

The Heavens 251

Chapter 251: Meng Hao's Dao of Alchemy!

Each and every Black Sieve Sect Cultivator in the enormous square watched on with excitement. It was as if massive thunderbolts had struck their hearts and minds, and continued to echo out.

“The forge of Heavens is what gives birth to the transformations of the sun and moon!”

The words echoed out, causing everyone to pant. The beautiful woman stared at Meng Hao with wide eyes. Next to her, Patriarch Violet Sieve was so moved that he closed his eyes.

Everything grew silent.

“You...” Chen Jiayi's expression immediately changed. How could he possibly have imagined that Fang Mu would be able to speak so viciously? He felt as if a sharp blade had pierced into his very heart.

Zhou Dekun took in a deep breath and stood there, trembling. He wasn't excited, though. Actually, moments ago, he had actually thought Chen Jiayi to be correct. But hearing Fang Mu speak, he knew what he said to be the truth.

Chen Jiayi took a deep breath and composed himself. “Grandmaster Fang, you startled me,” he said, staring dead at Meng Hao. “However, it doesn't matter whether you are talking about the sun and moon, the sky, or the forge of Heaven and Earth. All exist on the path of alchemy. All types of plants and vegetation can be concocted into medicinal pills. All spirits and souls can concoct the spirit of the pill! What I disagreed with just now was Grandmaster Zhou's assertion that the self is unchanging, but that pill formulas contain countless variations. I said nothing about the transformations of the sun and moon of which you speak.

“In my opinion, alchemists must embrace transformation of the self. Only by embracing transformation can countless variations be produced. Only in this way can you speak of endless pill formulas, or concoct the endless varieties of medicinal pills that have existed since ancient times.”

“Your excellency did mention a person being able to produce countless variations,” said Meng Hao coolly. Once again he spoke slowly and calmly. As he stood on the dais, the breeze lifted his long

hair, blowing it across his face, partially obscuring the stellar glow in his eyes. “Countless variations? The wind and clouds, the thunder and lightning, these are all Heavenly changes. The quaking of the earth, the rise of mountains, the flow of great rivers, these are Earthly changes. Are you responsible for these great changes of Heaven and Earth? Is the rain which falls from the sky birthed by the will of Grandmaster Chen? Grandmaster Chen, is it your will which causes the rise and fall of mountains?”

“That was to be my second question. However, there’s no need for you to attempt to respond to it, because you can’t! In truth, you are no Grandmaster. Even if you become one in the future, you will never be worthy to lay claim to such transformations. Can the transformations of Heaven and Earth truly be contained in your heart? How laughable! As conceited and arrogant as the King of Yelang! You truly overestimate yourself!”

Meng Hao was now ridiculing Chen Jiayi in the same voice that Chen Jiayi had used to ridicule Zhou Dekun. The words cracked like lightning, causing Chen Jiayi’s face to flicker.

“You... you really do have a sharp tongue! That’s obviously not what I meant. You’re completely exaggerating what I said. I was speaking only of pill concocting philosophy!”

“Philosophy? I would love to hear some more details.”

“I speak of nothing other than the philosophy of transformation,” he replied immediately. “Take the best of many schools of thought and fuse it into your own. Absorb the finest aspects of your acquaintances. Eliminate the dregs which exist in the self. Refining pills is like refining the self! By reaching perfection, the path to the pinnacle can be trodden, and the full power of transformation can be employed!” The surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples seemed to approve of his words.

He continued in a voice that could sever nails and chop iron: “It’s like when a painter paints a mountain. He first observes millions of mountains, and then is capable of painting his own. That mountain he paints will contain the essence of all the other mountains he observed; thus, a masterpiece is created! Similarly, millions of tiny streams will fuse together to create a great and boundless river! This is the philosophy of which I speak. Assemble the thoughts from many schools, and coalesce them in the self! This is my path, and how I achieve the Dao of alchemy!” He flicked his sleeve, and his eyes glittered as he stared at Meng Hao. “I’m curious to hear Grandmaster Fang’s philosophy of alchemy!”

His words echoed out into the hearts of the tens of thousands of Black Sieve Sect disciples. Han Bei looked on thoughtfully. Behind Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun stared, an introspective look in his eyes.

Meng Hao looked back at Chen Jiayi, his expression the same as ever. His tone light, he began, “When a painter observes millions of mountains, then paints one, perhaps his painting contains the essence of the mountains he observed. However, the mountain he paints... is not real. It emerges from his imagination, and is what he believes a mountain to be. In truth, he has already forgotten the first mountain he ever saw, because he has seen too many. He has also forgotten the feeling he experienced when he gazed at that first mountain’s peak.

“Millions of streams fuse together to become a great and boundless river. But that river... is no longer the stream it once was. It is the amalgamation of many waters, fused together and indistinguishable. That first tiny stream which dreamed of being a river is now dead, killed by the very process it desired.

“The process of his pursuit causes the painter to forget that first mountain, and because of that, the very reason he wished to paint a mountain in the first place. The process of becoming a river causes the stream to lose itself. Its will is diluted as it becomes a river, and then it is gone.” As he spoke, Meng Hao’s voice grew louder.

“This is my third question. By fusing many schools of thought, you lose yourself. You think you have benefited, but in reality, you have no path of your own. If you have no ideal of your own to adhere to, then you have observed millions of mountains, but forgotten why you wanted to paint a mountain to begin with!

“Without principles of your own to stick to, then you are a stream that has become a river. However, such a river has no soul! That, is true death!” Meng Hao flicked his wide sleeve. His words poured into Chen Jiayi’s ears and sent his mind spinning.

“As Cultivators, we must adhere to our own set of principles. As alchemists, we must adhere to our own Dao of alchemy. Acquaintances and other schools of thought can bolster or support our confidence. But we must never allow the process of the search to result in losing our own ideal.

“If the heart is unyielding, nothing can ever supersede it. This type of heart may seem as if it contains transformations, but in reality, is stable, a foundation. From beginning to end, it will never disappear. It will always exist. An unchangeable heart!” Meng Hao’s powerful words shook the square. Chen Jiayi’s face twisted, and without even thinking about it, he retreated a few paces. His eyes shone with confusion.

“If your heart yields, how can you create anything lasting?!” Meng Hao continued. “Grandmaster Chen, you do not possess a resolute heart. Do you truly have the confidence to mention other

schools of thought? Do you have the courage to boast shamelessly of blending together your own path? Do you truly dare to speak to me of the Dao of alchemy?"

Silence filled the square for a moment, and then conversations filled the air. Chen Jiayi was panting, and his heart was filled with confusion.

Behind Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun trembled, his mind reeling. All of a sudden he realized why after all this time he had never been able to become a Violet Furnace Lord. "Over the years, I've paid too much attention to the Dao of alchemy of those around me," he thought. "I've picked and chosen randomly.... I've forgotten about the path I originally wished to tread.... If your heart yields, how can you create anything lasting?"

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the beautiful woman exchanged a meaningful glance. Only the ruddy-faced old man next to them sat there with his eyes closed, not having moved a muscle.

A buzz of conversation rose up from the Black Sieve Sect disciples. Meng Hao's words had caused great waves of emotion to rise up in their hearts.

"You...." Chen Jiayi's face was pale. Next to him, Li Yiming was breathing heavily.

Meng Hao flicked his sleeve. His voice thundered up to the heavens. "Because the self never changes, the heart can tolerate the ever-changing transformations of the sun and moon, the maelstroms of Heaven and Earth, and those arduous journeys through thousands of crags and tens of thousands of torrents.

"The Dao of alchemy is eternal. The countless transformations contained within the heart are the pill formula. The unchangeable self is the pill furnace.

"I am the pill furnace, and my heart is the pill formula. Refine the interior to achieve Immortality. Refine the exterior to achieve the boundless Dao of alchemy. Fuse them together, and this is the Truth of alchemy. Alchemy is the Heavens! Alchemy is the Earth! Alchemy is the world!

"This is my Dao of alchemy!" Finally, the ruddy-faced man next to Patriarch Violet Sieve opened his eyes and looked at Meng Hao.

Each and every one of the Black Sieve Sect Cultivators, regardless of who they were, were now looking at Meng Hao. A silence as thick as death hung over them as they stared with brightly shining eyes.

Zhou Dekun stared excitedly at Meng Hao. As of now, not a shred of doubt existed in his heart. All of it had been replaced by passion, and pride. It was all because of Fang Mu, alchemist of the East Pill Division!

He had already made up his mind. When he returned to the Sect, he would help Fang Mu to gain the acceptance of the other Furnace Lords.

Actually, after this debate, it wouldn't take long for the entire Southern Domain to be talking about Fang Mu.

Chen Jiayi's face was pale, as if his spirit were completely gone. Next to him, Li Yiming was covered in cold sweat and was mumbling to himself. What no one could tell was that he was actually reciting Meng Hao's words, and branding them onto his heart.

An indescribable silence filled the square. Everyone was shaken to the core by Meng Hao's words.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the other Nascent Soul Cultivators were all thinking exactly the same thing: "This kid... has a limitless future!"

"Nonsense!!" cried Chen Jiayi, his shrill cry breaking the silence. He leaped up onto the dais to stand directly in front of Meng Hao. His eyes were bloodshot, and glared angrily at Meng Hao, shamed into rage. "You're nothing but sharp-tongued and shameless! If words could concoct pills, then even mortals could practice alchemy! I have been cultivating the Dao of alchemy for years. I have memorized one hundred thousand varieties of plants and vegetations. I know of eight hundred thousand grafting variations! You finagled your way to being a Furnace Lord, but really, you're nothing more than a master alchemist! In this regard, do you dare to compete with me?!" Chen Jiayi really had no other option left. His previous aggressiveness had been thoroughly trampled down by Meng Hao's fierce diatribe.

It felt like being slapped across the face, like having a dagger plunged into his chest. As an alchemist, all of it was a direct attack on him.

"How do you want to compete?" replied Meng Hao, his voice cold, and his eyes filled with an icy air. He had long since decided to thoroughly crush Chen Jiayi.

Chapter 252: Crushing

“You and me, a contest of plant and vegetation knowledge!” said Chen Jiayi, glaring at Meng Hao. In his opinion, Fang Mu had finagled his way to being a Furnace Lord, and was far too young to compare to him, considering how many years he had spent working with plants and vegetation.

He had utmost confidence in his ability. True, there were people within the Sect who could surpass him, but he was absolutely sure that he could achieve victory over this trifling, sharp-tongued Fang Mu.

Even as he spoke, he waved his right hand, causing two black, withered branches to fly out of his bag of holding.

“Dried Spring Equinox Sapling!” thought Zhou Dekun, staring at the dried branches.

“These treasured items have been passed down since ancient times! Dried Spring Equinox Sapling!” Chen Jiayi grabbed one of the branches and held it in his hand.

“Grandmaster Fang Mu. You most likely do not recognize this item, so allow me to explain. This plant is rarely seen in the modern world, and does not occur naturally. The ancient method used to produce it has long since been lost. It has many uses, but it is because of one of its most amazing uses, that it came to be called the ancestor of all plants! Contained within this ancient plant is the essence of most types of plants and vegetations.

“As such, an alchemist such as myself can fill my Spiritual Sense with all my knowledge of plants and vegetation, imbue it into this Dried Spring Equinox Sapling, and cause it to sprout! The greater the body of knowledge, the more sprouts will appear. This will clearly prove which of us has the greatest mastery of plants and vegetation!” Chen Jiayi only had these two stems of Dried Spring Equinox. He had previously acquired them through a series of lucky coincidences, and considered them to be precious treasures.

Now that he had been pushed into a corner, he pulled them out in his attempt to grow his reputation in the future.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever, although inside he was actually leaping up and down with excitement. He had read about the Dried Spring Equinox Stem in the ancient records. It had miraculous usages that were difficult to explain. One of its greatest functions was its ability to improve the success rate when concocting medicinal pills!

By adding one of the stems to a batch of medicinal pills, the success rate would be increased significantly, perhaps even to one hundred percent.

Without the slightest hesitation, Meng Hao took the Dried Spring Equinox Stem in hand and glanced down. In his heart, he felt that it was a bit unfortunate. This particular Dried Spring Equinox Stem was somewhat small, only about as thick as a finger.

“Grandmaster Fang, let’s begin!” said Chen Jiaxi eerily. He sounded like he couldn’t wait to crush Fang Mu.

All of the Cultivators from the Black Sieve Sect looked on with expressions of concentration. The benefits they had received from this particular alchemy lecture were hard to quantify. Han Bei sat in the crowd, looking at Meng Hao.

Zhou Dekun was feeling a bit anxious. He had heard the story of the shocking way Meng Hao had passed the test to become a master alchemist. But he was still worried. Seeing his expression, Chen Jiaxi’s confidence grew stronger.

He didn’t wait for Meng Hao. Instead, he poured Spiritual Sense into the dried stem on his palm.

With a cold laugh, he said, “The appearance of one sprout indicates mastery of one hundred thousands types of plants and vegetation. Two sprouts represents two hundred thousand variations. Grandmaster Fang, I suggest you take the situation very seriously.” A bright glow began to emanate out from the dried stem, filling the entire square and attracting the attention of all the onlookers.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever. His Spiritual Sense burst out, flying directly into the dried stem.

Time passed slowly, enough for a single incense stick to burn. Suddenly, a green sprout appeared on the dried stem in Chen Jiaxi’s hand, the same you might see during the spring equinox.

“One hundred thousand plants... Grandmaster’s Chen has already shown mastery of one hundred thousand plants!”

“Who knows how many Grandmaster Fang... huh?” Even as the Black Sieve Sect Disciples began to discuss the proceedings, two sprouts appeared on the stem in Meng Hao’s hand!

Meng Hao’s expression was calm as the two sprouts appeared. However, the onlookers were shocked, as was Chen Jiayi. His eyes went wide. He had never seen anyone be able to produce two sprouts from the dried stem in the time it takes one incense stick to burn.

“It doesn’t matter,” he comforted himself. “Considering my skill with plants and vegetation, I will definitely be able to defeat this finagler in the end!” A snide expression filled his face. However, it was at this exact moment that....

A third sprout appeared, then a fourth, a fifth, and... nine sprouts appeared in total! It all happened in the space of about ten breaths!

The scene caused gasps of astonishment to fill the air. The Black Sieve Sect Cultivators were completely astounded.

“How is this possible....”

“Nine sprouts. That represents nine hundred thousand medicinal plants, nine hundred thousand variations! This Grandmaster Fang is so young, how could he have such terrifying skill with plants....”

“That’s nine....”

Suddenly, a tenth sprout grew out of the dried stem. Chen Jiayi, on the other hand, had only produced three sprouts.

“Impossible!” thought Chen Jiayi, his eyes growing red. He just couldn’t believe what he was seeing. His hair was in disarray, and he let out a wild howl as he attempted to make more sprouts come out as quickly as possible. Actually, he hadn’t clearly stated earlier what level of mastery he had obtained. In reality, he only knew nine hundred thousand plant and vegetation variations, placing him at the peak of the second realm.

As such, he really could only cause nine sprouts to appear.

It was at this moment, right after the ten sprouts had appeared on the stem in Meng Hao's hand, that suddenly... a flower bud appeared. It wriggled out, immediately attracting everyone's attention, even Chen Jiayi's and Li Yiming's.

A popping sound rang out as the flower bud opened... into a tiny white flower!

Li Yiming's face drained of blood. "An ancient Dried Spring Equinox blooming... it's... it's..." His expression was one of ultimate astonishment. He was well aware of the significance of the dried stem blooming.

His voice filled with excitement, Zhou Dekun said, "One hundred thousand medicinal plants, one million variations, one hundred million grafting variations.... The blooming of the ancient tree represents the millions of grafting variations. If ten flowers appear, it represents all one hundred million graft variations!!" He had never imagined that Meng Hao's skill with plants and vegetation could have reached such a shocking level.

Most Furnace Lords' mastery of plants and vegetation stopped somewhere in the tens of millions. Only Violet Furnace Lords could reach the level of one hundred million grafting variations.

"You... you...." Chen Jiayi gaped in astonishment at Meng Hao, his mind reeling. His vision began to grow dim. Even in his wildest dreams, he would never have imagined that Fang Mu's mastery of plants and vegetation could have reached this shocking state. Had he known, he would never have attempted to compete against him.

His voice quavered, and his body trembled. He was about to say something more when suddenly a second flower appeared, then a third and a fourth....

One flower after another, rocking Chen Jiayi's spirit. The Cultivators in the square were thrown into a frenzy. They stared at Meng Hao with looks of complete shock and disbelief.

Six flowers. Seven flowers. Eight flowers. Nine flowers....

Every new flower sent waves of astonishment through the hearts of the onlookers, even Patriarch Violet Sieve and the two Patriarchs next to him. Their breathing was ragged as they watched Meng Hao, their eyes burning.

Finally... the tenth flower appeared!

When the tenth flower appeared, Chen Jiayi's vision went black. He was on the verge of passing out. Anguished howls of grief welled up in his heart. This turn of events could never have been predicted. How could he have encountered someone so... inhuman here in the Black Sieve Sect? In truth, were he to know that Fang Mu was Grandmaster Pill Cauldron, he would certainly pass out immediately.

"Inhuman..." thought Zhou Dekun, his body trembling, his vision blank.

This was not a competition between two people. Fang Mu had completely crushed Chen Jiayi. There was simply no way for him to even fight back. He was utterly and thoroughly defeated.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the two others were breathing heavily, staring fixedly at the calm Meng Hao, as if he were some sort of precious treasure. A massive commotion of conversation exploded among the Black Sieve Sect Cultivators.

The Cultivators in attendance all had some knowledge of the Dao of alchemy. How could they not understand the significance of what they were seeing...?

"Grandmaster Fang Mu!!"

"The dried stem blossomed ten times! The ultimate achievement, one hundred million grafting variations!!"

Amidst uproarious hubbub, Meng Hao suddenly lifted his head. Without even looking at the dried stem, he put it into his bag of holding. Obviously, he didn't plan to return it.

"So, do you still want to compete in plants and vegetation?" he said. In front of him, Chen Jiayi's face was deathly pale, and his entire body was quivering.

He tilted his head back. His hair was dishevelled, and his eyes shone with demented insanity.

"YES!" he cried, staring at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with jealousy and hatred.

He hated that his opponent was so young, yet possessed such mastery of plants and vegetation. He hated that his opponent was an East Pill Furnace Lord. He hated that his opponent left him speechless, both with his words and his Dao of alchemy. He especially hated that his opponent wouldn't let him win, wouldn't let Chen Jiaxi trample over him to rise to prominence.

His hatred seeped into his bones, giving rise to devilish insanity.

“We will compete in Instantaneous Formula Scrying!” said Chen Jiaxi, his voice hoarse. Down below, Li Yiming had planned to pull him back. However, after seeing the wild, animalistic look in Chen Jiaxi's eyes, he simply sighed inwardly.

“Alright, if you want another competition, you'll have it,” said Meng Hao coolly. Glancing over at Chen Jiaxi and his maddened state, he added another thought: “However, a competition like that bores me. If you want to compete, then let's make a bet. Any pill produced that the other party can identify, will be surrendered immediately!”

Zhou Dekun gasped at the viciousness of it. This would truly be the fatal blow.

Li Yiming's face twisted. At the same moment, Chen Jiaxi seemed to recover some of his common sense. However, he couldn't let go of the hatred within his heart. He pushed his common sense down, ignoring it.

“Fine! I won't stop until I win!!” His voice rang out, causing all of the Black Sieve Sect disciples to let out a collective gasp. Li Yiming and Zhou Dekun both seemed to be shaking with anxiety.

‘I won't stop until I win’ indicated that the competition wouldn't be over as long as there were medicinal pills to produce. The only way it could end would be for someone to quit, and that would be the ultimate defeat.

Li Yiming was incredibly worried as he watched red-eyed Chen Jiaxi slap his bag of holding to produce a medicinal pill, which he then tossed over to Meng Hao.

Meng Hao grabbed it and looked at it.

“World Mirage Pill. Heavenly Dawn sap, Hundred Tombs soil, Peace Dissemination leaf, Ninth Sexagenary grass....” Having finished speaking, Meng Hao placed the medicinal pill in his bag of holding and looked at Chen Jiaxi.

Chen Jiayi glared at him. He wanted to say that Meng Hao was wrong. However, they were both alchemists. To do that would lose him even more face than being openly defeated, and he would lose any right to continue.

He slapped his bag of holding to produce another medicinal pill, which he threw over to Meng Hao.

“Frigid Lightning Pill,” said Meng Hao coolly. “Not many of these pills exist. It requires root of Seasonal Glory Grass, harvested amidst the snows of winter, as well as Gold and Iron sap, Lightning Fire Grass....” He continued to list out dozens of medicinal plants.

“This pill... interesting. I’m not sure of the name, but it contains power to strengthen the arms. It’s obviously a body-refining pill. It contains Indomitable Mountain flower, Containment sapling....”

“This... this is actually a magic pill which can melt the blood and transform it into explosive power. It contains crushed Green Burst, Celestial Heaven oil....”

“Fellow Daoist Chen, you have many unique pills. Excellent, excellent. I’m not sure the name of this pill, but it’s clearly a poison pill. It contains....”

Time passed by slowly. Zhou Dekun stared on in shock. Chen Jiayi seemed to be on the verge of collapse, his face as pale as death as he tried to outdo Meng Hao. However, he really had no chance. He was essentially just handing over his medicinal pills....

In the time it takes for only half an incense stick to burn, he had already delivered nearly a hundred different medicinal pills over to Meng Hao....

Chapter 253: Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!

In the time it takes for half an incense stick to burn, a hundred different types of medicinal pills had been “delivered” over. Chen Jiayi trembled; his face was ashen. His madness had reached an explosive height as he found that there wasn’t a single medicinal pill he could produce that his opponent couldn’t identify.

This level of skill left Chen Jiayi in despair. He wanted to cry that his opponent was wrong, but he didn’t dare. If Fang Mu then used the formula to concoct an identical copy of the pill, Chen Jiayi’s entire reputation would be in ruin.

Li Yiming stood off to the side, watching bitterly as Chen Jiayi handed over pill after pill, and Meng Hao put pill after pill into his bag of holding. His scalp was numb, and his heart had filled with an indescribable fear.

The surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples watched the scene in astonishment. From their perspective, Chen Jiayi wasn't competing with Fang Mu, he was just giving him pills.

On the other hand, Meng Hao's actions left them buzzing with shock. His unfathomable skill with plants and vegetation, his irrefutable logic regarding the Dao of alchemy, and his fearsome Instantaneous Formula Scrying just added layer after layer of mystery. As they watched him, their faces filled with continuously growing amazement.

From beginning to end, Meng Hao didn't pull out even a single medicinal pill. This was because he never misidentified any of the pills that were produced. Eventually, he started to feel a little bit embarrassed.

Chen Jiayi, of course, had the worst of it all. His heart bled, his eyes were growing dry, and his body trembled. Everything seemed to be going black.

However, he continued to pull out medicinal pills. He had utmost confidence in each pill, and yet they all ended up in his opponent's bag of holding.

There was no way to put an end to it. Just now, he had said, 'I won't stop until I win.' He wouldn't be able to end until he ran out of medicinal pills.

As he pulled out the one hundred and twenty seventh pill, he suddenly lifted his head to look at Meng Hao. Then, he radiated madness as he slowly put the pill back into his bag of holding and instead retrieved a jade box.

The jade box was covered with black splotches, as if it had been entombed in the earth for countless years. This was an object that Chen Jiayi originally hadn't intended to reveal. To him, it was a precious treasure of a lifetime. In fact, when he had uttered the words 'I won't stop until I win,' he hadn't even considered to include this item in the statement.

Suddenly, he realized that if he wanted to gain complete victory, he would have to win at least one time. And if he wanted that, then he must use the item in the jade box. After all the fierce struggle now, pulling out this object finally gave him hope.

The instant the box appeared, all eyes came to rest upon it. Anyone could tell that the pill inside this box would most certainly determine victory or defeat!

The black stains on the box made it obvious to all the onlookers that the box was so old it was beginning to decay. There was even a faint, gruesome death aura wafting out from the box.

A serious look filled the eyes of Patriarch Violet Sieve and his two companions.

Chen Jiayi gritted his teeth and slowly said, “If you know the formula to this pill, then I, Chen Jiayi, will admit defeat and, if I ever meet your excellency in the future, will immediately fall to the ground and kowtow to you! If you don’t know the formula, then I will not cause any further trouble for you. I will only require that you return all the pills I produced just now. Then, this matter will be concluded!”

Zhou Dekun’s eyes narrowed, and before Meng Hao could say anything, he strode forward and beratingly said, “Chen Jiayi, you are a scarlet-robed master alchemist of the World Pill Division. Do you have any face? This is obviously an ancient medicinal pill whose pill formula has been lost for countless ages. How could a modern-day alchemist possibly be able to identify it!?” He was obviously worried about Meng Hao leaping to accept the challenge.

A buzz rose up from the surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples. “An ancient medicinal pill!” Such pills from ancient times were very rare. Even one would be enough to cause an incredible stir. Furthermore, the formulas for most ancient pills were lost. Even the three great alchemists might have trouble identifying an ancient pill. Each and every such pill could be considered a consummate pill.

“Where did Grandmaster Chen get an ancient medicinal pill? You almost never see something like that! If it were auctioned off, the price it would get would be unimaginable!”

“Could it be one of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain’s treasures that he bestowed upon Grandmaster Chen as a gift?”

As the conversations broke out, Li Yiming took a deep breath. Even he never imagined that Chen Jiayi would possess an ancient medicinal pill.

“Do you dare?!” shouted Chen Jiayi, glaring at Meng Hao.

Meng Hao looked at the jade box, and his eyes filled with imposing aura. He had seen an ancient medicinal pill before, the day Grandmaster Eternal Mountain had visited the Violet Fate Sect. That pill had been an Entrancement Pill.

Meng Hao thought for a moment, and then his eyes flickered with resolve. He made a grasping motion, and the jade box in Chen Jiayi’s hand flew over to him.

Seeing Meng Hao agree to the challenge caused Zhou Dekun’s heart to fill with anxiety. Li Yiming also appeared shaken. Chen Jiayi, on the other hand, let out an inward sigh of relief. His eyes filled with a cold sneer. He knew from the moment his opponent had agreed, that victory was his!

He had acquired this treasured ancient medicinal pill a few years ago from some old painter. It had nearly left him in poverty, and he had been forced to concoct pills like a slave for three years as part of the deal to acquire it.

He didn’t dare to casually consume it; he planned to wait until his longevity was reaching its end before doing so. Or perhaps he would trade it for some incredibly priceless treasure. As a matter of fact, the pill’s appearance had already caught the attention of the Black Sieve Sect; it seemed they already were interested in acquiring it.

Meng Hao took hold of the jade box. His expression was serious as he slowly opened it. As he did, a reddish glow shined up from within. Faint strands of celestial music drifted about, and within the glow, the phantom image of a young boy could be seen. He appeared to be dancing in pleasure.

The image instantly caused Patriarch Violet Sieve and his two companions to gasp. The beautiful woman immediately rose to her feet.

The amazement of the surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples was really at its peak. Buzzing conversations filled the air, and Zhou Dekun’s face went pale white.

“An ancient medicinal pill which can create illusory images, this pill... is even surrounded by celestial sound. Just... just what pill is this?”

Li Yiming was also completely shocked as he stared at the glowing red light emanating up from Meng Hao's hands.

As for Chen Jiayi, a fresh breath of life seemed to have washed over him. He was in high spirits, and gave a cold laugh as he looked at Meng Hao. Seeing Meng Hao's look of intense concentration, he lifted his chin.

“Grandmaster Fang, considering your skill in the Dao of alchemy, don't tell me that you can't identify this pill? Ah, forget about it. I'll just explain it for you. You know what pill this is? The name of this pill should be known to all alchemists. This is one of the three great medicinal pills of the ancient Dao of alchemy. Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!!”

The Black Sieve Sect Cultivators didn't seem to be familiar with the name of the pill. However, upon hearing the name Li Yiming immediately stood up. A look of disbelief filled his face as he stared at the glow rising up into the sky.

“Primordial... Heavenly Replenishing Pill....”

Zhou Dekun was panting, and his body shook. He took a few steps forward, breathing raggedly, staring at the medicinal pill in Meng Hao's hands. Suddenly, his voice rang out through the Black Sieve Sect's massive square: “Crimson glow, a dancing child accompanied by celestial music.... This... this is most certainly one of the three great ancient medicinal pills! Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!! According to the legends, anyone who consumes this pill can steal luck from the heavens and increase their longevity by one thousand years!!” The audience buzzed in excitement. A medicinal pill which can increase longevity, even if only by a sixty-year cycle, would be incredibly rare. The price people would be willing to pay for such a thing would be unthinkable.

A consummate pill which could increase lifespan by one thousand years was even more incredible!

Patriarch Violet Sieve's eyes shined with unprecedented brightness. The only other time a glow like this had been seen in his eyes was when he had been about to snatch Ultimate Vexation. After all, his longevity had long since been approaching its end.

The ruddy-faced old man next to him also looked at the jade box with profoundly glowing eyes. He began to mutter to himself.

With his chin set complacently, Chen Jiayi looked at Meng Hao and said, “Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill. The word Primordial includes ten thousand variations of plants and vegetation.

As for the words Heavenly Replenishing, it is just as Grandmaster Zhou just said. It can increase longevity by one thousand years!” Chen Jiayi was now completely back in control of himself. He had suffered defeat before, but with the appearance of this pill, he now viewed himself as having already won.

“Grandmaster Fang,” he continued, “I believe it’s now your turn. Please, tell me the pill formula for the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill, if you’re able!” He glared at Meng Hao aggressively.

Everything went quiet, as all eyes focused on the crimson glow emanating out of the jade box, and the red pill which rested inside.

Li Yiming also seemed to have recovered his wits. He took a deep breath, and his eyes began to shine. He knew in his heart that there was no way Fang Mu could achieve victory now.

Zhou Dekun cursed silently. This was an ancient pill, one of the three great miraculous pills. Its name was majestic, and there was definitely no modern-day alchemist who could know the formula.

He took a step forward. Glowering at Chen Jiayi, he said, “Chen Jiayi you are a scarlet-robed alchemist of the World Pill Division. Such tactics as this are contemptible! People like us, even people like your Master, Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, could never identify the formula of the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill! Furthermore, the contest just now was to identify pills that you had concocted. Did you concoct the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill? Even you don’t know the formula, yet you dare to bring it out as part of this contest?!?”

Chen Jiayi laughed coldly. “This was agreed upon by Grandmaster Fang,” he said in a growling voice. “You can’t claim that I’m breaking the rules.” He ignored Zhou Dekun, and stared again at Meng Hao. “Grandmaster Fang, I’m not the only person awaiting your answer. There are tens of thousands of others who are all eagerly awaiting to hear the pill formula. Haven’t you been looking at the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill for long enough!?” He took a step forward and, seeing Meng Hao’s brow furrowed as it was, felt all his previous feelings of depression melting away. “If you can’t identify it, then so be it. However, you must produce all of my pills from just now and return them immediately.

“Fang Mu!” he shouted, his voice echoing throughout the square. “Can you, or can you not identify the pill formula!” Meng Hao slowly raised his head. His gaze moved from the medicinal pill and came to rest on Chen Jiayi.

Chapter 254: Thunder Across a Plain

“This pill...”

Meng Hao’s face looked the same as it always did. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking. His voice echoed out as if from unfathomably deep waters, immediately attracting the attention of all the onlookers.

Everyone, even Zhou Dekun, seemed to have assumed that Meng Hao had already lost. He didn’t appear to have even the slightest hope of achieving victory. Even a Violet Furnace Lord wouldn’t be able to identify the pill formula of an ancient pill.

“What of this pill?” interrupted Chen Jiayi. “Fang Mu, why be wordy about it? Losing is losing! There’s no need to struggle against it!” He gave a cold laugh.

Meng Hao looked calmly at Chen Jiayi.

When he spoke, his words were neither hasty nor halting. “The outer layer of this pill bears evidence of having been buried in the ground for at least one thousand years. Its death aura is dense, infecting even the jade box. However, the pill has not been harmed at all.

“The strange thing is that the middle layer of the pill is different. It contains only seven hundred years of time. Furthermore, although some of the plant and vegetation variations appear at first to have been refined with the ancient non-smelting technique, in fact, there are actually traces of smelting fire on them.” As Meng Hao spoke, Chen Jiayi’s cold smile grew wider.

“The inner layer of the pill,” continued Meng Hao, “is very strange. There are seventeen various plant and vegetation variations there, none of which exceed two hundred years in age! That is why it took me a bit longer to inspect it. I’m not sure why this supposed Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill, which can extend one’s lifespan by one thousand years, would have an exterior, a middle, and a center, that are so vastly different!” As soon as he finished speaking, a buzz rose up from the audience.

“What does that mean? Don’t tell me the pill is a fake?”

“How could it be fake? There was obviously celestial music just now, and the dancing child. Those things couldn’t be fake!”

“Don’t tell me Fang Mu is just babbling nonsense?”

As the Cultivators discussed the matter, Chen Jiaxi began to laugh uproariously. His grim, cold laughter echoed out in all directions.

He flicked his sleeve, and once again spoke, his voice dripping with ridicule: “Fang Mu, by simply admitting defeat, then I, Chen Jiaxi, could show respect to your status as a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division. But instead, you use low-down, underhanded means to attempt to achieve victory! You try to besmirch this ancient medicinal pill by saying that it’s a forgery!?! Competing with you has truly brought me great loss of face! What a waste!

“I can’t believe the East Pill Division has produced an alchemist such as you. Such an utter disgrace! No wonder you had to finagle your way into being a Furnace Lord. Now I, Chen Jiaxi, thoroughly understand the entire situation.”

Li Yiming’s expression also filled with derision. Zhou Dekun’s face was bright red. As an alchemist, defeat should be recognized, and respect for the Dao of alchemy should never be forgotten.

He sighed inwardly, and was just about to open his mouth in an attempt to smooth the situation over, when Meng Hao’s calm voice once again rang out.

“When did I ever say the pill was a forgery?” he asked, his expression the same as ever. He appeared to be completely oblivious to the gazes of the onlookers, as well as to Chen Jiaxi’s complacency.

“You sharp-tongued punk!” cried Chen Jiaxi, throwing any thoughts of mercy to the wind. “Are you still trying to argue? Just now you obviously implied that the pill was fake, didn’t you? Do you have an explanation for that? Fang Mu, do you have even the slightest scrap of face left?”

All the Black Sieve Sect disciples were now looking at Meng Hao. Their faces were filled with strange expressions. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the other two watched on wordlessly with furrowed brows.

“Would you pipe down!?” roared Meng Hao. His eyes filled with a brilliant light that shone like lightning on a pitch black night. His words echoed out like thunder across a plain, echoing out with such force that Chen Jiaxi’s mind was instantly shaken. Without realizing it, he stepped backward a few paces, the sound ringing in his ears.

Meng Hao stepped forward. He spoke, his words devoid of any courtesy: “You babble nonsense! You invert right and wrong! You don’t measure up to me when it comes to the Dao of alchemy, nor can your skill with plants and vegetation compare to mine. You are even further behind when it comes to Instantaneous Formula Scrying. And yet you still dare to bare your fangs and brandish your claws in front of me?!”

“I, Fang Mu, made three points just now, and none of them contained the word ‘forgery.’ That word came from you, you self-righteous twit! This competition was your idea. Defeat after defeat has revealed your true face, you stooge! You ask me if I have face? Let me ask you? Who is there that would possibly give face to you?” Meng Hao’s voice grew louder and louder, each sentence stabbing into Chen Jiayi’s psyche like a sharp sword. His eyes filled with flames of fury. However, as Meng Hao approached him, dread welled up in his heart, and he again retreated.

“You are a mere scarlet-robed master alchemist of the World Pill Division. Even people above you in the World Pill Division don’t qualify to constantly accuse me of finagling my way into being a Furnace Lord. I became a Furnace Lord because of the graces of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, and he approved of the pill I concocted. Therefore, repudiating me is the same as repudiating Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, and therefore the whole of the World Pill Division!” Meng Hao took another step forward, his words ringing out around him in a roar.

“Such actions on the part of a member of the World Pill Division are nothing less than treason against your Sect!”

The roar of Meng Hao’s words sent Chen Jiayi’s mind spinning. His eyes filled with veins of blood. “You....” His body trembled and he raised an accusatory finger toward Meng Hao. He was normally capable of sharply incisive words, but now, his mind was in chaos, and he couldn’t even speak.

Meng Hao’s words roared out like thunder: “In an attempt to further your personal glory, you’re even willing to repudiate Eternal Mountain and commit treason against your Sect! You are a lowlife, worse than pigs or dogs! What makes you think you have the face to stand in front of Fang Mu and rave so arrogantly? What gives you the courage to stand on the same stage as me when I am lecturing about alchemy?” Meng Hao flicked his sleeve. His words slammed into Chen Jiayi’s ears, causing his body to shake and his mind to reel and rock.

“Fang Mu!” he shrieked shrilly.

“Finally, let’s discuss this medicinal pill of yours. Its exterior is a thousand years old, its middle is seven hundred, and its interior roughly three hundred. It is no forgery. However, it will not add a

thousand years to your lifespan. Why? Because this pill is clearly a poison pill! The outer layer is simply a coating, while the middle layer serves to conceal the poison congealed within the center!

“What kind of scoundrel alchemist are you to produce such a pill? Furthermore, what is your intention in bringing it out? Don’t tell me you planned to sell it to the senior generation of the Black Sieve Sect? Upon consuming this pill, the Qi passageways will turn backward, and the Qi and blood will reverse their flow. Within the space of three breaths, you will begin to bleed from your eyes, nose and mouth. Within ten breaths, your garments will be soaked with gore, and you will be in such excruciating pain that you will wish you weren’t alive. After enough time passes for an incense stick to burn, your blood will freeze, and you will be dead!” Meng Hao waved his hand, sending the jade box and the red pill flying back to Chen Jiaxi, who stood there, his hair disheveled, his entire body quivering.

Meng Hao gave a cold snort, then continued in a voice that could sever nails and chop iron: “That is the response of Fang Mu. If you pulled out a forgery, I could identify it easily. But to pull out a poison pill like this shows how truly pernicious you are. Worthy of death! There is no need for me to continue to compete with you!!”

Chen Jiaxi felt as if his mind were being ripped in two. “This is no poison pill!!” he bellowed madly.

“If so, then why don’t you consume it?!” said Meng Hao, his voice as sharp as a blade, his eyes flickering like lightning.

“You!” raved Chen Jiaxi. He had gone through countless hardships to acquire this pill, and actually had planned to sell it at an exorbitant price to the Black Sieve Sect. However, Meng Hao’s words just now had caused Patriarch Violet Sieve and the other two Patriarchs to stare suspiciously. The surrounding Black Sieve Sect disciples also stared, their expressions grim.

Li Yiming felt as if his internal organs were about to burst. The tables had turned too quickly. Just now, Chen Jiaxi had clearly been in the superior position, and then in a blink of an eye, everything had been reversed. Li Yiming’s mind spun blankly.

It wasn’t just him. Zhou Dekun watched on dumbly. He had been very sure that the pill was real, and had never imagined that the events just now could occur. Everything Meng Hao said seemed perfectly reasonable.

“You... you!!” Chen Jiayi’s mind spun so violently he almost couldn’t comprehend what was happening. He had been pushed into the ultimate corner by Meng Hao. If he didn’t consume the pill, then everyone would obviously suspect him.

“Fang Mu!!” he howled.

Suddenly, he threw the pill into his mouth. Immediately, streaks of blood snaked through his eyes, and blue veins bulged on his forehead. He looked like some sort of devilish fiend. Patriarch Violet Sieve hesitated for a moment when this happened, but didn’t move to interfere.

The ruddy-faced man sitting next to him also was shaken inwardly, yet did nothing.

“I’ve consumed it,” he howled glaring at Meng Hao. “Did you see, Fang Mu? I consumed the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!!”

“One, two, three...” said Meng Hao, his voice light. When he said the word “three,” three breaths had passed. Chen Jiayi’s face suddenly changed. His body began to tremble, and his face distorted. He let out a blood-curdling scream, and then blood began to ooze out of his eyes, mouth and nose.

Immediately, all of the Cultivators present on the fifty-seventh mountain of the Black Sieve Sect burst into a commotion. Many of them shot to their feet, their eyes filled with astonishment.

Li Yiming’s vision began to grow dark, and his mind filled with a spinning roar that caused him to nearly lose consciousness.

Zhou Dekun gasped, his face filled with disbelief as he looked at Chen Jiayi standing there, screaming miserably, blood dripping down his face.

Patriarch Violet Sieve’s pupils constricted, and then began to fill with fury. Next to him, the ruddy-faced old man frowned, and his eyes began to fill with displeasure.

Meng Hao stood there on the stage, continuing to count softly.

“Four, five, six....”

As Meng Hao counted, Chen Jiayi fell to the ground, screaming shrilly. His body thrashed, and blood flew everywhere. His Qi passageways had reversed, and popping sounds could be heard ringing out from within his body. A mist of blood sprayed from his mouth, turning his red robe into a true garment of gore.

All of this was exactly as Meng Hao had described. Soon, the tenth breath would arrive, and Chen Jiayi would die. However, the moment Meng Hao spoke the word nine, his body suddenly flickered forward. His right hand pressed down onto the top of wheezing Chen Jiayi's head.

Immediately, Chen Jiayi's screaming ceased. His body trembled, and his aura was feeble, but it seemed that his trip down the road of death had paused momentarily. From the look of it, though, he only had a few moments left before death found him.

"For the sake of Grandmaster Eternal Mountain, Fang Mu is going to save your life today," said Meng Hao coolly. His face was as calm as ever. Therefore, no one knew that his heart was actually surging with waves of indescribable excitement.

Chapter 255: She Was Floating in the Wind

As soon as the words were out of Meng Hao's mouth, he slapped his bag of holding. A pill cauldron flew out along with some Earthly fire crystals and a host of medicinal plants, which Meng Hao began to work with. In front of everyone, he began to concoct a pill.

He worked at incredible speed. To everyone watching on, it seemed obvious that he must be doing all of this in an attempt to save Chen Jiayi. Apparently in order to completely ensure his success, he even extracted a drop of blood from Chen Jiayi's forehead.

The blood entered the pill furnace, clearly as a way to make the medicinal pill more effective in purging the poison.

Everything was deathly silent, and all eyes were on Meng Hao as he concocted the pill. From the moment he had stepped foot into the Dao of alchemy, this was the quickest he had ever concocted a pill. It only took a few moments for a fragrant aroma to fill the square.

Meng Hao then waved his hand, and a pink-colored medicinal pill flew out. It shot like lightning into Chen Jiayi's mouth. His life clearly hung by a mere thread at the moment.

Tens of thousands of eyes were fixed on Chen Jiayi. As soon as he consumed the pill, a tremor shook his body.

Then, even more shockingly, his hair began to rapidly change color, from black to white. His skin began to wither, as if his vitality had seeped away. In the space of a few short breaths, he seemed to have aged nearly a hundred years.

Before, he had been middle-aged, but now he looked like an old man with one foot in the grave. Wrinkles covered his face, and he emanated ancientness. Before, his Cultivation base had been at the late Foundation Establishment stage, but now it seemed to be vanishing because of his decrepitness.

The entire process, from beginning to end, only took about ten breaths' worth of time. Chen Jiayi looked completely different; he was now a feeble old man with no Cultivation base. However, the death aura which had been drifting off of him moments ago, had been replaced with life force.

When this happened, his eyes suddenly opened. Suddenly he coughed up a massive congealment of blood, along with what remained of the medicinal pill. It was about the size of a fingernail, half as large as it had been before.

It wasn't the pill Meng Hao had concocted, but the pill everyone had taken to be the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill!

As soon as he spat the pill out, Meng Hao waved his sleeve, collecting it into a pill bottle. Before he could put it into his bag of holding, however, Patriarch Violet Sieve's eyes flickered. He waved his right hand, causing the pill bottle to fly out of Meng Hao's hands and into his own.

Meng Hao ignored this, focusing instead on Chen Jiayi, who was trembling, a look of confusion in his eyes.

"In the moment before the poison killed you, I managed to prevent it from continuing to dissolve. The poison is not impossible to dispel. However, given my current skill in the Dao of alchemy, I was unable to find the proper combination of medicinal plants in such a short time. Therefore, I used the simplest method possible, and also the most direct. I stimulated your life force, and shattered your Cultivation base. In this manner, I was able to force out the poison. As for your Cultivation base, if you practice recuperative cultivation, it should slowly recover."

Chen Jiayi said nothing as Li Yiming rushed over and helped him to his feet. Chen Jiayi stared blankly at Meng Hao, then let out a bitter laugh.

“Eternal Mountain once said that alchemic battles are just like magical battles: death can come with a single thought. As of today... I am convinced of this truth.” With that, he clasped hands in salute. His body trembled, and he lowered his head to conceal the venomous hatred which seeped out from his heart.

Li Yiming also clasped hands and bowed to Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others. They clearly could not stay on the mountain, so, he took hold of Chen Jiayi and flew up into the sky, disappearing off into the distance.

A few Black Sieve Sect Cultivators rose to accompany them as they left. Considering all of Meng Hao’s experiences, it was impossible for him to not notice Chen Jiayi’s hatred. Had that hatred not been there, Meng Hao, well aware of how much he had come out on top, would have helped the man recover his Cultivation base more quickly.

But now, he abandoned such thoughts. Long before he had become Fang Mu, he had learned to treat his enemies with icy coldness.

Meng Hao turned to look at Patriarch Violet Sieve, who was currently examining the medicinal pill which Chen Jiayi had just vomited out.

“Elder Violet Sieve,” he said with a polite smile, “I won that pill in the competition just now. If you would like it, sir, perhaps you could state what you intend to trade for it?”

Patriarch Violet Sieve laughed loudly. Shaking his head, he flicked his sleeve, and the medicinal pill in its bottle flew back to Meng Hao. He had scanned it with Divine Sense just now. Even though he didn’t know much about the Dao of alchemy, he was a Nascent Soul Cultivator, who had lived many, many years. How could he not have an understanding of things like the ancient medicinal pills? Actually, he had previously specifically studied ancient medicinal pills.

Just now, no matter how he examined it, he couldn’t see anything particularly special about the pill. In fact, when he held it in hand, he could detect a fishy, rotten odor. After a brief discussion with the ruddy-faced man using Divine Sense, they had determined that it definitely was a poison pill.

The fact that he so quickly returned the pill to Meng Hao had a lot to do with everything that Meng Hao had just said and done. Before, everyone in the Black Sieve Sect, including Patriarch Violet

Sieve and his companions, hadn't paid much more than a glance to Fang Mu. As of now, though, it was obvious to everyone that Fang Mu... far exceeded Zhou Dekun.

This was especially true of his final vicious display. From now on, Patriarch Violet Sieve would pay closer attention to this Fang Mu.

Meng Hao accepted the pill bottle with a smile, then casually tossed it into his bag of holding.

The alchemy lecture was now over. Zhou Dekun invited Meng Hao to join him at a feast thrown by the Black Sieve Sect, but he politely declined. His face covered with exhaustion, he returned to Black Welcoming Peak.

Back in his residence, he sat down cross-legged to restore his energy. Time passed by, and soon moonlight filled the sky. Meng Hao suddenly opened his eyes and waved his right hand. A pill furnace appeared, along with an Earthly fire crystal. He also produced his Furnace Lord medallion, and its protective shield.

After securing himself within the shield, he slapped his bag of holding to produce the pill bottle and the poison pill. He took a deep breath, and took out... the jade box! He had placed it in his bag of holding much earlier.

In reality, the medicinal pill really was one of the three ancient medicinal pills, the Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill!

It was only half of the original pill, therefore, the essence of Time AND the medicinal strength within the pill hadn't completely vanished!

In ancient times, pills were not concocted using flames. Instead, the power of Heaven and Earth was used. The jade box was actually the final step of the concoction process. After being sealed inside, the pill would gradually become complete.

This was common knowledge; almost all ancient medicinal pills that had been discovered were like this. Despite being sealed in the jade box, the passage of so much time caused most such ancient medicinal pills to gradually dry out and become defective, although they generally contained a bit of medicinal strength.

Meng Hao had no idea how long this Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill had existed, but for some reason, it hadn't dried out, and had contained the full level of medicinal strength. Furthermore, the pill contained the power of Time.

If Meng Hao had not mastered the technique to refine Time, achieved enlightenment regarding the Violet Will Incantation, and refined a Spring and Autumn tree, then it would have been very difficult to spot the uniqueness of this medicinal pill. All three were essential. If one were missing, he wouldn't have been able to pick up on the clues.

Time was both visible and corporeal, yet at the same time, invisible and incorporeal. Ancient medicinal pills will dry out, and reveal their ancientness. This was a result of their passage through Time. However, this medicinal pill was different. It sucked in Time, filling the pill with its illusory power. This pill was actually... a Time treasure!

Because of that, when consumed, the pill would reverse the Qi and blood passageways, and immediately cause the body to begin to wither and age. However, after that, when the pill was fully dissolved, then the true power of the Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill would explode out.

That is exactly what had happened with Chen Jiaxi.

The so-called medicinal pill that Meng Hao had concocted was a ruse to cover up the truth. The only function it had served was to smear over the evidence of the Primordial Heavenly Replenishment Pill in Chen Jiaxi's body.

Meng Hao's true goal had been to first prevent Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others from picking up on any of the clues, and next connive his way into getting the pill for himself.

Meng Hao took a deep breath as he extracted the globule of blood from within the pill furnace and placed it into a jade bottle. Next, he put the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill into the oven and began to clean the filth off of it. Then, he gingerly placed it back into its original jade box, which he then held up to examine.

"The true value of this pill to me is not its medicinal strength, but the fact that encased within it is the power of Time. When it comes time for me to forge my treasure of Time, I will be able to learn a lot from it! It will increase my chances of success by quite a bit." Meng Hao was itching with anticipation. He could only imagine the power that he would be able to wield after producing his own treasure of Time.

“It’s too bad that Chen Jiayi... will obviously never tell me where he got this medicinal pill. However... I should know soon enough.” He lifted up the jade bottle, inside of where he had placed the globule of blood. This blood... was from Chen Jiayi.

“Once I’m able to produce a blood clone, the clone should be able to use its power to see the memories of whoever blood it was created from.” Meng Hao’s mind filled with excitement. As for Chen Jiayi, he had chosen to fight with Meng Hao in terms of alchemy. His Cultivation base hadn’t been irreparably destroyed, and furthermore, they were in the middle of the Black Sieve Sect, and the victory had been made openly and fairly. Therefore, there were no negative repercussions.

A few days passed by in a flash. The World Pill Division left, leaving the Black Sieve Sect alchemy training fully in the hands of Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun.

Patriarch Violet Sieve personally requested that Meng Hao concoct some Soul Refining Pills for the Black Sieve Sect. Such pills were nourishing to the soul. Meng Hao decided to politely decline; he didn’t want to have to work in such close contact with the Black Sieve Sect. As for Zhou Dekun, he seemed excited with the current situation. He had been giving lectures throughout the Black Sieve Sect, and was feeling quite content with everything.

Meng Hao spent his time visiting the sights in the Sect and paying respects to some of the Conclave disciples. He tried in a roundabout way to get information about Xu Qing. After five days passed, he still hadn’t seen a trace of her.

As of now, he was starting to get worried; the Black Sieve Sect was a bizarre place. The incident with Zhou Jie had solidified this fact in his mind.

On this particular evening, Meng Hao was walking along in an area near the edge of the One Hundred Mountains. He lifted his head up, and saw a woman standing atop one of the mountains off in the distance. She wore a black robe, and stood upon a stone pillar which jutted up from the mountain. The wind caused her garment, as well as her long black hair, to flutter about her. The instant Meng Hao saw her face, his mind trembled.

This woman was beautiful, but cold and cheerless....

He had been searching for her everywhere, and then suddenly, here she was, floating in the wind.

Her expression was one of blankness. She stood on the stone pillar, looking like she wanted to float away.

This was... Xu Qing.

Chapter 256: Bottom Line

The blank look in her eyes made it seem as if she had lost her soul, as if her spirit itself had been injured.

Her pale skin did not seem to contain even the slightest trace of blood, like that of a corpse which had been entombed in a coffin of ice for a thousand years. The wind which blew across the pillar she stood on was incapable of blowing away her look of confusion.

Her garments were stained with blackened spots of dried blood that seemed to have been there for a very, very long time. Never having been washed away, they had dried and branded themselves onto the fabric.

On her forehead was a wound, a gash that had clearly been there for some indeterminable length of time. It looked like a sword wound... that hadn't healed.

As her garments fluttered in the wind, her right wrist became visible. It had a second sword gash on it.

Xu Qing was thinner.

She was thin, and even colder than before. She looked as if she had just emerged from the midst of a frigid snowstorm. Her garment was blue, her long hair draped around her like a cloak. Her skin was so delicate it seemed as if a breeze could puncture it. Meng Hao stared up at her beauty, seemingly unwilling to even blink.

If he blinked, everything would go dark, light would disappear, and he would no longer be able to see the beautiful figure in front of him.

He saw the sword wounds, as well as her blank look. He also saw that her blood vessels had been damaged. In that moment, the entire world seemed to disappear, except for Xu Qing, standing there on the mountain peak amidst the wind.

Meng Hao suddenly felt a twinge of pain in his heart.

He could ignore Han Bei's secret. He could ignore Zhou Jie's bizarre behavior. The Demon Sealing Jade had spoken to him twice, but be it Han Bei or Zhou Jie, Meng Hao felt as if it didn't have much to do with himself. Their life or death, their bizarre situations, were things he didn't want to get involved with.

After all, the root of all the various situations was none other than the Black Sieve Sect itself!

Meng Hao had grown up as a scholar, and was innately intelligent and farsighted. How could he not understand the meaning of the words of the Demon Sealing Jade? It was especially obvious considering the divine ability Zhou Jie had used at the end of their battle that year, and the discarnate souls which had appeared. How could he not understand... what had happened to Han Bei and Zhou Jie? And how could he not understand the terrifying power of the Black Sieve Sect?!

He did understand. In fact he knew that the Black Sieve Sect's forces were much greater than the people who walked about on the surface of the land!

"Discarnate souls possess the body," he thought to himself. "The discarnate souls are like those which appeared along with Zhou Jie's divine ability that year, Cultivators who have long since died. It seems countless discarnate souls exist underneath all of the Hundred Thousand Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect...."

"This Black Sieve Sect, is a Sect of the underworld!"

"Returned from the afterlife, desiring to rejoin the world of men, possessing the bodies of Cultivators and living parasitic lives. Zhou Jie exists in this very state, his body having been possessed. He is incapable of recovering his own mental faculties, and should not have been able to seek out death as he did that day. Clearly, something unexpected had occurred after his possession."

"Because of that unexpected event, the discarnate soul that had possessed him was injured, which allowed his own soul to reawaken. That was what had caused his confusion, his madness, and his struggle."

"As for Han Bei, there is clearly nothing wrong with her. However, she wants outsiders to think that her body has been successfully possessed. This is because there are not two souls within her, but three! One is her own, one is a discarnate soul from the Black Sieve Sect, and the third... is the Han Clan Patriarch which emerged from the statue in the Black Sieve Sect's Blessed Land, and then entered her body!"

How could Meng Hao not understand these things!?

It was because he understood, that he didn't want to get sucked into the situation. But as time passed, and he hadn't been able to track down Xu Qing, he'd started to get nervous. Finally today, he was able to see her....

And now he understood that... he could not ignore the situation. Xu Qing's soul possession was a bottom line that Meng Hao couldn't accept.

He took a deep breath, then strode forward, heading directly toward the peak of the mountain. His body transformed into a prismatic beam. In an instant he had arrived behind the pillar upon which Xu Qing stood.

He looked at her back, and was about to approach her, when she turned. Her cold features were no longer filled with a blank look. Instead, a grim expression appeared.

In that moment, a sense of impending crisis welled up from the bottom of Meng Hao's heart. As he looked at Xu Qing, he couldn't see a Foundation Establishment Cultivation base any more. Instead, everything was blurry.

Meng Hao's expression did not change. He looked at her, and at the same time surreptitiously performed an incantation gesture with his right hand. Within his mind floated the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex. Because of the way he had performed the incantation, the Hex changed. It floated about in his mind, and stayed there, not moving out even the tiniest bit.

However, as soon as the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex appeared in his mind, his eyes, though they didn't look any different, now viewed the world in a completely different way.

The mountains were still green; the land below was the same land as before. But, the greenness of the Hundred Thousand Mountains was now covered with a black aura. This black aura roiled up from all the mountains to circulate about in the air. In this moment, it looked to Meng Hao as if the Black Sieve Sect really had become a Sect of the underworld.

Strands of black aura drifted up off of Xu Qing's body and swirled around her. Its nucleus seemed to be in the pit of her stomach, where a flickering globule of black mist existed. Deep within that black mist, Meng Hao could see Xu Qing's soul, sleeping, as if it had been sealed.

The black aura emanated out constantly, and in fact, behind Xu Qing, it congealed together to form into the blurry image of a woman.

The phantom figure emanated a seemingly endless ghastly aura. It was bizarre, and emitted thick an aura of death as it looked at Meng Hao along with Xu Qing.

“Who are you?” said Xu Qing, her voice unhurried. From Meng Hao’s perspective, this voice did not belong to Xu Qing, but rather the gruesome discarnate soul which floated behind her.

As her words drifted out, Meng Hao suddenly sensed that the surrounding black aura was rushing toward them. It swirled around, forming into countless faces that grinned hideously as they stared at Meng Hao.

Of course, they were unaware that Meng Hao could see them as they floated around.

“I am Fang Mu of the Violet Fate Sect,” Meng Hao replied with a smile. “Elder Sister, are you a Conclave Disciple of the Black Sieve Sect? I’ve been here for a few days, but this is my first time seeing you.” As he clasped hands and bowed, he allowed the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex to dissipate, and the world around him returned to normal.

“Oh, so you’re Grandmaster Fang,” Xu Qing said coolly. “This is a prohibited mountain, please leave immediately.” She turned, ignoring Meng Hao and staring off into the distance. A blank look once again filled her face.

His expression the same as usual, Meng Hao bowed again and then turned into a beam of light that shot away from the mountain. He took his time going back, enjoying the sights along the way. By the time he got back to Black Welcoming Peak, the moon hung high in the sky.

He entered the building and immediately settled himself in the protective shield of the Furnace Lord medallion. His face instantly grew grim. He had been extremely cautious on his way back, careful to make sure nothing at all seemed amiss about him. However, there were still some discarnate souls who followed him. They had swirled around him the entire way, finally disappearing when he arrived at Black Welcoming Peak.

“To save Xu Qing, I have to get close to her,” he thought. “Furthermore, I can’t let anyone find out about it. This Black Sieve Sect is obviously an underworld Sect, with discarnate souls flying around

everywhere....” Had he made an open move just now, not only would he have been unable to save Xu Qing, but he would also have broken his own cover.

He sat thinking, his eyes flickering. After some time passed, he closed his eyes.

Early the next morning, his eyes snapped open. He lifted up a jade slip, branded it with some information, then flicked his sleeve to send it flying out of the building.

His cool voice echoed out: “I have a matter to discuss with Patriarch Violet Sieve regarding pill concoction.”

As soon as the jade slip flew out into the air, a Cultivator appeared out of nowhere to grab it. It was impossible to determine his Cultivation base, but he wore a black robe. He immediately disappeared off into the distance.

Inwardly, Meng Hao gave a cold laugh. Ever since his alchemic showdown with Chen Jiayi, he had sensed an aura outside of the Black Welcoming Mountains. Obviously someone was there watching him.

A few moments later laughter could be heard, followed by Patriarch Violet Sieve, who had come in person to discuss things with Fang Mu. He stood there with a smile on his face, clasping hands and bowing to Meng Hao.

“Grandmaster Fang,” he said with a smile, “please don’t take offense. I arranged for a disciple to stand watch outside to ensure your safety. After all, our Sect is a complicated place, and I’m incapable of controlling everything. According to the information in this jade slip, you say you can concoct the Soul Refining Pill. Well....”

Meng Hao sighed and then in an embarrassed voice said, “Elder Violet Sieve, actually, I’ve never heard of the Soul Refining Pill. Considering that, along with its strange name, it obviously has something to do with souls. I fear that the concocting such a pill would be extremely difficult. With so many variations, it would be very draining. That is why I hesitated to agree.”

Patriarch Violet Sieve didn’t reply. Instead, he stood there waiting for Meng Hao to continue, which he did. “Any other ordinary medicinal pill would be simple, but for strange new pills, even if I wanted to concoct them, I’m worried that it would really be too draining. Furthermore, I don’t really have the appropriate pill furnace....” He gave a wry smile, and looked even more

embarrassed. “Also, I don’t think I really have enough of the medicinal plants that would be required. And I’m sure that the medicinal plants required are very valuable....

“Of course, I’m actually happy to help out, sir. I don’t mind getting tired. However, what I’m more worried about, would be the wasted time.... Furthermore, I don’t want to bother anyone during the concoction process, which will require one hundred percent concentration on my part....”

Patriarch Violet Sieve frowned for a moment, then suddenly laughed. “I understand, Grandmaster Fang. I can provide all of the medicinal plants you need. Even if you aren’t able to concoct the pills in the end, it won’t matter. Furthermore, I have the authority to provide you with some Spirit Stones as a way of thanking you for your work. As for a pill furnace... the Black Sieve Sect’s treasure storehouse happens to have a Ten Thousand Refinements furnace. We can gift this treasured furnace to you, Grandmaster! In addition, I can guarantee that no one will disturb you during your pill concocting. It will be just the same as if we sealed Black Welcoming Peak.

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered, but his expression was one of shyness, as if he was still embarrassed. “Sir, I am here at the Black Sieve Sect as representative of my own Sect. How could I possibly lay claim to treasured items of your honored Sect...?”

As soon as Patriarch Violet Sieve saw his expression, he smiled and raised his hand to cut off Meng Hao.

Chapter 257: Soul Refining

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment but then seemed to have made his decision.

“Sir,” he said, his voice resolute, “since you seem to place such faith in me, then... I will do the concocting! I will use everything I have learned to concoct the Soul Refining Pill for your honored Sect!

“As for your kindness, it will be engraved upon my mind forever. How about this. I’m sorry to say that I can’t do a bulk concoction. Concocting the pills that way might simplify things on my part, but the medicinal strength would be average, and the pills wouldn’t be as effective. Each person’s soul has slight differences. If I adjust each medicinal pill based on those differences, then I can concoct pills with maximum possible medicinal strength!”

Patriarch Violet Sieve looked at Meng Hao thoughtfully for a moment. From the moment Fang Mu had entered the Sect, Patriarch Violet Sieve had not noticed anything about him that was amiss.

As far as his background, his identity, his skill in the Dao of alchemy, there was nothing at all to cause him to be suspicious. He had been a bit skeptical regarding the matter with the Primordial Heavenly Replenishing Pill, but after thinking about it for a long time, he couldn't come up with any evidence of anything fishy.

The matter of the Soul Refining Pills was currently of extreme importance to the Black Sieve Sect. However, the alchemy Cultivators of the Black Sieve Sect were incapable of concocting such pills.

Only the East Pill Division and the World Pill Division were skilled enough to handle matters related to souls. With the World Pill Division gone, and Fang Mu being so prominent, Patriarch Violet Sieve only had to think for a moment before nodding.

“There are thirteen Conclave Disciples in the Black Sieve Sect who, because they cultivate a special type of divine ability, ended up injuring their souls. The symptoms are dementia and hallucinations, as you saw that day with Zhou Jie. Ai....” Patriarch Violet Sieve sighed, and then stared solemnly at Meng Hao.

“We can rely only on you, Grandmaster Fang, to concoct the pills we need. I will arrange for the thirteen Conclave disciples to be sent here one at a time for you to examine and concoct pills for.” When he finished speaking, Patriarch Violet Sect turned to leave. Meng Hao clasped hands and bowed as he did so.

Not much time passed before a bag of holding was delivered to Meng Hao. Inside were a large amount of Spirit Stones, roughly one hundred thousand. Seeing this caused Meng Hao's heart to start pounding.

In addition, there was a vast collection of medicinal plants, as well as the formula for the Soul Refining Pill.

Last of all was a pill furnace. Meng Hao took it out, and immediately his eyes began to shine.

The pill furnace was completely white, seemingly jade, and yet not. There were no carvings on its surface, and was a very unusual shape. Not a bit of medicinal aroma wafted out from it. However, what Meng Hao did see were strands of white colored Qi circulating around inside.

“Ten Thousand Refinements furnace!” murmured Meng Hao, palpitating with eagerness. Back in the East Pill Division he had studied a jade slip with introductions to all the various types of pill furnaces. There was one type which, after having successfully concocted ten thousands batches of

medicinal pills, would gain sentience because of all of the nourishment it had received from the Qi of the medicinal pills.

Such a furnace would have been constructed from incredible materials to begin with. After the ten thousand concoctions, it would become even more incredible. Such pill furnaces were rarely seen in the world. Generally speaking, pill furnaces are viewed as consumable items, and will explode after one hundred uses or so.

For a pill furnace to survive for ten thousand batches placed its value at an incredible level.

Meng Hao took a deep breath and then swirled his hand about inside of the furnace, grasping one of the strands of Qi and pulled it out to examine. After a moment, he sighed, sounding somewhat regretful. It seemed this pill furnace had been used to concoct ten thousand of the exact same type of medicinal pill.

In this case, it couldn't quite measure up to some of the other of this type of furnace which had been used to concoct countless different types of medicinal pills. However, as far as Meng Hao was concerned, this furnace far exceeded his Blood Crane furnace.

Putting away the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace, Meng Hao stood and then looked outside. A group of dozens of Black Sieve Sect disciples had surrounded the mountain and were now sitting cross-legged in meditation. Bluish light flickered around them. Clearly, once Meng Hao began his concocting, they would employ the full power of the light to create a shield around the mountain, ensuring that he wouldn't be disturbed.

Meng Hao muttered to himself for a moment, then decided to prepare for any emergencies which might arise. He lifted his Furnace Lord medallion, then branded it with some information. It immediately flickered. Moments later, Zhou Dekun flew toward him in a beam of colorful light.

Having received Meng Hao's transmitted message, he ended his alchemy lecture and immediately came to Black Welcoming Peak. Sensing the dozens of Black Sieve Sect disciples meditating in the area, he felt a bit of surprise.

Meng Hao went out to meet him and explain the situation. Furthermore, he asked Zhou Dekun to stay behind as Dharma Protector, and to act as his assistant.

Some time ago, Zhou Dekun would surely have refused. However, his attitude toward Meng Hao had completely changed recently. Hearing all the information, he nodded solemnly and pulled out

his Furnace Lord medallion. Meng Hao felt much more reassured now, and handed over the bag of holding with all the medicinal plants.

With the protection of two Furnace Lord Medallions, no matter what the Black Sieve Sect did, he would have temporary protection from any sort of Divine Sense.

As far as the discarnate souls went, Meng Hao had some methods that would prevent them from noticing anything untoward. In any case, he did not plan to do anything too noticeable. In this whole matter, caution would be of the utmost importance.

Not much time passed before two Cultivators appeared, carrying between them a young man in a blue robe as they hurried over.

When they arrived, Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun both took a close look at the young man, and then frowned.

His face was pale white, seemingly without any trace of blood. His eyes were vacant and blank, and his body was emaciated, his skin so thin that you could see the bones sticking out from within. It was obvious that his Qi passageways were not even moving. He was almost like a mortal.

One of the middle-aged men supporting him said, "This is Conclave disciple Huang Zhongxi. While cultivating a secret magic, the technique backfired, weakening both his body and soul. If the Sect Elders didn't maintain his life with magical power, he would have long since died." The man sighed, and then bowed deeply to Meng Hao.

"Muscle atrophy and a weakened body," said Zhou Dekun, his voice soft. "The soul is spilling out and the mind is dying. This man...."

Meng Hao looked closely at the young man, who clearly seemed to have lost his spirit. After a long moment, he approached the young man and placed his fingers onto his neck.

He muttered to himself for a moment, then moved his hand to grasp the young man's arm, after which he closely inspected the faint blue veins visible in his skin.

"First we will concoct a Spirit Fusing Pill to see how much damage has been inflicted on his mind. Elder Brother Zhou, what do you think?" Meng Hao looked over at Zhou Dekun, who nodded.

“Three Yellows grass, Seven Souls spice, Hundred Years flower....” Meng Hao slowly listed out several dozen kinds of medicinal plants. Zhou Dekun recognized many of these plants as being very rare. All were related to recovering mental faculties. He quickly retrieved the medicinal plants from the bag of holding provided by the Black Sieve Sect and began to catalyze and prepare them according to Meng Hao’s directions.

Meng Hao pulled out the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace. When he saw it, Zhou Dekun’s eyes went wide. However, he knew that now was not the time to ask about it, and suddenly understood why Meng Hao attached such importance to this job....

After placing the various medicinal plants into the pill furnace, Meng Hao performed a catalyzing incantation with his left hand, and then pressed a finger from his right hand directly into the forehead of the young man, opening up a small wound and retrieving a drop of blood.

The drop of blood floated in front of Meng Hao for a moment, and then flew into the pill furnace.

A few moments later, a black-colored medicinal pill appeared. With the flick of a sleeve, Meng Hao sent it into the mouth of the young man. About ten breaths passed, and then suddenly, the young man’s body began to tremble. He let out a miserable howl, which caused the faces of the two middle aged Cultivators to flicker.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever, completely calm.

The blood curdling screaming lasted for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn, after which a black Qi began to emanate out from the top of the young man’s head. Within the black Qi was also a white-colored mist. The two seemed to be fused together. However, neither seemed to be able to make use of the other, and were attempting to disperse.

However, it was as if some power were preventing them from separating. The more they fused together, the more they attempted to separate. From the look of it, they would only be able to stay fused together for a limited time, before completely separating.

“I’m not sure what technique this person cultivated, but it caused Death Qi to enter his body, which then began to consume his life force. It was suppressed, but that will not last forever. Unless something is done to save him, he will definitely die within three months.

“I, Fang Mu, can attempt to save him,” said Meng Hao coolly. “I’m fifty percent confident that I can succeed. However, his blood vessels are already in ruin. I need three generations of blood from his ancestors to create a Blood Vessel Pill. With that, I can reconstruct his blood vessels, and afterward, give birth to a new soul for him. Souls are birthed from the blood, so after this has been accomplished, I can concoct the Soul Refining Pill. At that point, success should be assured.”

Hearing this, one of the middle-aged Cultivators supporting the young man turned and left. After the time it takes two incense sticks to burn, he returned and handed three jade bottles to Meng Hao.

Inside were three generations of blood from the young man’s ancestors. In addition to the requisite latent talent, most Conclave disciples had ancestors who attained high positions within the Sect. As such, acquiring three generations of blood was not difficult.

Meng Hao indicated for the Black Sieve Sect Cultivators to take the possessed young man inside the residence. Then he asked them to leave, and produced his Furnace Lord medallion. Zhou Dekun did the same, and immediately the glowing shield appeared to lock down the area. Outside, another shield appeared to cover Black Welcoming Mountain. Everything was sealed down.

The only people in the building now were Meng Hao, Zhou Dekun and the pale-faced young man with the lost mind.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever as he looked thoughtfully at the young man.

“This person has been possessed by a discarnate soul evading the reincarnation cycle of Heaven and Earth.... After possession, if the body does not contain its original soul, it will become like a walking corpse. Without the ability to sustain itself, the body will begin to decay in a matter of days.

“Therefore, the discarnate soul is incapable of consuming the body’s original soul. Instead, it must exist as a parasite that controls the body!

“Originally, there was balance, but due to some unexpected circumstances, the balance was broken. Thus, the current situation arose.” A barely detectable glitter appeared in Meng Hao’s eyes.

“The discarnate soul is already damaged. The thing to do is to transform Yin into Yang... turn misfortune into the opposite! As the Demon Sealing Jade said, either seal it so that it cannot see the summer sun, or assist it with the blood will of the Demon Sealer!” Meng Hao’s eyes shone with a cold light. He wasn’t sure if the Soul Refining Pill would have any effect. But what he did know

was that the will contained within his blood was the only hope the young man had of living, either now, or in the future.

Chapter 258: Grand Matriarch Phoenix

“Three Heaven Pearl leaves. Dust Wind root, nine stalks. Sixty-year old Spirit Flow sap...” Meng Hao slowly listed off nearly a hundred different varieties of medicinal plants. Next to him, Zhou Dekun immediately retrieved them from the bag of holding and handed them over.

The earthly fire crystal blazed explosively, and the floating pill furnace immediately turned bright red. A strong medicinal aroma wafted out from the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace. Meng Hao fed the medicinal plants into it according to the proper interactions. He put them in carefully, making sure not to waste anything. Then he sliced a cut onto his finger and placed a drop of his blood into the pill furnace.

He exercised utmost control over the concoction process, which ended up taking three days.

After three days passed, a bright red medicinal pill emerged. Without hesitation, Meng Hao placed it into the mouth of the young man.

As soon as the pill entered his mouth, the young man’s body began to spasm. He did not scream, but as his body shook, a blank look filled his eyes. The struggling became more intense. It lasted for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. Finally, his body vibrated, and then suddenly went still.

He lowered his head, and didn’t move. The space of ten breaths passed, after which a gruesome Qi began to spread out from his body. Finally, he lifted his head up. The blank look was no longer there in his eyes, but instead, somberness.

“Many thanks, Grandmaster,” said the young man slowly. His words were those of thanks, but they were spoken with an incredible arrogance, as if saying the words were similar to giving alms to a beggar. He rose to his feet, ignoring Meng Hao, then turned and strode out of the building.

Zhou Dekun frowned with displeasure.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever, but inside, he laughed coldly. It seemed that balance had been restored between the young man’s body and the discarnate soul inside. However, because of the drop of Meng Hao’s blood, he now had the ultimate power; if necessary he could directly destroy the discarnate soul.

A single drop of the blood of a Demon Sealer can thoroughly exterminate a discarnate soul!

Patriarch Violet Sieve, the beautiful woman, and the ruddy-faced old man were waiting for the young man at the bottom of Black Welcoming Peak. When they saw him approaching, they began to breathe heavily. They quickly clasped hands and greeted him with a bow.

“Congratulations on your recovery, Minor Patriarch!”

Of course, they didn't let anyone see what was happening. They had long since sealed off the area they were in.

The young man glanced at the Nascent Soul Cultivators. “That otherworldly corpse which fell from the sky has really caused some problems. In fact, our lord is once again in deep slumber because of it. We're back in the world of men, but we still haven't accomplished the task ordered by our lord... However, you three did well to make use of that person. After all, he was able to facilitate my recovery. Now, we still have a chance.

“Arrange for the discarnate souls of the other Patriarchs to come. As for the one who contains... Grand Matriarch Phoenix, well, no mistakes can be made with her. If there are no problems with the others, send her as well.” Having finished speaking, the young man's body flickered, transforming into a black smoke which then disappeared, melting back into the earth.

Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others reverently saluted him as he departed. Then they stood and exchanged bitter glances. With that, they left, arranging for the other twelve people to be sent to Meng Hao, one at a time.

Time passed slowly. Meng Hao treated one after another of the so-called Minor Patriarchs. As of now, Black Welcoming Peak had become a very important place in the Black Sieve Sect.

Whatever requests Meng Hao made were met immediately. Of course, how could he not make use of this opportunity? All he had to do was say the name of a medicinal plant, and it would be delivered to him. Many of the ingredients he needed for the Perfect Gold Core gradually began to fill his bag of holding. Seeing what was happening, Zhou Dekun began to grow a bit envious, and also began to request some medicinal plants.

As they concocted pills, they both slowly began to reap rewards.

In this way, Meng Hao was also able to collect quite a few sets of three generations of blood. They had nothing to do with the pills he was concocting; they were required to create blood clones, and he would naturally not lose out on an opportunity for that.

If blood was not available from a given ancestor, Meng Hao wouldn't press the issue. He would just extend the time spent concocting the pill.

Finally one day, the pale faced Zhou Jie entered the building. This was the first time Meng Hao had seen him since that incident when he first arrived at the Black Sieve Sect. Zhou Jie sat down cross-legged. Meng Hao said nothing for a moment, then began to concoct the pill.

After Zhou Jie left, Han Bei arrived. She had a cautious look on her face. When she sat down in front of him, Meng Hao looked at her and then chuckled.

"Grandmaster Fang..." she said with a smile. Suddenly, she felt very nervous. The voice of the Han Clan Patriarch suddenly rang out in her mind.

"Be careful of this person! He is complicated, and most likely is able to sense my presence!!" This was not the first time she had heard something like this from the ancestor. The reason she had been nervous the first day she met Fang Mu outside of the Black Sieve Sect, was because of the voice of the Han Clan Patriarch.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. He smiled, then began to concoct. When the pill came out, Meng Hao looked over at Han Bei. Her expression was also the same as usual. However, her heart was trembling. Inside her mind, the trembling voice of the Han Clan Patriarch could be heard.

"That pill... you must not consume it!! This person... he...."

"Grandmaster Fang," she said softly, rising to her feet calmly. "I'll take the pill away and consume it later."

Meng Hao turned to Zhou Dekun, clasped hands and said, "Elder Brother Zhou, I have a small personal matter I wish to discuss alone with Fellow Daoist Han."

Zhou Dekun laughed. He had long since sensed that something was amiss. However, having been able to collect so many medicinal plants in the past days, he paid it no heed, and immediately left the building.

Seeing Zhou Dekun leave, Han Bei's heart trembled. "Grandmaster Fang...." she said, keeping her expression the same as always, like a flower. She was about to continue speaking when Meng Hao interrupted her.

"If you don't want to consume the pill, very well. In that case, however, you will owe me a favor that must be repaid at some point in the future." He looked at Han Bei with a profound look that seemed to penetrate deep into her mind.

Han Bei looked back at him and gritted her teeth. She was full of schemes, but right now, couldn't think of any way out. A blank look appeared in her eyes.

"Grandmaster Fang," she said, "I don't quite understand what you mean. But, I suppose I can agree to this favor."

"I don't need a favor from you," replied Meng Hao coolly, "but rather the third soul that exists within your body!"

The words entered Han Bei's ears like a thunderbolt. Her expression immediately changed completely.

She was about to say something when, suddenly, a blue Qi emerged from the top of her head. It congealed above her into the shape of a man. He stared at Meng Hao for some time before finally nodding.

"The Han Clan owes you a favor," he said in an archaic voice.

Meng Hao clasped hands and saluted. The figure disappeared, and Han Bei stared at Meng Hao, an expression of shock and fear on her face. After a long moment passed, she turned and left as quickly as possible. Before leaving the building, she collected herself, then caused a cold, somber look to shine in her eyes. As far as any outsider could see, there was nothing unusual about her. Soon, she disappeared off into the distance.

A month of pill concocting went by until finally, the Black Sieve Sect sent the last person to Meng Hao. It was none other than... Xu Qing.

Based on all of Meng Hao's experiences, the fact that she was the last to be sent was very telling. The discarnate soul inside of her must be someone not to be trifled with in the Black Sieve Sect, someone of utmost seniority.

Just as Meng Hao had suspected, as soon as she arrived, things immediately changed around Black Welcoming Peak. The protective shield protecting the mountain grew stronger, and countless discarnate souls circled around up in the air. All of them seemed to be looking down toward Black Welcoming Peak.

Seeing all of this, Meng Hao's heart sank a bit. However, the feeling didn't show on his face. He watched Xu Qing slowly enter the building and sit down cross-legged in front of him. She looked calm, and there was much less blankness in her eyes.

Meng Hao looked at her, glanced at the wound on her forehead, then activated his Furnace Lord shield. His face was the same as usual, but as he concocted the pill, he put in, not a normal drop of blood, but a drop of blood from his Cultivation base!

Such blood contained the essence of his life force, including his identity as the Ninth Demon Sealer, and the persistence of his will.

It entered the pill and joined the various interactions; furthermore, Meng Hao used some of the power of the meat jelly to ensure that no clues would spill out. When the concocting was done, he held the pill out to Xu Qing. She picked it up with her delicate hands, but didn't consume it.

"So, this is the pill which helped everyone to recover?" she said, her voice cold as she looked at Meng Hao. Without waiting for his response, she rose to her feet and strode out of the building.

Meng Hao watched her leave, then sat there thinking silently. He was certain that although she didn't consume the pill in his presence, she would soon.

This was because although she appeared to be in the process of self-recovery, it was actually just a front. The problems with the discarnate soul in her body far exceeded those of the others he had seen, by at least two or three times. In fact, her situation was the most grave he had seen so far. This was evident by the fact that the wound on her forehead was much worse than when he'd seen it the first time.

The next day at evening, within the seventh mountain of the Black Sieve Sect, Xu Qing sat cross legged within her immortal's cave. Her face was pale white, and her eyes filled with both struggle and blankness. Her body trembled.

She continued in this way for several hours before finally lifting up her hand from her bag of holding. Inside was the medicinal pill concocted by Meng Hao. The process of lifting it up to place into her mouth took nearly ten breaths.

If Meng Hao were here, he would be able to see multiple discarnate souls drifting around her body. All of them were staring nervously at Xu Qing as they flew to and fro.

In fact, outside, all of the Black Sieve Sect disciples who Meng Hao had saved, including Zhou Jie and Han Bei, kneeled before the Immortal's cave, bowing respectfully. It seemed as if they were waiting for a summons to enter.

Xu Qing still held the pill in her hand. After a long moment passed, the gruesome coldness in her eyes overcame the blankness and struggle. The discarnate soul inside of her sighed. She knew that because of the injury to the soul, balance couldn't be restored in this body. She was fading, and the original soul of the body was also fading. The body's life force was disappearing, and the wound on her forehead was growing worse. She knew that if she put things off any longer, the body would begin to decay.

Originally, she had never believed that consuming medicinal pills created in this world could lead to recovery. However, seeing the recovery of all the other discarnate souls caused her to question her view. After studying the pill for some time, she was unable to unlock its mysteries. Therefore, she decided that she had no other choice than to consume it. She placed the pill into her mouth.

Chapter 259: I Want To Watch You Fade Into the Distance

As soon as the pill entered her mouth and began to dissolve, Meng Hao's blood began to emit a crimson glow. At the same moment, the soul of Matriarch Phoenix within Xu Qing's body began to shake. A sense of impending life-or-death danger appeared, but before she could do anything, a frightening aura submerged her, making it impossible to send a warning to anyone on the outside.

Suddenly, Xu Qing's soul, which had previously been in a state of slumber, was infused with the red glow, nourishing her, causing her to recover. Xu Qing's soul was being directed.... Matriarch Phoenix was being suppressed by the blood of a Demon Sealer, allowing Xu Qing to rise from her weakness, whereupon, a soul consumption began to take place within the body!

This soul consumption had been Meng Hao's goal all along. He wanted Xu Qing to be able to do what Han Bei had done; fuse the discarnate soul, make it her own. Such a fusion would be undetectable by the Black Sieve Sect and the other discarnate souls. No one would be able to tell who truly held mastery over the body!

One in the midst of the other, a dangerous rebirth!

As Xu Qing raised the pill to her mouth, Meng Hao was sitting cross-legged in his residence. When the pill entered her mouth, his eyes opened. They were filled with a brilliant light. The blood in his pill came from deep within him, so obviously he could sense what was happening.

"The power of the meat jelly's ever-changing forms really is hard to penetrate...." Meng Hao rubbed his face for a moment, then slowly lifted his hand, within which was a jade bottle.

Inside the jade bottle was a medicinal pill. This was a pill he had concocted back in the Violet Fate Sect, before coming to the Black Sieve Sect. The pill bottle was sealed with wax, and hadn't been opened.

Originally, he had planned to give it to Xu Qing, but up until now, hadn't had a chance to.

He looked at the pill bottle, and then closed his eyes.

Early the next morning, Meng Hao walked out of his residence. Immediately, the disciple dispatched by Patriarch Violet Sieve to guard Black Welcoming Mountain, turned and saluted him with clasped hands.

"Please deliver this pill bottle to Fellow Daoist Xu Qing. She requested me to concoct it when she visited the other day." He handed the bottle to the Cultivator. Because of Xu Qing's special standing within the Black Sieve Sect, he felt it was unlikely anyone would open the bottle.

Even if someone did, they wouldn't understand.

A few days passed. On the seventh day, Zhou Dekun kept saying that they needed to leave. Meng Hao could delay no further. He left the mountain peak, flying up to join the impatient Zhou Dekun.

There were no problems whatsoever between him and Zhou Dekun. The alchemy lectures were over, as was the pill concocting. The invitation period from the Black Sieve Sect had long since expired.

There really was no reason to stay behind any longer. Meng Hao had had no other choice than to give in to Zhou Dekun's prompting.

At the moment, a large group from the Black Sieve Sect was escorting Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun out of the Sect. Patriarch Violet Sieve was among them, and was very courteous as they proceeded along.

As for the pill bottle, Meng Hao had been right. No one dared to open it. It had been delivered to Xu Qing's secluded meditation area, where it was received by a girl with a grim expression in her eyes. She scanned the bottle with Divine Sense and didn't notice anything special about the pill stored inside. Yet, she didn't dare to actually open the bottle. She was aware of Matriarch Phoenix's personality. This girl had already done the unthinkable by returning from the afterlife; however, a mere thought from Matriarch Phoenix could exterminate her instantly.

A trifling medicinal pill wasn't worth such a risk. Therefore, the girl paid little attention to it.

Finally the door of Xu Qing's Immortal's cave opened. As the sunlight poured in, the girl lifted her head up and then strode into the Immortal's Cave. Catching sight of Xu Qing sitting there cross-legged, she dropped to her knees and kowtowed.

"Congratulations on your recovery, Matriarch Phoenix."

Xu Qing said nothing. The girl didn't dare to lift her head, and as such, didn't notice the blank look which appeared in Xu Qing's eyes, followed by surprise.

After a few moments passed, Xu Qing stood up. She wore a long, greenish-blue robe, and her features were cold. As she left the Immortal's cave, she coolly said, "Rise."

The girl took a deep breath and then quickly rose to her feet, carefully following Xu Qing out of the Immortal's Cave.

Xu Qing looked up at the azure blue sky, and the bright sun, and the strange expression in her eye slowly faded away and turned into coldness. Deep within this coldness, however, was emotion, something only she was aware of.

“Please call over the other twelve Black Clan souls,” said Xu Qing, her voice cool.

The girl immediately nodded, and was about to leave, when she suddenly hesitated.

“Yes?” said Xu Qing, the coldness in her eyes glistening as she looked at the girl.

The girl’s body trembled, and she quickly said, “Grand Matriarch Phoenix, a few days ago Alchemist Fang Mu delivered this pill bottle. He said you had requested a pill to be concocted.” For some reason, the girl felt as if Grand Matriarch Phoenix was now even colder than she had been before.

She retrieved the pill bottle from her bag of holding and held it out.

Xu Qing’s expression was calm as she looked at the pill. Inwardly, though, her heart trembled, and her breathing grew rapid. She made a snatching motion, and the pill bottle flew into her hand. She unsealed the wax and poured the pill out of the bottle.

It was an ordinary medicinal pill, worth very little. However, despite its relative lack of worth, it caused an enormous storm of emotions to rise in her heart.

This was none other than... a Cosmetic Cultivation Pill.

She stared in shock at the medicinal pill.

“Which mountain is he located in?” said Xu Qing, closing her eyes to recover her grim coldness. The soul fusing wasn’t complete at the moment, and her mind was still a bit conflicted, and filled with confusion.

“Black Welcoming Peak...” replied the girl. Even before she could finish speaking, Xu Qing took a step forward and then disappeared.

Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun stood smiling outside the main gate of the Black Sieve Sect. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others clasped hands and bowed. Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun politely declined the offers to escort them further. After exchanging the proper formalities, they prepared to leave.

It was at this very instant that a bright beam of light shot through the air with indescribable speed. It emerged from the Hundred Mountains of the Black Sieve Sect, whistling through the air at such speed that ripples emanated out. A roaring sound filled the air which caused Patriarch Violet Sieve's face to twist. He spun and looked up at the approaching prismatic beam, and his face flickered again.

It all happened in the blink of an eye. Within the space of a breath, Xu Qing appeared in mid-air, wearing her long greenish-blue robe, her demeanor icy. Her grim, cold gaze swept over the crowd, coming to rest upon Meng Hao. Inside her heart was pounding.

The world seemed to disappear around her, forming a haze... except for one space.

This look... is because I want to catch another fleeting glimpse of your figure within the crowd.

This look... is because I want to always be able to see you.

This look... is because I want you to know... I've watched over you this whole time.

Meng Hao smiled as he looked at Xu Qing. She was immeasurably cold, but he was used to that. His smile contained happiness, within his eyes was warmth.

Their gazes met; Meng Hao's smile and Xu Qing's coldness. Only the two of them knew how their gazes reached into each other's hearts. He knew that she understood. She knew that the person standing there in front of her was none other than Meng Hao.

It was the same as that look they had shared outside the Black Sieve Sect's Blessed Land. It was just like the smile underneath the moonlight in the Reliance Sect. It was like the time Meng Hao had turned his head to look at her back on Mount Daqing.

Obviously, this was not the proper place for words. In truth, though, there was no need for words; the emotions of their period of separation were contained deep within their eyes. A look was all they needed to express the joy which existed in their hearts.

“I’ll escort you,” said Xu Qing coolly.

“Many thanks, Fellow Daoist Xu,” said Meng Hao with a smile, clasping hands and lowering his head.

Zhou Dekun stared in shock for a moment. Patriarch Violet Sieve and the others also gaped; they knew who Xu Qing really was, and they also knew that her presence here far, far exceeded that of their own.

Xu Qing ignored them, having eyes only for Meng Hao.

The three of them left.

Far outside the Black Sieve Sect, Meng Hao and Xu Qing stood atop a tall mountain peak, looking at each other. Zhou Dekun tactfully waited some distance away.

“Thank you....” said Xu Qing, her voice soft.

Meng Hao shook his head and looked back in the direction of the Black Sieve Sect. Xu Qing waved her right hand, and the ghastly coldness once again appeared in her eyes. She turned, and her voice echoed out into the emptiness.

“Any soul within thirty thousand meters of this place will be instantly exterminated!” As she spoke, a ghastly aura accompanied the sound to echo out. Meng Hao immediately sensed the countless discarnate souls in the area fleeing at top speed. An instant later, there was no sign of any discarnate soul.

Time passed, and the two of them stood there in the early morning air on top of the mountain. They spoke simple words, smiling, listening. Time passed, but neither of them seemed willing to part.

In the past, they had been friends in the same Sect. Later, they met in the Black Sieve Sect Blessed Land. Now here they were, meeting again in the outside world. All of these things things melded together deep in Meng Hao’s heart, as well as Xu Qing’s.

Her expression was cold, but her heart was filled with joy. Within her seemingly cold pupils could be seen a touch of warm light. No matter how his appearance had changed, the person in front of her was still her Junior Brother Meng Hao.

As soon as she had realized that Fang Mu was Meng Hao, her heart had begun to pound. There were so many things she wanted to tell him, but as soon as he looked at her, she felt like she didn't have any words to speak.

The fact that he hadn't left the Southern Domain, that he was a Furnace Lord of the Violet Fate Sect... this was enough. As soon as she saw the Cosmetic Cultivation Pill, she completely understood everything. She wasn't sure when it had happened, but Meng Hao's figure had at some point become deeply ingrained into her; he was now a part of her very heart, a part that would never leave her.

No matter how many years passed that tried to wash clean the memory, as long as she thought back, she could see that faint smile. The years could not wash it away, so it grew deeper, to the point where she didn't need to think back. She just kept moving forward, because she knew that one day, the two of them... would meet again, and would walk together amidst the snow and wind.

Soon, moonlight caressed the branches of the willow trees, and the sky began to turn slightly violet. The mountain breeze lifted Xu Qing's long, black hair to cover her face. The sight of it filled Meng Hao with warmth, and a slight smile.

The smile appeared on his face, but came from his heart.

It was faint, but like water, it was something her life could never do without.

"Go," she said softly. "I want to watch you fade into the distance."

Chapter 260: Five Years Without a Fight!

As Meng Hao disappeared off into the moonlight, he looked back and saw Xu Qing standing there on the mountain peak. Memories of the times he had spent with her filled his mind.

The first time he handed her a medicinal pill in the Reliance Sect. Outside the Immortal's cave in the Reliance Sect, when he gave her a Cosmetic Cultivation pill. Her voice underneath the moonlight. Then their time together in the Black Sieve Sect Blessed Land. And now.

For some reason, it seemed as if many stories lay therein.

Meng Hao wasn't sure if this was romantic love. The feelings within in him now were things he'd never felt before, never experienced. What he did know was that every time he saw Xu Qing, he felt happiness well up within him that seemed to have been buried deep in his memories.

It was a good feeling.

In fact, during his five years in the Violet Fate Sect, the thing he found himself thinking about most often was cold Xu Qing, standing under the moonlight, her black hair floating in the wind.

"I wonder what it would be like... if the Reliance Sect were still there, if the Black Sieve Sect hadn't taken Elder Sister Xu away? What if we were still back in the Reliance Sect?" Meng Hao looked forward again. The moonlight shone down onto his back as he proceeded off into the distance. Questions such as that had no answer.

He drew further and further away....

Two days later, a pair of prismatic beams shot through the air above a path to the teleportation portal which led to the Barren Mountains. They were none other than Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun. Their task having been accomplished, they were now on their way back to the Sect.

After leaving the Black Sieve Sect, Zhou Dekun, had cleared his throat and then said, "Aiii. You should get out of the Sect more often and make more friends with these Cultivator Clans. You know what? How about this: I'll take you to meet some of them while we're on our way to the teleportation portal."

Looking sorrowful, he had continued, "We're Furnace Lords, and we spend most of our time holed up in the Sect. You can't deny that concocting pills takes a lot of resources. What you can earn in the Sect isn't enough to survive on. So... ah, Fang Mu, whenever you get sent out of the Sect, don't be in a hurry to get back. Take some time to interact with the outside. They have wealth to spare, and are the perfect companions for alchemists like us."

Meng Hao had nodded approvingly. After the events in the black Sieve Sect, the previous hard feelings between him and Zhou Dekun had disappeared. They now had a relatively good relationship.

Thus, Zhou Dekun spent the better part of half a month taking Meng Hao to the various Cultivator Clans in the region, as well as to a mid-sized Sects, where they were received with great ceremony. No matter where they went, they were treated with utmost respect. Seeing the pretentious air with which Zhou Dekun carried himself amongst these Cultivator Clans made Meng Hao smile.

Furthermore, whatever needs they had were met; in fact, whenever there were opportunities to sell medicinal pills, the Spirit Stones came flowing into their bags of holding. That caused Meng Hao's eyes to shine brightly. During the half month, he was able to sell quite a few medicinal pills.

Actually, most of the pills he had sold were ones he had acquired from Chen Jiayi.

Finally, half a month later, Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun were nearing the teleportation portal that led to the Barren Mountains

The Barren Mountains were located very near to the center of the Southern Domain, an area that could be considered a major intersection between the various Sects and Clans. Because of the location of this teleportation portal, it had eventually turned into a centralized travel hub.

In a valley in the east of the Barren Mountains was a location that usually bustled with activity. Now, however, it could only be described as gruesome.

The reek of blood filled the air, and the ground was littered with corpses. Searching through the corpses for bags of holding were a few dozen Cultivators who wore black robes and white masks. Occasionally they would encounter someone gasping their last breaths, and would immediately run them through with a sword.

Beyond the black-robed Cultivators was a black, iron cage, several meters tall. Considering the cage floated in the air and emanated a mysterious glow, it was obviously a magical item. Inside the cage were two Cultivators.

Their faces were pale, and they were both unconscious. They were splattered with blood, and were clearly seriously injured, but not dead. A faint aroma of medicinal pills emanated off of them; they were obviously alchemists. One of them wore a long green robe, which was embroidered with a pill furnace, marking him as an alchemist of the World Pill Division.

Not too far away, three Cultivators were locked in magical combat in mid-air. Ripples spread out through the air. This was not the magic of the Nascent Soul stage; however, the level of power made it obvious that they were not Foundation Establishment Cultivators, but rather Core Formation.

Of the three Core Formation Cultivators, two wore black clothes and azure masks. Their attacks were vicious; they were only of the early Core Formation stage, but were clearly beyond normal.

As they attacked, booms filled the valley.

“Who are you?!” roared the besieged Core Formation Cultivator. “I’m from the Golden Frost Sect....” Blood sprayed from his mouth as he shot backward.

There was no response to his question. Of the two azure-masked Cultivators, one was pudgy, the other skinny. They advanced forward, their attacks growing even more vicious.

It was at this exact moment that suddenly, one of the three teleportation portals in the valley began to glow. As soon as the glow rose up, the group several dozen Cultivators with black robes and white masks began to close in on the portal.

The glow of teleportation lasted for the space of a few breaths, and then slowly began to disappear. Two figures appeared: Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun.

Zhou Dekun was laughing and saying something to Meng Hao.

“I have a good relationship with several of the Cultivator Clans in the Barren Mountains. Next, I’m going to take you to....”

Meng Hao was smiling, but in an instant, his expression immediately changed. Even as the teleportation was completing, before he and Zhou Dekun could see anything on the outside, a sense of danger rose up within him.

Before he could speak, the sense of danger rose to the heavens. Meng Hao’s face changed. He flicked his left sleeve, and a wild wind sprang up, rippling toward Zhou Dekun and knocking him to the side. Borrowing some of the momentum, Meng Hao’s body snapped like a willow branch off at another angle.

Meng Hao and Zhou Dekun flew off into opposite directions. Almost in the same instant that they left the teleportation portal, a boom filled the air as the combined magical might of the dozens of Cultivators slammed down onto it.

As the boom echoed out, Meng Hao shot backward nine meters, both hands flashing incantation gestures and then waving out in front of him. Popping sounds rang out as the incoming power of the dozens of Cultivators dissipated.

Zhou Dekun's face flickered. After being pushed off of the teleportation portal by Meng Hao, his right hand flickered in an incantation sign and then slammed into the ground. A great beam of light shot out from his body, blocking the power of the magical attack. Despite being of the late Foundation Establishment stage, blood sprayed from his mouth. His eyes filled with astonishment and fury as he looked at his attackers.

Meng Hao's eyes filled with a cold glow. It had been a long time since he engaged in battle magic with anyone. During his five years in the Violet Fate Sect, he hadn't made even a single attack against anyone. However, his skill in battle magic, and his ability to kill, had by no means been reduced. In fact, his five years of hibernation had made him even stronger.

Some of that had to do with the Dao of alchemy and the Dao of poison. During the past five years, he had concocted no small amount of poisons. Killing intent flickered in his eyes as he looked at the dozen or so Cultivators in black robes and white masks.

The instant he saw them, he could sense the intense killing intent radiating off of them. He saw the corpses laying around on the ground, and the two people in the cage. He also could see the battle going on in the air off in the distance.

He didn't hesitate at all. His right hand slapped his bag of holding, and the two wooden swords flew out. Their sword aura flared up; they had been kept in silence for a very long time, and now that they were out, a massive killing intent boiled up. This caused most of the black-robed Cultivators to turn their heads toward Meng Hao.

"How dare you!" roared Zhou Dekun. "I'm a Furnace Lord of the East Pill Division. You..." He hadn't personally engaged in magical combat for a very long time. Ever since becoming a Furnace Lord, he had trodden a path filled with courtesy and respect. Yet just now, even before he could step off of the teleportation platform, he had been the victim of a sneak attack.

Before Zhou Dekun could even finish speaking, Meng Hao saw the eyes of the black robed men beginning to glisten as they looked over toward the old man.

“Not good,” thought Meng Hao, his eyes flashing. Without a moment’s hesitation, his body flickered, and he shot forward.

He moved at incredible speed, the two wooden swords screaming next were like two Sword Dragons that charged directly toward two of the black-robed men. Before the two men could retreat, the wooden swords stabbed through their foreheads, coming out the other sides of their heads in fountains of red and white.

Continuing forward, Meng Hao flashed an incantation and then shoved his palm forward. Multiple images of a hand appeared. They began to emit a roaring sound, then fell apart into small attacks which shot toward the black-robed men. The black-robed men instantly fell back.

“Senior Zhou,” Meng transmitted to Zhou Dekun, “don’t forget the ability of the robe! Get out of here!” The dozens of Cultivators immediately split into two groups, one of which headed toward Meng Hao, the other toward Zhou Dekun.

Everything was happening too quickly. Zhou Dekun was in a panic. However, as soon as Meng Hao reminded him, he stamped his foot onto the ground. His Furnace Lord’s robe began to glow, and suddenly he disappeared.

He had just activated the teleportation function of the Furnace Lord robe, which he could only do three times. Seeing Zhou Dekun disappear, a cold snort filled the air. One of the two Core Formation Cultivators, the pudgy one, transformed into a beam of light and shot in pursuit of Zhou Dekun.

As he disappeared off into the distance, his voice rang out, “We have some East Pill Division Cultivators delivered right to our doorstep. Brother Yang, I’ll go catch the one that just ran off!”

Without a word, the other Core Formation Cultivator, the skinny one, resumed his battle with the man from the Golden Frost Sect, who was clearly seriously injured at this point. From the look of things, he would be slain at any moment.

Down on the ground, the dozens of black-robed men turned their attention from Zhou Dekun to Meng Hao.

Meng Hao didn’t flee. His eyes glittered with killing intent, and the corners of his mouth turned up into a slight smile. It had been a long time since he had been able to make any sort of attack against

anyone. These people in front of him were mere Foundation Establishment Cultivators. In Meng Hao's eyes, they were already dead.

"I haven't killed anyone in five years. I guess you guys are going to make me break my record of abstinence!" This was the first time in five years in which Meng Hao's Cultivation Base would explode to its full potential!