, and his body trembled. However, he gritted his teeth and slapped his bag of holding to produce a Spirit Stone. He gripped the Spirit Stone in one hand and catalyzed the Crimson Spirit sapling in the other.

One by one, the other participants began to follow suit. An hour passed. Soon all of the participants, excluding Meng Hao, were relying on Spirit Stones to catalyze the plants. One and all had pale faces and bloodshot eyes.

Only Meng Hao looked as calm as ever. His gaze was fixed on the Crimson Spirit sapling as he carefully controlled his spiritual power. Not a drop leaked out. All of it poured into the seed of the Crimson Spirit sapling.

Clearly, none of the other participants were able to do such a thing. Of all the spiritual power they sent out to nourish the medicinal plants, only thirty percent actually ended up being used.

Another hour passed. The man who had been the first to produce the Spirit Stone suddenly staggered. Face white as a sheet, he coughed up a mouthful of blood and took a few steps back. He stared mutely at the seed in his hand. He had expended all of his power and hadn't been able to produce a single sprout.

He shook his head bitterly and chose to withdraw.

Not much time passed before a second, third and then fourth participant left. By the time more than two full hours of the catalysis round had passed, only five participants were left.

It was then that a popping sound rang out, causing everyone to look toward Meng Hao's right hand. There in his palm, a sprout suddenly popped out from the crimson seed!

Moments later, a sprout popped out from the seed of one of the other competitors. This seed belonged to the man who had lasted in the first round of the competition longer than anyone else except Meng Hao.

His face was somewhat unsightly as he tightened his grip on the Spirit Stone in his hand and then gave Meng Hao a grim look.

As for the other three participants, their faces were white. Despite using all the power they could muster, they were still unable to cause the Crimson Spirit sapling seed to sprout. All of them withdrew.

The true test of the second round had arrived. Once again, it was a battle between the middle-aged man and Meng Hao.

"I prepared a lot of Spirit Stones for this part of the examination," said the middle-aged man, his eyes red. "There's no possible way that I can lose to you." The pillar he stood on was situated directly opposite of Meng Hao. He looked up and glared at Meng Hao, then pushed down on his forehead. A roaring sound filled the air as his Cultivation base suddenly began to soar.

It flew from the eighth level of Qi Condensation all the way to the ninth, the great circle of Qi Condensation! Clearly, he had been suppressing his Cultivation base the entire time, all with the intention of unleashing his true power in the end of the catalysis exam. In this way, it would only take one step to sweep past any opponents.

When the man's Cultivation base suddenly erupted, it caused quite a commotion among the onlookers. At the same time, the Crimson Spirit sapling seed in front of him slowly began to grow.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. He didn't employ the power of his Foundation Establishment Cultivation base. He relied only on the spiritual power of Qi Condensation to catalyze the Crimson Spirit sapling. He completely ignored the middle-aged man, and in fact closed his eyes to focus solely on catalysis.

More time passed. Both Crimson Spirit saplings continued to grow taller. Several hours passed. By now, both plants were about the height of a person.

The middle-aged man's body quivered and veins bulged on his face. He had lost track of how many Spirit Stones he had used, and felt like he was beginning to grow crazy. As soon as a Spirit Stone was used up, he would produce another. His Qi passageways seemed unable to bear up under the strain, but he ignored them. Determination filled his eyes. He must win! He must become a master alchemist! For that, he would charge on regardless of anything.

Finally, blood sprayed from his mouth, and even as his body trembled violently, he pushed all out with his Cultivation base, which was now beginning to sink down in level. Spiritual energy which stemmed from his very life force poured out to catalyze the Crimson Spirit sapling. This instantly caused the plant to grow up about three meters. As of now, it no longer looked like a sapling, but instead a tree. The middle aged man staggered backward several paces, unable to continue. He had already risked his life, and to continue on would no longer be risking it, but delivering it up!

His Qi passageways burned as if with fire, causing his entire body to spasm. Sweat poured out, and his Cultivation base continued to sink lower. Despite all this, his eyes glowed with loftiness and pride.

Amazed discussions instantly broke out among the surrounding apprentice alchemists. Even Wang Fanning and the others exchanged glances. Chu Yuyan nodded her head. Clearly, what he had done was no slight accomplishment.

"My Crimson Spirit Sapling had grown so tall it's now a tree! Your sapling isn't even seventy percent as tall as mine. Let's see how you secure the master alchemist position now!"

For the first time, Meng Hao looked over at the middle-aged man. "I'm not finished yet," he said coolly. The Crimson Spirit sapling in his hand slowly began to grow higher. From seventy percent of the height of the other man's, it grew to eighty, then ninety.... In the time it takes an incense stick

to burn, the middle-aged man's face grew paler and paler. His body trembled, and his eyes filled with disbelief. Meng Hao's Crimson Spirit sapling was now three meters taller than his.

Everything was completely silent. Everyone stared blankly at Meng Hao. They had already been astonished by his nature talent in the first round. Now, in terms of catalyzing skill, the results caused everyone to stare with deep shock.

However, Meng Hao still wasn't finished. He stared at the Crimson Spirit sapling, his eyes blazing with determination.

"If I'm going to put on a show," he thought, "I might as well go all out. I'm really curious to know how much I can grow the Crimson Spirit sapling with this catalysis technique!" Eyes glittering, more spiritual energy appeared in his palm, pouring into the Crimson Spirit sapling. Of course, he did not use the power of Foundation Establishment; he wanted to show off, but he wouldn't forget himself in the process.

Six meters, nine meters... slowly, the Crimson Spirit sapling stopped growing up, but began to grow out instead. Thicker and thicker it grew until it was now a large tree!

This tree might not be amazing enough to attract the attention of the entire world, but it certainly became the focal point of the entire examination square.

Meng Hao catalyzed the tree to such an extent that suddenly a single flower appeared on it, along with a fruit. It was a crimson-colored Spirit Fruit that instantly began to emanate spiritual energy.

When Chu Yuyan saw this, her eyes went wide and filled with an expression of disbelief. Wang Fanning rose to his feet, as did the other old-timers. Strange expressions filled their faces.

"The Crimson Spirit sapling is blossoming!! It's bearing Spirit Fruit!"

"He's a Qi Condensation Cultivator, but can do this? Inconceivable!"

The tens of thousands of observing apprentice alchemists couldn't hold back; a buzz of discussion instantly filled the air. All the other participants who had failed stared blankly. As apprentice alchemists themselves, they were well aware of the significance of the Crimson Spirit sapling bearing fruit.

“Crimson Spirit saplings can be used to refine medicinal pills for the great circle of Foundation Establishment. But their fruit contain the essence of the entire plant; they can create medicinal pills for the early Core Formation stage!”

“I can’t believe Fang Mu did it! This technique can catalyze out all types of medicinal plants suitable for the Qi Condensation stage, and even some for the Foundation Establishment stage. But it’s impossible to use on medicinal plants needed for the Core Formation stage. And yet... he actually catalyzed Crimson Spirit Fruit!”

As the sound of conversation drifted in the air, Meng Hao took a deep breath and waved his right hand. The Crimson Spirit sapling abruptly trembled, as if it had suddenly lost its source of power. It began to wither. Even as it withered, though, Meng Hao’s left hand reached up and grabbed the Crimson Spirit Fruit. Without a moment’s hesitation, he placed it into his bag of holding.

The nine meter tall Crimson Spirit sapling was now completely withered. Amidst the continuous buzz of conversation, Meng Hao hopped off of the stone pillar.

Wang Fanming took a deep breath, then gave Meng Hao a deep look and said, “The person promoted to master alchemist today is... Fang Mu!” His voice rang out across the square, and then seemed to enter the pill furnace and echo out throughout all the valleys of the entire East Pill Division.

All one hundred thousand apprentice alchemists heard each and every word!