

## The Heavens 281

Chapter 281: ... Rather Die Than Submit!

A black beam of light appeared, streaking toward them from off in the distance. Its speed was almost impossible to describe as it shot toward Chu Yuyan's will and then slammed into some of the pill furnaces which were circling around her. The instant it hit them, they shattered into pieces, which the black beam devoured.

It was with great difficulty that Chu Yuyan had attracted these pill furnaces out of the group of one hundred thousand others. Just as she had found one she had synergy with, the black beam slammed into it and destroyed it. It seemed as if the furnaces didn't dare to flee or evade, like they were allowing the black beam to consume them. It was as if the black beam was an Emperor who had demanded the death of a government official. Of course the official had no choice but to die!

Chu Yuyan's will was instantly shaken.

Not all of the pill furnaces were shattered; there were two or three that the black beam seemed to disregard and leave alone.

An instant later, the black beam shot toward Ye Feimu. It circled around him and the dozens of pill furnaces which he had attracted from out of the hundred thousand. Half of them shattered to pieces and were consumed. The beam then moved on to the others.

All of this takes some time to explain, but the black beam moved in the twinkling of an eye. Next it shot toward Meng Hao. He had no time to snatch the pill furnace which hovered in front of him. The black beam slammed into his violet pill furnace, and it disintegrated and was sucked up by the beam.

Rage instantly billowed up from the depths of Meng Hao's heart. His fury soared to the heavens. He was not like the other candidates who had been able to attract multiple pill furnaces from out of the hundred thousand. To them, losing a few was not a huge matter; they could always select another one that the beam didn't destroy.

However, Meng Hao had expended a lot of effort to persuade the violet pill furnace to accept him. Then, it was destroyed in the blink of an eye by the black beam. Now he was left without anything at all. How could he not fly into a rage?

This was even more the case when, after destroying Meng Hao's pill furnace, the black beam exuded a will of arrogance, and then shot off into the distance. It seemed as if it were an Emperor surveying his territory, who would kill a few officials here and there and then continue on his way.

Meng Hao could clearly make out the image of a pill furnace within the black beam. It was completely black, and emanated no magical symbols whatsoever. Black was not one of the colors within this world, making it seem completely incompatible, as if it were above all the other pill furnaces.

"Destroy my pill furnace, will you? Fine, my new pill furnace is going to be you!" His fury billowing up, his will suddenly shot into pursuit of the black pill furnace.

At this moment, Meng Hao took the so-called "follow your heart" theory and tossed it out into the void. He also tossed aside the idea of finding the Life Furnace that belonged to him and him alone. This was his personality.

If you destroy Meng Hao's pill furnace, then regardless of the reason you did so, you will pay the price to replace it!

This is Meng Hao. His fury rippled, and his will shot out in pursuit of the black beam.

To add insult to injury, the black pill furnace didn't seem to even notice him. Its level of arrogance was incredible. As it proceeded along its way, it would viciously smash into other random pill furnaces, destroying and consuming them.

It seemed that this pill furnace had its own Spirit, which viewed Meng Hao with contempt and disdain.

Meanwhile, just outside of Violet East Mountain, everyone sat around the Mother of Furnaces. Chu Yuyan opened her eyes; slowly, so did Ye Feimu and the other seven. As they did, the air above their hands began to glow, and then transformed into pill furnaces.

It didn't matter the color of the pill furnace they had acquired within the illusory world just now. The pill furnaces that appeared in their hands now were white, each and every one of them.

Everyone had awakened except for Meng Hao. He still sat there, eyes closed in meditation, his brow furrowed and his jaw clenched.

Outside of the Celestial Land and the illusory world, everyone, including the Violet Furnace Lords, actually had no way to see what was happening within the Mother of Furnaces. The only thing they could see were the expressions on the faces of Meng Hao and the others. Now, everyone was focused on Meng Hao, and his lack of success.

Chu Yuyan also glanced at him. Not saying a word, she stood and raced toward Violet East Mountain, pill furnace in hand. Ye Feimu's body flashed as he also charged forward, head toward the first of the paths that led up the mountain.

The other seven candidates also silently headed toward Violet East Mountain, each picking a path of their own. As they did, the paths disappeared behind them. Soon, there was only one path left on the mountain, left behind for Meng Hao, who was still in meditation.

Within the illusory world of the furnace, Meng Hao was engaged in mad pursuit of the black beam. It had led him to every corner of the place, and as it did, its contemptuous will seemed to grow stronger and stronger.

Finally, Meng Hao lost his patience, and he gave a cold snort. "Demon Sealing, Eighth Hex!" His senses told him that this world was under some type of sealing, making it impossible for outsiders to be able to tell what was happening inside. Therefore, he held nothing back. His invisible body dissipated, and a part of Meng Hao's soul suddenly appeared amidst endless ripples. The ripples transformed into gossamer strands which immediately shot toward the black pill furnace, entangling it.

The black pill furnace seemed to be frozen in shock. In its memory, it had never encountered anyone who could catch it. Within this world, it was the sovereign; no one could possibly lay hold of it. And yet, today it had run into a magical technique which was capable of shaking both its will and its pill-furnace form. Immediately, it stopped. It only took the space of two breaths to shake itself free.

However, just as it was about to speed off, an illusory hand appeared out of nowhere and clamped down onto it. Originally, Meng Hao's presence here had been invisible. However, because of the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex, an illusory phantom image of his body could now be seen.

“Where do you think you’re running off to?!” he said, locking his grip onto the pill furnace. The black pill furnace began to struggle, sending out massive waves of power. As it did, a face appeared on its surface.

It was the face of an evil, vicious youth. It radiated enmity and hatred, and after it appeared, it glared at Meng Hao and let out a threatening howl.

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered with coldness. He lifted up his left hand and slapped the thing right across the face. The slap to the pill furnace’s Spirit rang out with a boom. The face was flung to the side, but then spun back around and let out another roar of rage toward Meng Hao.

The roar rose up to the heavens, as if it contained an incredible might within it. The force of it washed over Meng Hao, shaking his will. However, he did not allow his grip on it to weaken in the slightest. Instead, he gave a cold harrumph.

“Fighting back? Well, fighting back won’t do you any good!” He lifted his left hand, employing the power of the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex as he pressed his finger down onto the youth’s face.

“You consume other pill furnaces? Fine, I don’t care. But you dared to consume MY pill furnace. In doing so, you’ve sown Karma. Now you will reap the Karma, and earn your reward!” His left hand flickered in an incantation as he again employed the power of the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex. Streams of seals flew down onto the pill furnace; it seemed as if it would soon be sealed into complete suppression.

The Spirit of the pill furnace, embodied in the face of the youth, struggled violently. Its will of hatred grew more powerful than ever; in a frenzy, it opened its mouth and let loose a piercing scream.

The sound of it filled the entire illusory world, reaching its every corner. All of the pill furnaces inside heard it, and began to tremble. They immediately began to rush toward Meng Hao.

In the blink of an eye, Meng Hao was surrounded by stream after stream of glowing lights. A thousand, five thousand, ten thousand, fifty thousand, one hundred thousand....

More than one hundred thousand beams of light circulated around Meng Hao. The glow they caused rose up endlessly, and gradually transformed into one hundred thousand pill furnaces. They had Meng Hao completely surrounded. The buzzing noise they emitted echoed out as they spun around

him at top speed. It seemed they had Meng Hao in their cross-hairs; if he didn't release the black pill furnace, they would attack him.

The black pill furnace youth, ceased its attempts to flee. A proud look appeared on its face, then aggressive arrogance. It looked at Meng Hao as if it were attempting to provoke him. However, it was at this moment that Meng Hao lifted his hand and once again slapped the face.

Rage covered the face of the black pill furnace youth. A scream rang out, causing the surrounding hundred thousand pill furnaces to suddenly charge in attack. They shot toward Meng Hao, sending out ripples throughout the air. Their glow lifted up to the heavens. Meng Hao merely gave a cold snort, and closed his eyes.

“Time to leave!”

His will sprang into action, immediately beginning to disappear, along with the furnace he gripped in his hands. Its shrill cry slowly dissipated as the hundred thousand pill furnaces charged in attack. Not a single one of them was even able to touch Meng Hao.

Outside of the pill furnace in the Celestial Land, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in meditation. Suddenly, his eyes flashed open. The instant they did, a black glow shot up in front of him, and a pill furnace appeared. Despite the fact that it was here, it appeared to be struggling.

But Meng Hao's will was still in his body; how could he possibly allow it to flee? He gripped it hard, and his eyes glowed with a fierce cold aura.

“Are you really looking to die?!”

The pill furnace continued to struggle, and as it did, a strand of will entered Meng Hao's mind. It said... it would rather die than submit!

Meng Hao smiled, although it was a smile filled with coldness.

“Rather die than submit? No, I'm not going to destroy you. Starting today, I don't care if you want to or not, you're my pill furnace, no matter how much you resist!” He stood up and looked toward Violet East Mountain, and the only remaining path leading up it.

At the same time, outside of the Celestial Land, on Eastern Emergence Mountain, the onlookers didn't seem to be very impressed. However, the eight Violet Furnace Lords' faces all flickered.

“That's....”

“That black pill furnace contains its own will!”

“I saw that same furnace when I was in there all those years ago.... I wanted to take it, but failed. This Fang Mu seems to have created some kind of connection with it....”

“It's extremely rare to see that pill furnace within the illusory world. The will of a Cultivator is no match for it, and should be incapable of capturing it. After all these years, it has become the sovereign pill furnace of the illusory world....”

“Just what promises did Fang Mu make to the black pill furnace to get it to accept him...? From the expression on his face, it seems that maybe the two of them are having some conflicts!” As the Violet Furnace Lords discussed the scene, the other onlookers also began to notice Meng Hao and the pill furnace.

“That's strange, why does Fang Mu have a black pill furnace? Everyone else got white ones....”

As people expressed their surprise, Grandmaster Pill Demon's eyes began to glitter with a strange light.

“This kid... actually managed to bring it out....” An imperceptible smile touched the corners of his mouth.

Back in the world of the Celestial Land, the pill furnace beneath Violet East Mountain began to tremble. A roaring sound filled the air, along with a seven-colored glow. It seemed almost like... the hundred thousand pill furnaces within were in a frenzy, trying to break their way out from within.

Chapter 282: The First Region

This scene caused everyone on the outside world to stare with wide eyes.

Many of the East Pill Division alchemists had faces filled with disbelief. The furnace within the Celestial land was emitting shocking booms. The roaring was so intense that the massive furnace rocked back and forth.

Quite a distance away, Meng Hao suddenly looked back. No one in the outside world would know why the furnace was doing this, but he did. The hundred thousand pill furnaces inside were attempting to bash their way out to pursue him.

His eyes glittering, he shot away from the pill furnace, reaching the final path available to tread on Violet East Mountain. He was exhausted, but he still propelled himself forward with full power. In the space of a few breaths, he was on the path, climbing upward. The mountain path disappeared behind him.

The pill furnace's booming grew even more intense, and popping sounds rang out. Meng Hao wasn't worried. Not even looking back, he continued up the mountain path.

Everyone in the outside world could see the pill furnace rocking violently back and forth; it seemed as if it would explode into pieces at any moment.

"Crafty move, kid," said Pill Demon with an enigmatic smile. He reached his hand out toward the image of the Celestial Land, and extended a finger. When his finger descended, a roar filled the sky of the Celestial Land, where magically appeared the massive image of a finger. The finger seemed to fill the entire sky and cover the entire land, becoming a canopy covering the whole Celestial Land.

The finger was incredibly thick and coarse; the fingerprint was clearly visible on its surface. The appearance of this immense finger seemed to shake the Celestial Land like the will of the Heavens itself! The sub-Patriarchs from the outside Sects were also astonished.

They watched the scene mutely as the scene unfolded within the Celestial Land. The power it emitted shook the heaven and rocked the earth, as if it had governance over both. Endless, infinite ripples emanated out, as if the finger had a will of its own. It slowly pressed down on the furnace at the foot of Violet East Mountain.

The instant it pressed down, the entire world of the Celestial Land shook; after that, everything was still. The previously rocking and trembling pill furnace was now incapable of any movement whatsoever as the finger pressed down on it.

All of this lasted for the space of about two breaths. Then, the enormous finger disappeared, and the pill furnace was once again calm.

On Eastern Emergence Mountain, everything was quiet. Patriarch Violet Sieve was panting as his heart raced. He looked over in shock at the expressionless Grandmaster Pill Demon.

“According to the rumors,” he thought, “the most powerful expert in the Violet Fate Sect is not a Patriarch of the Violet Qi Division, but Grandmaster Pill Demon himself. The rumors also say that Grandmaster Pill Demon’s Cultivation Base reached the Spirit Severing stage years ago. If it hadn’t, how could he have lived more than a thousand years?”

The sub-Patriarchs from the other Sects all seemed to be thinking the same thing. The Second Swordlord of the Solitary Sword Sect lowered his head slightly. He was one of the few people present who knew how frightening Grandmaster Pill Demon’s Cultivation base actually was.

Because Pill Demon didn’t want to make a big deal about it, he’d only invited these sub-Patriarchs to the apprentice-accepting ceremony. Otherwise, he would have invited the true Patriarchs of the great Sects and Clans.

Xu Luo from the Blood Demon Sect was panting slowly, and his eyes glowed with a blood-colored shine that quickly turned into reverence. He thought silently about how much the Blood Demon Sect feared Grandmaster Pill Demon. They had compiled many of the rumors regarding Grandmaster Pill Demon, and had uncovered a shocking secret.

Unfortunately, such a secret would never be known to very many people.

Zhou Jie of the Black Sieve Sect looked on with narrowed eyes. A cold will gleamed in his eyes, mixed with an unprecedented sense of concentration.

“Seems somewhat familiar, like the aura of an old friend....” His eyes flickered as he looked at Pill Demon.

As the outsiders were shocked by Grandmaster Pill Demon’s actions, Meng Hao was walking up the steps of the path on Violet East Mountain. Occasionally he would look up ahead, but all he could see was mist. The peak of the mountain itself was not visible.



Time passed slowly. Meng Hao trudged up the steps, feeling more and more apprehension at how tall this mountain was. Five days had passed already. He had long since lost sight of the land below; clouds and fog completely surrounded him, obscuring his vision, making it impossible to see the world outside the mountain.

However... however high he was, Meng Hao got the feeling that when compared to the peak of the mountain, he was still at its base.

The higher he went, the thinner the air got. There was nothing that could put pressure onto his Cultivation base, but the further along he went, the more effort it took to take each step. Soon it took twice as much as it had when he started out.

Meng Hao had started out his journey along the path at a dead rush, and already exhausted at that. Add in the effort he spent struggling with the black pill furnace, and he could no longer race ahead. Now, he went one slow step at a time. Every once in a while he would pause and look around. The immediate surroundings were lush and verdant. Grass grew all around, which Meng Hao would occasionally pick.

From the perspective of the outside observers, Meng Hao had already fallen far behind. All the other candidates were much further ahead of him.

This was especially true of Ye Feimu, who was the first alchemist to enter the first of the four regions. Just up ahead of him was an enormous stone boulder which was covered with dense inscriptions. After examining it for some time, Ye Feimu sat down next to it cross-legged. After that he pulled out a pill furnace and began to concoct a pill.

The next day, the pill emerged. Holding it carefully with both hands, he proceeded past the boulder.

Not long after, Chu Yuyan also concocted a pill, and then proceeded forward. All of the other alchemists except for Meng Hao did the same.

The master alchemists of the East Pill Division began to discuss what was happening.

“No wonder Ye Feimu is at the peak of the Furnace Lord rank. His Cultivation base is extraordinary, and he was the first person to step into the first region. His ability to recognize medicinal pills as well as his pill concocting skill are both anything but sloppy. I bet he’s going to win.”

“Chu Yuyan is also doing well. This promotion trial by fire is most likely going to come down to a decision between the two of them. Earlier, I thought Fang Mu might have had a chance, but I never thought he would spend so much time getting a pill furnace. What a pity.”

“Right. If your first step is slow, then all of them will be slow....”

Most of the sound of discussion came from the ordinary master alchemists. The Furnace Lords and Violet Furnace Lords just watched on thoughtfully, opting to say nothing.

A few days later, Meng Hao finally reached the first region, and saw the enormous boulder. He looked at the inscriptions, studying them for a while, before glancing at the path which proceeded on upward.

“This is the first region. After this boulder, the path to the second region is covered with a poisonous miasma.... One must concoct a poison repelling pill to be able to get through safely. The greatest difficulty is that throughout the journey, different miasmas will appear, and special pills will have to be concocted for each one.” Meng Hao thought about the situation for a moment. Finally, he pulled out the black pill furnace and looked it over. It seemed to him that he hadn’t truly won out over it, so he decided to put it back into his bag of holding, leaving it suppressed for the time being. Instead, he took out the Ten Thousand Refinements Furnace, put some medicinal plants in it, and then started concocting.

After two hours he had produced a medicinal pill. He swallowed it, then glanced around at the scenery once more, and then walked past the enormous rock. As he proceeded onward, his body was enveloped by a thin mist.

The master alchemists immediately started to discuss what had just happened.

“Furnace Lord Fang Mu thinks a bit too much of himself. He only used two hours to concoct the pill. Of all the other candidates, the one who used the least amount of time was Ye Feimu, who took four hours. The longest was a day.

“How could he possibly compare with Furnace Lord Ye? Furnace Lord Ye is Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. Look, he’s the furthest ahead, and is already half way through the first region.”

Everyone watching the screens could clearly see what was happening, and knew exactly how far everyone had progressed. Even some of the Furnace Lords exchanged glances; to them, it really did look like Meng Hao was being sloppy and careless.

Of course, Meng Hao had no idea what things they were saying, nor did he care to know. He continued on relentlessly through the miasma. It grew thicker as he went, and the color changed as well, to dark gray.

All the plants and flowers in the area were withered, and seemingly had been for years. A gloomy, cold aura filled the air. As Meng Hao went on, he occasionally caught sight of arm-length centipedes, scurrying about quickly through the shrivelled grass.

However, whatever poisonous bugs that appeared as Meng Hao walked along, would suddenly pause, seemingly incapable of doing anything to him. They would just let him continue on his way.

Time passed slowly. As he traveled he would occasionally take break, using some of the nearby withered grass, as well as some of the poisonous bugs, to concoct a medicinal pill. He did this a total of three times.

More and more poisonous bugs began to appear, soon, they were swarming. But as soon as Meng Hao neared, they would either begin to tremble, or run away. As for the roiling miasma, it would consistently move out of the way, making way for Meng Hao to travel along the path.

This too, was clearly visible to the observers, who watched on with wide-eyed astonishment. Soon, more and more eyes were focusing on Meng Hao's screen. It wasn't just the East Pill Division; even Cultivators from the other Sects were watching closely.

"He's using the poison bugs to make medicinal pills, but what pill exactly?"

"What medicinal pill is that? It has such an incredible effect..."

The Cultivators watched on in astonishment, then glanced over at the screens of the other candidates, including Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan. It seemed most of them were reaching the end of the stairs that were part of the first region. Most of them had concocted medicinal pills on many occasions during the journey. They also would concoct pills to ward off the poison, but none of them were as dramatically effective as Meng Hao's.

This, of course, was because the poison bugs along the path didn't seem to have any inclination of avoiding Ye Feimu and the others. However, in their terror, they clambered over each other in order to get out of Meng Hao's way.

If this scene was taking place anywhere except the Violet Fate Sect trial by fire, then plenty of people would begin to make connections. But this was a Violet Furnace Lord promotion, so there ended up being only one conclusion drawn by the observers.

The pills Fang Mu concocted were anything but ordinary!

### Chapter 283: Goofing Off

Actually, even if Meng Hao hadn't concocted the various medicinal pills, the miasma wouldn't have been the least bit harmful to him in any way. The Resurrection Lily had been suppressed, but its nature talent was still within him, which could innately dispel all varieties of poisons.

Meng Hao did not fear poison.

Granted, many years had passed since the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament, which so many Cultivators had witnessed. However, anyone observing could easily make a connection between the two. Thus, he had concocted the medicinal pills to make it seem like they were repelling the poisons. However, their true function was to suppress his own aura, which was affecting the poison bugs and the miasma.

That of course was something about him that was completely different from the other candidates.

There was really no choice but to suppress his aura in this way. If he didn't do so with the medicinal pills, then as he traveled through the miasma, it would explode away from him immediately, and the entire area would be completely free of it, without the slightest trace.

Even having suppressed his aura, the miasma still spread out away from him. There was literally nothing he could do to make himself walk through the miasma and have it remain still.

As for the poisonous bugs, were it not for the fact that his aura had been suppressed, they simply wouldn't dare to exist nearby. In fact, Meng Hao was worried that he might lose control of his suppressed aura, and that any bugs which hadn't fled far enough away from him would spontaneously die. If that happened, it would definitely attract attention from the outside world.

Therefore, the best he could do was use medicinal pills to suppress his aura, be extremely cautious not to allow the miasma to completely disperse, and try to make the poison bugs behave a bit more normally. Despite all of that, he caused quite a stir on the outside world.

However, it was just a stir, not enough to draw any connections to the Blood Immortal Legacy tournament.

Several days later, the first person made it to the second region, and of course, it was Ye Feimu. Behind him was Chu Yuyan, and then in third place, Meng Hao, the newcomer to the top of the group.

As far as the other seven people, two more eventually appeared at the boulder marking the second region. The other five were still stuck back on the path in the miasma, concocting pills and slowly moving forward.

When the candidates arrived at the large boulder, all of them discovered the same thing. Strands of Violet Qi emerged and latched onto their pill furnaces and then merged into them, causing them to change color.

The same thing happened to the Meng Hao. The black pill furnace seemed very opposed to this happening, but considering how it was suppressed by Meng Hao, there was nothing it could do to resist.

People outside immediately began to discuss what was happening.

“The’ve only just passed the first region, and you can already see the difference...”

“It looks like the final candidate will be one of these five people. However, I still think Furnace Lord Ye has the advantage.”

Suddenly, Violet Furnace Lord An Zaihai’s voice rang out. “The Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire promotion is a test of an alchemist’s skill in the Dao of Alchemy. Falling behind doesn’t mean anything. The year I took the test, I came in last in the first two regions. However, I successfully passed the third region, the one in which most people get stuck. You might better spend your time observing how these ten Chosen alchemists concoct pills, than discussing things the way you see them now.” An Zaihai’s echoing voice immediately silenced the discussions of the surrounding alchemists. They grew silent and thoughtfully began to watch what was happening.

What they saw was that the five alchemists in last place were all very calm. All of them were concocting pills in different ways, and not one of them experienced the slightest failure.

Time passed slowly. Meng Hao had already been staring thoughtfully for several hours at the boulder leading into the second region. It wasn't just him. On their various respective paths, Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan were also staring with furrowed brows at the boulders.

The boulders completely blocked the various paths. Only by fulfilling the requirements laid out, would a fissure open in the boulder and allow passage through.

Meng Hao murmured to himself as he sat cross-legged next to the boulder. "Concoct medicinal pills for the four great stages of Qi Condensation, Foundation Establishment, Core Formation and Nascent Soul. Each one must have medicinal strength of eighty percent or higher, and must contain variations from among the ten million variations of plants and vegetation. If you can create your own unique medicinal pill, this will be counted as perfection...." A thoughtful look appeared in his eyes.

The four regions of the Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire contained practical tests of an alchemist's skill in the Dao of alchemy. The first region tested the skill of concocting pills based on the current circumstances. Different situations required different pills to be concocted, requiring flexibility. It seemed simple, but in reality, most Furnace Lords were incapable of doing such a thing.

The second region was even more difficult. It tested fundamental pill concocting ability. Four medicinal pills, one for each of the four great stages. Medicinal strength must be maintained, and mastery of the ten million variations of plants and vegetation was a necessity.

This trial by fire was comprehensive, and as for this second region, someone not at the peak of the Furnace Lord rank would be incapable of passing it. Even for someone with those qualifications, passing was not an easy thing.

Meng Hao sat there thinking silently for some time, as did Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu, along with the other candidates who made it to the second region boulder.

There were no requirements regarding the medicinal plants which could be used; each alchemist could do however he pleased. In fact, based on one's mastery of the variations of plants and vegetations, one could simply make a depiction of a medicinal plant on the surface of the boulder, and the power of the Celestial Land would produce an illusory replication, which could be used for illusory pill concoction.

They were only illusory replications, but were actually very realistic.

“There are two options,” thought Chu Yuyan. “One is the easy path, to concoct an existing pill. After all, the only requirements are those regarding medicinal strength and skill with the ten million variations of plants and vegetation.

“The other path, is much harder, and that is to create a new medicinal pill, to make something out of nothing.... Both of these two paths can lead onward, toward the highest pinnacle. However, it is clear that, the road of a Violet Furnace Lord... lies along the second path!” Determination filled her eyes. She was an apprentice of Grandmaster Pill Demon, so in order to become a Violet Furnace Lord, she had to prove herself.

Ye Feimu obviously felt the same way. He stared at the boulder, and as he did, a bright light shone in his eyes, along with a proud, unyielding look.

“If I’m going to concoct something,” he thought, “I will concoct a pill no other person has ever seen, a pill which contains my very self! I will show that I have the will of a Violet Furnace Lord!”

At almost the same time, resolve showed on the faces of Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu as they chose the second of the two paths.

As for the others, most picked the easy path, although some attempted to concoct original creations. Each one made their decision based on their own Dao of alchemy.

Meng Hao looked at the boulder thoughtfully, sighing as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. He had recently traveled for four days nonstop, had engaged in a battle of will with the black pill furnace, and was now completely exhausted. He looked at the requirements listed on the boulder, and realized that traversing the path of medicinal pill creation would definitely make him more tired.

He began to murmur to himself: “Concocting an existing pill is definitely better than coming up with something new. Creating a new medicinal pill requires good fortune, alchemic enlightenment, and meticulous concentration, otherwise the quality will be inferior.... Yeah, this is the best decision. My analysis is definitely correct. I will not let my quality drop.” The more he thought about it, the more it made sense to him. His mind at ease, he began to concoct medicinal pills. He lifted his right hand and pressed down onto the boulder; immediately it rippled like water. The medicinal plants which floated in his mind, slowly began to appear in front of him.

“A medicinal pill for the Qi Condensation stage. I’ll make the simplest one, a Qi Condensation Pill.” He flicked his sleeve, and an illusory pill furnace emerged from the boulder, into which he fed bunch after bunch of medicinal plants. After another moment’s thought, he began to concoct.

Not too much time passed before Chu Yuyan’s eyes opened and she waved her beautiful hand. A pill furnace appeared and her eyes glittered brightly as she began to concoct.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, Ye Feimu opened his eyes. Filled with self confidence, he began to concoct.

The observers outside on Eastern Emergence Mountain were watching intently as everything happened; their eyes passed back and forth among the ten screens, including Meng Hao, the tenth person.

Of course, the focus was Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan, who had performed spectacularly in the first region. And of course many were paying attention to Meng Hao, who had attracted such attention with his own performance there.

However, Meng Hao was taking the easy path to pill cultivation. Currently, he was concocting a Qi Condensation Pill; he wasn’t the only one, in total, seven were doing so.

The audience could see the instructions on the boulder, and thus began discussing things in low tones. It was relatively easy to determine what this part of the test was about.

“It turns out Fang Mu is concocting a Qi Condensation Pill.... It seems like he’s falling further and further behind Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu in this second region.”

“I heard about Furnace Lord Ye Feimu a long time ago. His skill in the Dao of alchemy is at the pinnacle. Based on the look of it, he’s not just concocting some ordinarily medicinal pill. Could he be working on an original creation?”

Lin Hailong gave a slight smile as he turned to An Zaihai and said, “Chu Yuyan is most likely also creating an original medicinal pill.... Simply having the confidence to do that is worthy of praise.”

An Zaihai gave a slight nod. His expression was calm as he glanced at the ten screens. When he saw Meng Hao, and took note of what he was concocting, he felt slightly amused. In his opinion, Meng



Hao understood that an original creation would allow him to pass this critical juncture, but had decided instead to save time and effort.

Time passed, and in the blink of an eye, three days had gone by. Meng Hao had produced a Qi Condensation pill of eighty percent medicinal strength, as well as a Foundation Establishment Day of similar quality. Now he was working on a pill for the Core Formation stage, a Spiritualization Pill.

Before, Meng Hao would have had a difficult time concocting such a pill, considering his Cultivation base. However, now that he had ten Dao Pillars, and was of the great circle of Foundation Establishment, concocting a simple, common Spiritualization Pill required a bit of effort, but wasn't very difficult.

In fact, he was both concocting and resting at the same time. Having been in Violet East Mountain for several days now, he had now recovered quite a bit of energy. He was no longer exhausted, and his pill concocting went a bit faster than before.

However, the moment his Spiritualization Pill emerged was also the exact moment when Chu Yuyan's original Qi Condensation stage medicinal pill came out. When it did, brilliant light swirled up from her pill; at a single glance, it was obvious this was no ordinary pill. It immediately attracted quite a bit of notice on the outside world.

At the same time, Ye Feimu's original medicinal pill emerged. A four-colored glow enveloped it, a bit brighter than the glow from Chu Yuyan's pill. A sudden gasp of astonishment could be heard from the spectators.

As for Meng Hao, however, he produced nothing extraordinary whatsoever. Like most of the others, he had chosen to concoct familiar pills. Furthermore, from his attitude, it seemed as if he were goofing off. It was completely different from the conscientiousness of Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu.

In fact the clear cut difference between them... made Meng Hao seem even more unremarkable.

Only one person on Eastern Emergence Mountain was different. Grandmaster Pill Demon. When he casually glanced at the screen depicting Meng Hao, an imperceptible shadow of a smile appeared on his face.

Chapter 284: Three People; Three Daos of Alchemy

By the time Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu were in the midst of creating their Foundation Establishment stage medicinal pill, Meng Hao had already finished with the Spiritualization Pill, and had begun to work on the Nascent Soul medicinal pill.

Medicinal Pills for increasing the Cultivation Base during the Nascent Soul stage were made from rare medicinal plants not often seen in the world. There were not many such pills in the Southern Domain; for four or even five people from a single Sect to possess one would be considered beyond incredible.

These were not pills that could be mass produced; one batch might make three, or perhaps five. Therefore, they were quite prized. Such pills were not common even in the Violet Fate Sect.

When you consider that a Nascent Soul Cultivator who practices breathing exercises can absorb all of the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth within a three kilometer radius in a single breath, it is easy to imagine how important medicinal pills can be to them. If they possess such pills, all is well. If they don't, the only remaining option is to take them by force.

However, when it comes to medicinal pills for Nascent Soul Cultivators, the most difficult type to concoct, as well as the most valuable, are pills which extend longevity!

The value of such pills is extremely high; a lifespan that does not exceed on thousand years, is not a defiance of the Heavens. The only way to live past one thousand years, to defy the Heavens, is to sever the Spirit. Otherwise, one can only waste away in death.

Of all the medicinal pills for the Nascent Soul stage, the most basic are healing pills, and such pills are also the easiest to concoct.

Generally, they are of average effectiveness; however, no matter which way you look at them, such pills must be considered of the Nascent Soul stage. Meng Hao decided to concoct just such a simple medicinal pill for the Nascent Soul stage. As far as he was concerned, this wasn't considered finagling, but rather, using the most simple method to pass this part of the test. He didn't want to expend a lot of mental energy to concoct a unique, one-of-a-kind pill.

Therefore, several days later, one of the most common healing pills for the Nascent Soul stage emerged. Meng Hao held the pills from the four stages in hand, and then, pushed them into the boulder. The boulder began to tremble, and then a fissure appeared that snaked down the very middle of the boulder, a little over half a foot wide.

It almost seemed like the boulder wasn't pleased with Meng Hao's medicinal pills. However, he had met the requirements; each pill contained five of the ten million medicinal plant variations, although most of them had been obscured by Meng Hao using a technique just for that purpose.

He looked at the fissure and then cleared his throat. He knew that he was being observed by others; with a bit of a bashful and embarrassed expression, he lowered his head and walked up to the crack. By turning his body to the side, and exerting a bit of effort, he was just able to squeeze himself through. Then, with a solemn and dignified expression, and not the least bit of awkwardness, he continued along the steps up the mountain, toward the third region.

When the spectators in the outside world saw this, the master alchemists of the East Pill Division could be seen making bitter smiles. Those who were relatively familiar with Fang Mu seemed a bit embarrassed. Using such a method to pass this part of the test really was a bit of an eyesore.

This was especially after looking back at the earnestness with which Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu persisted in their work. Meng Hao's attitude immediately aroused the scorn of those who hadn't liked him very much to begin with. A few of the eight Violet Furnace Lords also frowned.

However, regardless of anything, Meng Hao was the first one to make it past the second region. Hands clasped behind his back, he casually walked into the third region, looking exactly as if he were just going for a stroll and taking in the scenery.

One of the Violet Furnace Lords, a middle-aged man named Ye Yuntian, said, "Fang Mu doesn't seem to be taking things very seriously. With such sub-par character, he's clearly not suitable to become a Violet Furnace Lord." His voice was cool and seemed to carry the weight of authority.

An Zaihai laughed and said, "Not necessarily. There's no rule against using the simplest method to charge past."

"That's true, Elder Brother An," replied Ye Yuntian with a smile. "Now, though, I'm very curious to see what sort of decision he will make in the third region."

Moments later, more candidates emerged from the second region. Only Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu remained. A total of five people came out. The other two were unable to complete medicinal pills with eighty percent medicinal strength, and thus declared forfeiture.

Now, only eight screens remained of the original ten above the pill furnace in the outside world.

When Meng Hao reached the boulder marking the third region, Violet Qi poured out. It was only a tiny thread, and lasted only for the space of about three breaths. He had succeeded, but the approval of the Celestial Land was not great.

After the strand of Violet Qi entered the pill furnace, Meng Hao looked at the boulder, then sat down cross-legged in front of it. He took a moment to erase the last bit of exhaustion in him, until he was filled with energy.

Chu Yuyan's final pill emerged, and when it did, her face was pale. It had been extremely difficult for her to concoct the fourth pill. As for original creations, she had persisted up until the Foundation Establishment pill; as for the Core Formation and Nascent Soul pills, she was unable to create new versions of such pills. Instead, she had selected the most difficult of the pill formulas she knew to concoct the final two pills.

Wiping the sweat from her brow, she watched as a three meter wide fissure split apart the boulder in front of her. A self-confident smile on her face, she strode forward.

After her, Ye Feimu finished his pill concoction. Similar to Chu Yuyan, he had been unable to make original creations for all four pill varieties. He had succeeded in making an original pill for the Core Formation stage, but as for the Nascent Soul stage, he could not proceed. Having no other choice, he created the most high-level and difficult pill for the Nascent Soul stage that he could think of. It took ten attempts before he finally succeeded.

Everything happened relatively quickly, because everything moved more quickly within the world of the Celestial Land. Were it outside, it would take over a year to concoct the four pills he had.

Ye Feimu took in a deep breath as he watched a six meter wide fissure cracked open the boulder in front of him. A proud look filled his eyes as he strode through.

It was becoming readily apparent to the observers which of the various candidates were above the others. A buzz of discussion echoed out as they began to talk about the shocking sight of the fissure created by Ye Feimu.

As Chu Yuyan and the others reached the boulder marking the third region, dense Violet Qi poured out toward them. The Violet Qi which emerged for Chu Yuyan lasted for the time it takes an incense stick to burn before dissipating. Most shockingly was Ye Feimu. His lasted for the time it takes two incense sticks to burn; furthermore, his pill furnace had already turned light violet!

On their various respective paths, the other candidates' pill furnaces absorbed the Violet Qi. Afterward, they began to concentrate on the boulder. Frowns appeared; the test for the third region was even more difficult than the first two.

Meng Hao finished his meditation. He opened his eyes, and they glowed brightly. He was completely recovered, and his eyes glittered as he examined the text on the boulder in front of him. A thoughtful expression appeared on his face.

Beyond the boulder, there were no stone steps. The path of steps seemed to end right here, and only clouds were visible.

“Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plants....” Meng Hao's eyes narrowed as he looked at the carving on the boulder. It depicted a type of medicinal plant with nine flowers on it, each of which was a different color. “Three Treasures Pearl Curtains Plants are common. Six Treasures Pearl Curtain Plants are uncommon. As for Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plants... they are rarely ever seen! Each flower contains different medicinal properties. The nine petals all work in harmony with each other. This single medicinal plant can be used in over a thousand different pill formulas.... The formulas used and the quality of the medicinal pills concocted will determine how many steps appear....” Meng Hao closed his eyes for a moment to think.

On the other paths, the other candidates were facing the exact same test.

Chu Yuyan reached up to place her right hand onto the boulder. Immediately, a flickering, glowing light appeared, and the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant materialized in front of her.

The Cultivators on the mountain peak in the outside world, including the representatives from the other Sects and Clans, were all paying very close attention to the incredible scene which was taking place within the trial by fire.

Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian coolly opened his mouth and said, “The third region tests both pill concocting and decision making. How many pills must be concocted to magically create a perfect set of stairs? That is the key.” From start to finish, his gaze never left Ye Feimu's screen.

His words caused the faces of many of the master alchemists to fill with astonishment. One by one, they began to focus intently on the various screens.

Chu Yuyan looked at the plant floating in front of her. A thoughtful look glittered in her phoenix-like eyes.

“The Dao of alchemy is like the great Dao of cultivation,” she thought. “Plants and vegetation grow within Heaven and Earth. However, Heaven and Earth are not alive. Concocting pills... is like refining the Heavens and transforming the Earth, finding a spark of life therein, and turning it into a medicinal pill. Therefore, pill concoction... is a search for life, a way to find that spark which doesn't exist within Heaven and Earth!

“Nine is the ultimate number; therefore, I will make nine pills, and each pill will contain eight flowers. Furthermore, each pill will contain the medicinal properties of the one missing flower! These nine pills will form a cycle that will open up the path to the Heavens!” Chu Yuyan's eyes glowed with determination now that she had made her decision. She immediately set to work concocting.

After thinking for several hours, a serious look filled Ye Feimu's face, and he took a deep breath. His eyes narrowed as he flicked his sleeve; a Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant appeared in front of him, and he began to concoct.

“If I'm going to concoct a pill, I'll only make one,” he thought. “It will contain the medicinal properties of all nine flowers, as well as that of an additional medicinal pill! I will concoct not the number nine, but the number ten! I will concoct a pill that contains a medicinal property that the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant does not. In keeping with my identity, this tenth medicinal property will be unprecedented!”

It was difficult to say whose thinking in regard to the Dao of alchemy was more advanced. Between the two of them, one used the Dao of alchemy to refine life to the pinnacle. The other combined all the complex variations to create something unique.

At this moment, their skill in the Dao of alchemy was clearly visible to the spectators on the mountain top, and caused quite a stir. Everyone, including the representatives from the outside Sects, began to think deeply about the proceedings.

After Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu made their decisions, the eight Violet Furnace Lords nodded in praise.

Grandmaster Pill Demon's face, however, was unreadable, making everyone wonder which screen he was watching....

It was at this moment that Meng Hao opened his eyes, and they gleamed with a strange light. He lifted up his hand and pushed it onto the boulder. The Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant appeared, along with his pill furnace. He did not immediately begin to concoct, though, but rather stare at the medicinal plant, his eyes shining.

Within his mind flitted countless pill formulas. His skill with plants and vegetation was in full force as well. The Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant rotated in his mind as he mentally began to organize the various medicinal properties and how they worked together.

However, Meng Hao quickly decided to clear his mind. He looked at the medicinal plant, and then his eyes began to gleam even more brightly. He looked... interested. His bearing now was vastly different than the laziness he had displayed in the second region.

“I’m going to concoct ten pills,” he thought. “Nine minor pills, and one master pill. Nine is the ultimate number, representing strength. My body is the pill furnace, and my heart is the pill formula. Refine the Heavens, refine the Earth, refine the changes of Time. Concoct a pill that... contains the essence of nature’s simplicity!” A look both deep and bright shone in his eyes. Were this any other place, he would not display such an attitude toward pill concocting. But within this Violet Fate Sect trial by fire, his interest had been piqued. He would no longer conceal his true self; he would fully display his skill in the Dao of alchemy.

Chapter 285: Who is the Strongest?

Meng Hao took a deep breath. Then, he lifted up his right hand, took hold of a flower, and put it into the pill furnace.

Only the Violet Furnace Lords on the mountaintop could get an idea from Meng Hao’s actions what he intended to do. However, all of them had different expressions on their faces. Some were frowning, others seemed lost in thought.

“Fang Mu’s choice is... interesting.... However, he won’t be able to pull off something like that!”

“Even still, that type of thinking in the Dao of alchemy is laudable. It contains some of the frivolity of youth, but considering his skill in the Dao of alchemy, he definitely won’t be able to succeed. I still favor Ye Feimu. That kid’s Dao of alchemy contains persistence. Persistence is a necessity for all of us alchemists.”

The Violet Furnace Lords continued to discuss matters as they watched on.

Only An Zaihai gaped for a moment, before a bright gleam filled his eyes. “He wants to concoct....” An Zaihai’s breathing grew heavier. He did not agree with the others. Without thinking about it, he turned to look at his Master, Pill Demon. Grandmaster Pill Demon sat there cross-legged. A strange light flickered in his eyes, then disappeared.

Time passed, three days. Chu Yuyan had completed her first medicinal pill. When it appeared, 1,111 steps appeared up ahead of her.

For over one thousand steps to appear caused a buzz to rise up among the crowd on the mountain top.

Moments later, Ye Feimu also produced a pill. As soon as it appeared, so did the stone stairs, 2,000 of them. This caused the observing alchemists on the mountaintop to immediately rise to their feet, looks of astonishment on their faces.

What caused even more of a stir was that Ye Feimu looked at the pill with a frown, and then crushed it between his fingers. Immediately, the 2,000 stairs vanished.

It seemed that 2,000 steps... didn’t satisfy him!

In addition to Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu, and Meng Hao, two others were concocting pills. All had made different choices in their concoctions, and all paled in comparison to Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu. Each of them concocted three pills respectively, which produced a total of seven hundred stairs each.

They did not dare to crush their medicinal pills, though. No matter how many pills it took, they would cause all of the stairs to appear.

As for the alchemists who had fallen behind, they slowly showed up. After experiencing the difficulty of the second test, they sat there thoughtfully for a bit before beginning to concoct pills.

Of course, none of them produced results as spectacular as Chu Yuyan or Ye Feimu. They took the easy route; this was not in error, however, it did not count as being part of their personal Dao of alchemy.



Enough time passed for an incense stick to burn. Meng Hao was now finished with the first minor pill!

It emerged, a bluish-green medicinal pill, which Meng Hao had concocted using the bluish-green flower from among the nine.

The pill furnace was illusory; the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant was also illusory. Therefore, the pill that was produced was obviously not real. Despite that, it could be held in hand, and it could be crushed.

This was one of the bizarre, miraculous aspects of the Celestial Land, a magic that could create something from nothing!

Meng Hao looked at the bluish-green medicinal pill in his hand, then lifted his head. Further up, the mountain path began to buzz. Suddenly, out of thin-air appeared... a step.

A single step!

Meng Hao's face was the same as ever, without the slightest hint of change. Much earlier, he had predicted that this would happen. He looked back down at the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant's crimson flower, grabbed it, and began to concoct.

Seeing this caused a buzz to immediately rise up among the audience on the mountaintop. Of course, the Violet Furnace Lords didn't participate, nor did the Patriarch-level Cultivators from the outside Sects. They only looked on in silent thought. Based on their concentration, their age, and their experiences in life, eccentrics like this wouldn't easily show what they were thinking.

However, the disciples who had accompanied them had not reached such a level. Seeing what happened instantly caused astonished exclamations and discussions to fill the air.

"Alchemist Fang Mu only created a single stair...! That's simply too few! Is he really a Furnace Lord?"

"At the very least, the other candidates created a few hundred stairs. Furnace Lord Ye created the most, 2,000, and wasn't even satisfied with that. But Fang Mu... he doesn't look even the least bit embarrassed!"

“Maybe he has some special plan....”

Such discussions couldn't be avoided. Meng Hao's medicinal pill, and the one stair it had produced, was immediately divisive. Everyone could clearly see what had happened, and it was only natural that people immediately began to make comparisons.

Han Bei frowned. She couldn't believe that Fang Mu's skill in the Dao of alchemy was so limited. After her interactions with him in the Black Sieve Sect, she knew of his extreme cunning, and was convinced that he must be pulling off some clever trick.

Zhou Jie's expression was normal, without the slightest reaction whatsoever. It seemed as if nothing would cause him any surprise whatsoever.

Fatty was secretly clenching his fists. He knew that Fang Mu was Meng Hao, which caused him extreme anxiety inside, especially considering that he could not possibly charge forward and warn Meng Hao about what was happening.

Li Shiqi's eyes glittered slightly as she watched Fang Mu on the screen. She then glanced at Ye Feimu, and frowned, as if she wasn't quite sure the meaning of everything that was happening.

Of course, Meng Hao couldn't hear any of the commotion which he had caused on the outside, nor would he pay it any heed if he could. He was thoroughly engrossed in concocting his second medicinal pill. Again, his bearing was completely different from before in the second region.

However, the more earnestly he worked, the more derision rose up from the outsiders.

A day later, Chu Yuyan finished her second medicinal pill. Just the same as before, 1,111 stairs appeared. Ye Feimu's second pill also was completed. When it appeared, a great roaring shook the Heavens and rocked the Earth.

“4,000 stairs!! He's... he's no Furnace Lord! This Violet Furnace Lord Promotion definitely belongs to him!”

Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian chuckled. He looked at Ye Feimu with an expression of deep praise. The other Violet Furnace Lords also looked at him with similar approval. They nodded, slight smiles on their faces.

Their praise grew even more obvious when they saw Ye Feimu once again crush the medicinal pill. The 4,000 stairs disappeared.

“Striving for perfection is Ye Feimu’s weakness, and also his strength,” said Ye Yuntian, smiling. “This kid’s determination is something you rarely see in others. I hope that after becoming a Violet Furnace Lord, he will retain his tenacity, and use it to tread into realms we have not.”

As they discussed the matter, An Zaihai sat there silently. He wasn’t looking at any of the other candidates, only Meng Hao. Slowly, the shock in his eyes grew more intense.

Fatty gave an inward sigh as he looked at the screen with Meng Hao on it. “There’s no way to compare. Ah, Meng Hao, why did you have to encounter somebody so inhuman? How can you possibly compare to this Ye guy...?”

As the discussions proceeded, the other alchemists on Violet East Mountain continued to produce medicinal pills, Meng Hao included. When Meng Hao’s pill was completed, a roaring sound filled the air, and a second stair appeared. This immediately caused muffled laughter to rise up from the Cultivators on the outside world. They seemed to find the appearance of a single stone step to be quite amusing.

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever as he began to concoct his third minor pill.

Time passed by slowly. Meng Hao was by far in last place. In this third region, Chu Yuyan held her spot in first place. She had concocted eight medicinal pills, and was currently working on her ninth.

Up ahead of her on the mountain were 8,888 stone steps. It was an astonishing sight, and was already being given great recognition by the observers in the outside world. She was now being viewed as a possible contender with Ye Feimu.

This was especially the opinion among many alchemists of the East Pill Division. Quite a few greatly admired Chu Yuyan, and as they watched, their eyes burned with passion and hope as they wished her luck.

Besides Ye Feimu and Meng Hao, among the other candidates was an old man who had concocted thirty pills to produce a total of more than 8,300 stairs. Before, he hadn't attracted much attention, but now, of course, people were talking about him.

He had produced a lot of medicinal pills, however, all of them stemmed from his own Dao of alchemy.

As for the others, anywhere from 5,000 to more than 7,000 stairs had appeared. Meng Hao only had... 8 steps....

A single stone step had appeared each time he concocted one of the eight minor pills. However, Meng Hao was not in last place; rather, Ye Feimu was.

Of course, nobody actually believed him to be in last place. He was currently concocting a pill for the ninth time. The previous pill, the eighth one, had immediately produced 9,300 stairs. That, of course, had caused a commotion in the outside world. Surprise had even been visible in the eyes of some of the Patriarchs from the outside Sects.

Slowly, everyone on the mountaintop grew quiet, settling their Qi and calming their minds. They looked at the paths on the eight screens in front of them; they could clearly see that the moment of truth had arrived in the third region test. Any moment now, people would begin to pass onto the next region.

After enough time passed for two incense sticks to burn, Chu Yuyan's medicinal pill emerged. This was her ninth pill; immediately a black-colored cloud appeared above her pill furnace, the size of a hand. Electricity crackled, circling around above the pill furnace. The pill furnace emitted a roaring sound, and the ninth pill flew out; the path up ahead of Chu Yuyan immediately extended.

It grew from 8,888 stone stairs all the way to 9,999!

The absolute limit of stairs was 10,000. Chu Yuyan had created an incredible number of stairs. Reaching such an achievement in the Violet Furnace Lord trial by fire proved that she was an outstanding talent, worthy of being a Violet Furnace Lord.

Immediately, conversations broke out in the world outside.

“A Tribulation cloud appeared! That only happens for the most difficult to concoct medicinal pills.... Chu Yuyan is definitely worthy to be Grandmaster Pill Demon’s apprentice! This is clear proof that she is qualified to be a Violet Furnace Lord!”

“9,999 stairs! Chu Yuyan’s skill in the Dao of alchemy is shocking.”

All eyes were on her, including master alchemists, Furnace Lords, Violet Furnace Lords, Sect Patriarchs!

Chapter 286: The Most Powerful!

Chu Yuyan took a deep breath as she strode forward, walking directly up the stairs she herself had created.

Everyone else was still in the middle of concocting; the old man who had previously been in second place had now created more than 9,000 steps. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, he would be the second to pass through the third region.

However, it was just then that....

A shocking thunderclap sounded out, booming out from within the world of the Celestial Land. Concurrent with the sound of the thunderclap, a Tribulation cloud nearly three hundred meters in diameter appeared above Ye Feimu’s pill furnace. The Tribulation cloud roiled as it appeared in mid-air, and thunderclaps echoed out in roars. It seemed it desired to destroy the medicinal pill which had just been concocted.

The thunder existed only within the world of the Celestial Land. Outside on Eastern Emergence Mountain, where the audience was, the weather was sunny with a gentle breeze. Everyone was closely watching Ye Feimu’s screen and the Tribulation clouds within the Celestial Land.

Intense praise filling his eyes, Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian lightly said, “Tribulation clouds. It seems the pill Feimu concocted has provoked Pill Tribulation.”

Just as the Tribulation cloud was about to explode downward, Pill Demon lifted his hand and waved toward the screen. Immediately, the Tribulation cloud of Ye Feimu quivered and then began to disperse. The lightning within completely dissipated.

At the same moment, Ye Feimu's pill furnace exploded with a loud sound as a medicinal pill emerged. It was a nine-colored pill, containing all the nine colors of the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain plant flowers. However, it also used their medicinal properties to produce a tenth medicinal property!

As soon as the pill appeared, the stairs in front of Ye Feimu boomed. Step after step appeared; ten, one hundred, one thousand... all the way to ten thousand steps!

Chu Yuyan would have had to produce more steps to make her stairs absolutely complete.

In the blink of an eye, Ye Feimu had risen from last place, to first!

He flicked his sleeve, and the pill furnace disappeared. As he proceeded up the stairs, he immediately became the focus of all attention.

“Such a Chosen of the Dao of alchemy... ten thousand stairs!”

“Who else could possibly be the Violet Furnace Lord other than him....”

“It seems that he really and truly is... Grandmaster Pill Cauldron!”

It just so happened that at this exact moment, Meng Hao's ninth minor pill emerged, adding one more stair to his path. Now there were nine. When compared with ten thousand, nine stone steps were almost too insignificant to mention.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as ever. He had no idea what was happening on the outside; he had no clue regarding the commotion caused by Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu. His expression was as earnest as ever as he took his nine minor pills and placed them all into the pill furnace. He took a deep breath and, eyes filled with determination, began to concoct... a pill which conformed to his own Dao of alchemy! A pill which would be in accord with his skill, and would be a return to the simplicity of nature.

As the pills entered the pill furnace, Meng Hao's eyes slowly closed. His hands pushed out into the air as he began to concoct.

Meng Hao's actions on the screen went relatively unnoticed thanks to the shocking scene caused by Ye Feimu. The only people who seemed to notice were Fatty, Han Bei and An Zaihai.

Ye Feimu walked slowly up the steps, looking every bit like a Chosen. His screen was the only focal point atop the mountain; the only one who could remotely compete was Chu Yuyan.

As far as the others, they had fallen far behind. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the old man who had been in second place finally concocted enough pills; the 9,937th step appeared. The pill furnace in front of him exploded, and the Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain plant disappeared. This indicated that he had reached his peak.

He took a deep breath as he began to ascend the stairs.

Behind him, time continued to pass. The remaining candidates continued to persevere; to be able to participate in this trial by fire indicated that these were no ordinary alchemists. They might be a bit slower, but even the least among the group was able to create more than 9,600 stairs before his pill furnace exploded and he proceeded up.

Unfortunately, missing hundreds of stairs in the Violet East Mountain trial by fire was an indication of failure. Several people were forced pale-faced to admit defeat when they reached the end of the stairs they had created. Only a middle-aged man happened to succeed.

Of the group of eight just now, only five were left. Four had already succeeded; only Meng Hao was still concocting a medicinal pill.

Other than Fatty, Han Bei and An Zaihai, no one else was paying any attention to him at all. All of them were looking at the screens of Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan.

Until... about half an incense stick later, the faint sound of thunder suddenly echoed out. This attracted some attention; almost immediately, more thunder could be heard, this time much clearer. Everyone suddenly began to look around, confused, trying to figure out which screen the sound was coming from.

When their eyes finally came to rest on Meng Hao's screen, thunder pealed out for the third time, echoing out loud enough to shake the Heavens and rock the Earth, filling the entire world of the Celestial Land which could be seen on the screens. More and more people turned their gazes from Ye Feimu and Chu Yuyan, to look at Meng Hao.

Immediately, they began to gape.

This was because, although Meng Hao's expression was one of unprecedented concentration, above the pill furnace in front of him was a roiling black cloud three hundred meters in diameter. It looked exactly the same as the cloud which had appeared above Ye Feimu.

"Fang Mu..."

"Don't tell me he also concocted some type of astonishing pill?"

As astonishment spread throughout the mountain peak, An Zaihai began to breathe heavily, and his eyes shone with an incredible light. His unusual expression immediately attracted the notice of the other Violet Furnace Lords.

Suddenly, another incredible peal of thunder boomed out, far more intense than the previous three, by at least ten times. Meng Hao's pill furnace trembled violently. Up above, the Tribulation cloud rapidly expanded, from three hundred meters to three thousand!

This caused shock to fill the hearts of everyone in the outside world. But then, a fifth, a sixth and then a seventh Heaven-shaking thunderclap rang out!

The thunder shook the Celestial Land, and the screens began to flicker, as if they were experiencing some sort of interference. Tribulation clouds swelled outward; by now, they were several tens of thousands of meters in diameter. The scene caused the minds of the Cultivators in the outside world to reel.

"What's... what's going on...?"

"What medicinal pill did he concoct to cause this?! Ye Feimu's pill didn't provoke such shocking Tribulation clouds!!"

Everyone was in an uproar; it was impossible for them not to be astonished. Before, they had believed the scene caused by Ye Feimu to be incredible, but now they were struck dumb. This... was truly incredible!



The thunder echoed out throughout almost the entire world of the Celestial Land. The sound of thunder rose up to the Heavens. Now, it wasn't just Meng Hao's screen that was flickering, but all of the screens. They distorted and twisted so violently that it seemed they might rip apart and disintegrate.

Even more shocking was that clearly visible to everyone on the mountaintop outside, the rest of the candidates had all stopped in their tracks. Their expressions flickered and began to fill with disbelief.

Obviously, all of them could hear the thunder and see the Tribulation clouds. This caused shock to fill everyone's hearts. Ye Feimu's pill had definitely caused an extraordinary sight. However, only he had been able to see it. The candidates were all within the Celestial Land, and on the same Mountain. However, they were treading different paths, so no matter what the others did, they wouldn't be able to see or sense it.

But right now, a shocking scene was unfolding. The booming caused by Meng Hao's medicinal pill was breaking through any such barriers, making it so that all the candidates could see the Tribulation clouds.

"How could this be happening...?"

"Furnace Lord Fang Mu, what... what is he doing...?"

Fatty stared open mouthed, panting. Suddenly, an excited glow filled his eyes, and his body began to tremble. Inside, he was yelling out, crying for Meng Hao to become famous. It seemed possible that he was more excited at the moment than Meng Hao was.

Han Bei's eyes glittered; her expression quickly returned to normal, but inside, she was thinking that this was what she had expected of Fang Mu.

An Zaihai sat there cross-legged, his eyes shining with an intense light. All of the other Violet Furnace Lords were staring with unprecedented concentration at what was happening.

It was at this moment that the ninth thunderclap rose up.

Its appearance caused the entire world of the Celestial Land to quake. Atop Violet East Mountain, Chu Yuyan, Ye Feimu and the others all felt the shaking.

Up above them, they saw the sky completely covered with endless Tribulation clouds. They were huge and never-ending, thick, black and stacked in layers. As the booming rattled out, an uncountable amount of lightning bolts began to surge about in the clouds. The power on display was astonishing.

“Who is doing this...?” murmured Chu Yuyan, her face pale. It was as if she had lost her mind; she had no way to see who had instigated such a shocking scene. The first person who appeared in her mind was Ye Feimu. However, for some unknown reason, his image was suddenly replaced by someone who made her feel incredibly irritated.

Ye Feimu’s face drained of blood. He stared mutely up into the sky, one expression after another flickering across his face. Disbelief, confusion and a variety of other complicated expressions appeared. His mind was suddenly blank.

What happened next was even more astonishing. As the ninth thunderclap could be heard, it wasn’t Ye Feimu, Chu Yuyan and the others on East Violet Mountain who were shocked.... Completely unpredictable was that this ninth thunderclap influenced the outside world! In the sky above Eastern Emergence Mountain, black, roiling clouds suddenly appeared. Within them, lighting danced back and forth, and a rumbling roaring could be heard.

When this happened, An Zaihai leaped to his feet. The other Violet Furnace Lords who sat around him also had expressions of shock written on their faces. Pill Demon sat there quietly for a moment, then lifted up his right hand and flicked his finger.

The same move he had used to dissipate Ye Feimu’s Tribulation clouds, was enough to get rid of the thunder and Tribulation in the outside world. However, the Tribulation clouds within the Celestial Land were still there.

Seeing that the Tribulation clouds were about to reach the point where they would erupt, Meng Hao began to sweat. However, his eyes filled with determination. After the space of a few breaths passed, he growled then pushed out both hands toward the pill furnace.

As he did this, a roaring sound filled the air. Popping sounds rang out as cracks spread out over the surface of the pill furnace. A moment later, it exploded, and a colorless medicinal pill flew out. Suddenly, the Tribulation clouds up above began to shrink in on themselves. A massive lightning bolt, as thick as a person, began to descend.

Pill Demon's eyes glittered, and he said, "Disperse!"

It was one word. However, it caused the entire world of the Celestial Land to suddenly tremble as if some new intangible rule had been proclaimed within it. This rule seemed as if it could affect everything inside; it warped the sky, changed the lightning bolt, covered the Tribulation clouds, causing them to suddenly... disappear. It was as if the sky had instantly been replaced.

Meng Hao stretched out his hand and grasped the semi-transparent medicinal pill.

Everything was still and quiet in the outside world. All eyes were glued to Meng Hao's screen, and his right hand. The master alchemists, Furnace Lords, Violet Furnace Lords, and all the disciples of the visiting Sects, even the late Nascent Soul stage sub-Patriarchs, were all staring at the same thing.

What they wanted to know was, considering this medicinal pill had elicited such a shocking reaction, something that had even rippled out into the outside world....

How many stone steps would it create?!

Chapter 287: Creating Something out of Nothing

A moment passed, and there were still nine stone steps. Not one more, not one less.

Nonetheless, no one made a single comment. This was because... Meng Hao opened his hand, and the transparent medicinal pill therein floated up to hover in front of him. Then... it blossomed with nine, glowing colored lights. The light emanated out from the pill, slowly forming into the shape of a Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant!

The plant was vivid and lifelike, and the instant it appeared, it attracted everyone's attention. The gazes were filled with countless thoughts. Shock, amazement, and disbelief filled everyone's minds until they were complete blanks.

An Zaihai's voice broke the silence. "This is... creating something out of nothing!!" He was panting as he once again rose to his feet. Earlier, he had guessed that this might happen, but to see it with his own eyes sent his mind reeling and shook his heart.

Normally he would never have made such an outburst. He was an alchemist, and stubborn pursuit was part of the Dao of alchemy. He was the type of eccentric who would never reveal his emotions regardless of whether he was happy or furious. But in this regard, his sentiments ruled him.

“A great Dao of alchemy. Returning to the simplicity of nature! Creating something out of nothing!!” As An Zaihai’s voice echoed out, everyone watched the screen as Meng Hao lifted his foot onto the first step. He walked slowly up the nine steps, then raised his foot out into the emptiness. As it descended, a tenth step appeared. He walked forward. As he did, more steps appeared beneath his feet.

The limitation of number had already been exceeded; this was a realm far past that of Ye Feimu. Most people didn’t even understand such a realm; however, the eight Violet Furnace Lords did!

His heart trembling, mind reeling, Lin Hailong was the second to rise to his feet. With a gasp, he said, “This... this is... Fang Mu didn’t just concoct a pill, he concocted a seed! A Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant seed!!” Shock filled his eyes. “It’s impossible... He took an illusory model based on the Dao of alchemy, and then concocted a real seed!!

“If you plant this seed, there is a high likelihood that within a few years, a Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain Plant will grow. But... but... the ingredients he used were all illusory, not real! This realm... it is creating something out of nothing!”

After An Zaihai and Lin Hailong finished speaking, silence reigned. The master alchemists sat mutely in their places. The Furnace Lords were breathing heavily. All of the people who had been laughing at him earlier now felt their minds spinning, as if they had been slapped in the face by an enormous, invisible palm. The slap had both cleared their minds and sent them reeling at the same time.

After the space of a few breaths passed, an incredible hubbub broke out.

“Creating something out of nothing? Fang Mu was able to take something that didn’t really exist and use it to make something real? What level of skill in the Dao of alchemy does that represent? It’s....”

“Is Ye Feimu the strongest? Or is this Fang Mu even better...?”

The people from the visiting Sects weren’t able to discern what was going on. The only thing that was abundantly clear was the shock they saw on the faces of the Violet Furnace Lords.

Of their number, only Ye Yuntian had a gloomy look on his face. He frowned as he looked at Meng Hao's screen.

A breathtaking medicinal pill!

The disciples from the visiting Sects were shocked by the scene playing out in front of them. Truth be told, they had been shocked over and over from the moment this trial by fire began. However, this moment was the most shocking yet!

Creating something from nothing. Concocting pills in a Celestial Land. Refining the rules of alchemy. Turning an illusory Nine Treasures Pearl Curtain plant into an actual seed that could be planted. All of these things caused waves of shock to fill their minds.

As of now, they had forgotten Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu. All eyes were fixed like glue onto Meng Hao. He was the focus of attention of all the people here.

Fatty was panting. Han Bei's eyes shone with a strange light as she looked at Meng Hao. Li Shiqi's expression was one of fascination. She herself had never imagined that Alchemist Fang Mu would concoct a pill such as this.

Chen Fan had never been very interested in Alchemy. But he gaped in astonishment, and admiration grew within his heart for Fang Mu.

Patriarch Violet Sieve from the Black Sieve Sect laughed. "Starting today, the name of Alchemist Fang Mu will be known to everyone within the Southern Domain."

Sub-Patriarchs from the other Clans laughed and said similar things. When their words entered Ye Yuntian's ears, his face grew unsightly, and unconsciously he glanced toward his Master, Pill Demon. Pill Demon's face was expressionless, which caused Ye Yuntian to sigh with relief.

Turning his head to look at the other Violet Furnace Lords, he said, "Unless Master makes a specific choice, then everyone has a chance. Fang Mu may have some unique skills in pill concocting, but... the general trend is clearly favoring Feimu to become the next Violet Furnace Lord!" He gave meaningful looks to those among the Violet Furnace Lords with whom he was close. He felt a bit more calm after that, and when he looked back at Meng Hao's screen, his expression was the same as ever. His heart, however, was filled with rancor and cold laughter.

Meng Hao had no way to know what was happening in the outside world. However, from the moment he had begun to concoct the pill, he had decided to make a big scene. At the moment, he was walking up the mountain path. Ahead of him was nothingness, but every step he took, more stone steps would appear to support him.

Time passed. The buzz of conversation still filled the outside world when Meng Hao stepped onto the final stone step of the third region. He wasn't really sure how many total steps he had traversed. If he thought about it, then perhaps it was more than ten thousand.

Meng Hao didn't actually care about a specific number; it wasn't important.

"Who was it...?" thought Chu Yuyan, her breathing heavy. She still wasn't sure who had caused the shocking scene just now. Whoever it was, that person was on a different path. Unless they were at the peak of mountain, it would be very difficult to see anything. At the moment, the first person that came to mind was, again, Ye Feimu.

But then, she hesitated. Suddenly she wasn't so sure. Something inside of her was telling her that it probably wasn't Ye Feimu. And yet from her perspective, other than Ye Feimu, none of the other candidates, including herself, could possibly have done something like that.

As she thought, determination filled her eyes. She turned and continued upward.

The most conflicted of all was none other than Ye Feimu. He stood mutely on the stone steps, thinking for a very long time.

"Who was it? What pill did they concoct...? I concocted one medicinal pill, the pinnacle! I can't believe that someone else's decision regarding the Dao of alchemy could surpass my own. In the third region, I definitely produced the most steps with the least amount of medicinal pills! I only concocted one! This person could not possibly have outdone me!" Ye Feimu's pride caused pain in his heart, but it quickly vanished. "I must be in first place!"

His eyes glittering, he raced forward, hurrying toward the end of the third region. In his preparations to participate in this trial by fire, Violet Furnace Lord Ye Yuntian had actually violated Sect protocol by secretly telling him in detail about his own experience in the promotion trial by fire.

For example, Ye Feimu knew that at the end of the third region, it was possible to see who had passed through the region, what method they had used to do so, and what position they were granted by the Immortal Land.

His eyes filled with stubbornness, Ye Feimu hurried on, panting.

In addition to Chu Yuyan and Ye Feimu, there was also the old man and the middle-aged man. They were were also racing forward.

Time passed. The first person to reach the end of the third region was Chu Yuyan. She leaped across the gap created by the last few missing steps. Then, a tremor ran through her body. She had just seen the boulder marking the beginning of the fourth region. The first thing which entered her vision was not the requirements for concocting a pill, but rather, the rankings from the previous region, which floated in the air in front of the boulder.

In third place, was her own name, Chu Yuyan. Next to it were written the numbers 9,999!

She gasped, then looked up toward second place. It was Ye Feimu's name, and the number was 10,000.

"Ten thousand.... He really does deserve to be called Grandmaster Pill Cauldron. Ten thousand steps marks perfection in the third region. However... how could he possibly have only placed second...." She stared at the name for a moment, and her heart began to pound. Slowly, her gaze moved up until she saw the listing for first place. Instantly, a roaring sound filled her head, and her eyes shone with disbelief.

"How could it be him...?" She was suddenly out of sorts. The boulder was spewing out massive amounts of Violet Qi, but she didn't notice. All she could do was stare at the rankings.

"Fang Mu!" muttered Ye Feimu, his body trembling slightly. His eyes filled with disbelief and, even more so, shame. If it had been Chu Yuyan who beat him, he could have accepted it. But instead, it was someone he completely looked down upon. Furthermore, that person had surpassed him in the third region.

As far as he was concerned this was a complete humiliation. Actually, from the moment Fang Mu had been raised to Furnace Lord, he had aroused the dislike of the other Furnace Lords. That was especially true for Ye Feimu. He held nothing but contempt for the manner in which Fang Mu had received his promotion.

Next, Ye Feimu's body trembled, and began to fill with rage. This was because he had just seen the numbers written after Fang Mu's name. 10.

"Ten stone steps.... Ten stone steps...? I created a perfect set of ten thousand stone steps! How could a trifling ten stone steps even compare! Just what pill did this Fang Mu concoct?" Ye Feimu wouldn't go so far as to question the fairness of the trial by fire, but inside, he just couldn't accept it.

By now, he had already put the pieces together, and realized who the Pill Tribulation had come for.

Violet Qi poured out from the boulder, but Ye Feimu felt a sense of irony. His eyes filled with a cold light.

Meng Hao stood in front of the fourth region boulder, looking at the rankings. His right hand lifted up, causing the image to scatter. Massive amounts of Violet Qi poured out, dense to the extreme. Those watching in the outside world could easily see the boundless extent of the Violet Qi, and how much it exceeded that of Chu Yuyan's and Ye Feimu's

Several hours passed, during which time, this point was even further impressed upon all onlookers.

Meng Hao's black pill furnace absorbed the Violet Qi, and as it did, its color slowly changed. Now, it was no longer pitch black, but tinged with violet. At first glance, it would be hard to tell whether it was black or violet. However, the pill furnace was now struggling about half as much as it had before, and no longer as fiercely.

About an hour later, the Violet Qi disappeared. Text gradually appeared on the boulder, revealing the requirements for the final region.

Become an apprentice!

Seeing these words caused Meng Hao's vision to suddenly blur and twist. The mountain in front of him was no longer a mountain. The sky above... was no longer the same sky!

Chapter 288: Peach Blossom

The mountain vanished. Far, far off in the distance, a mountain range was just barely visible.



The sky, was no longer blue. Instead, it was as red as flame, because it was dusk.

The dusk carried with it the afterglow of the setting sun, which trickled across the land to blanket over a small county-level city. The walls surrounding the city had existed for many years, which was clear from their ancient appearance. They were covered with blotches and marks, evidence of the passage of time.

Atop the walls, a few guards lazed about. Occasionally the faint sounds of their laughter and chatting would drift down into the bordello below. There was a new girl in town, and their laughter contained the beauty of anticipation which comes in life.

Horse carts lined up to enter through the city gate; atop each cart sat a driver brandishing a whip and bellowing out directions to his horses as they ambled toward the city center.

The sun was setting, but oppressive heat still held sway over the land, turning it into something like an oven that wanted to bake the earth.

There was no wind or rain.

The only thing that existed was arid heat.

This walled city was not very large; it was only a county after all. People walked the streets in groups of two or three, cooling themselves with fans, occasionally cursing the weather.

The most lively places in the town were the teahouses, where a cup of cold tea could dispel a bit of the heat. On a sweltering summer evening like this, gossiping with friends and neighbors there was the primary pastime of the populace.

Other than the teahouses was the town bordello, which was a place for rich people. Many men who passed by couldn't restrain themselves from glancing up at the gorgeously dressed young ladies who leaned against the wooden shutters up above. It was enough to make any man's heart burn, and then cause him to think about how unbearable the weather was.

If a man's wife walked with him past the bordello, her face would twist with jealousy and she would hastily pull him away. A more shrewish wife might look up at the licentious, headstrong girls up above and curse them a few times.

It was said that the girls in the bordello were as delicate as flowers and as refined as jade, almost inhuman. Inside, the rooms were filled with ice cubes and cute servant girls with fans. Because of this, rich customers had the luxury of enjoying an ice-cold breeze.

Supposedly, the bordello also abounded with delicious food and wine.... Every man wished to go there, either for the girls, the food or the ice cubes.

"Look, the point is, this place is awesome!" said Meng Hao in a low, earnest voice to the two kids next to him, clenching his fists tightly. Both the kids were around the same age as him, twelve or thirteen years old. "You guys just don't have any sense of brotherhood!"

Meng Hao put his arms around their shoulders. One was skinny, the other chubby. Both looked excited, but at the same time, a bit shy and nervous.

Meng Hao gave them a very serious look, as if he were a Sect Patriarch arranging to hand over a legacy. "Tomorrow, I, young master, am being sent away to boarding school. From now on I'm handing over the title of Eastern Emergence County's #1 Bully to you two. Don't forget, you can't do anything to ruin young master's reputation!"

If... if they were in some sacred location, then perhaps his words would carry some power. But unfortunately, the three of them were currently lying on their bellies atop a wall.

What was inside the wall was nothing other than the bordello, and the wall they were on surrounded it. Further inside was a two-story building, connected to another building which filled the front of the courtyard. From their position on the wall, they could clearly see the shadows of men and women inside the second story windows. The sound of chatting and laughter drifted out.

The fat kid, whose face was covered with freckles, excitedly said, "Young master Fang, don't worry. The name of the #1 Bully in Eastern Emergence County will always belong to you. As for us two, #2 and #3 Bullies, we will definitely maintain your reputation!" The skinny kid next to him nodded enthusiastically.

“Good, I know I can trust you two,” Meng Hao replied solemnly. “However, you still need your gang initiation plaques. Today, your final test has arrived. Now pay attention. Soon, someone is gonna come out. When that happens, you have to throw these bricks as hard as you can!”

Each of the kids held a brick which was about the size of their own hand.

“That damned bastard!” said Meng Hao through gritted teeth. “He dares to go chasing after my Peach Blossom!? Young master is definitely going to find out who exactly it is who has the gall!” He glared at the second story of the building. Panting, he continued, “Peach Blossom promised me that she would wait until I grew up, and then she would sleep with me. Who could have guessed that some damned son of a b\*tch would dare to go pick on her!” His heart filled with rage. When the other two kids saw the look in his eyes, their hearts filled with intense admiration.

“He definitely deserves to be the Elder Brother,” they thought. “The #1 Bully in Eastern Emergence County has a mistress. He’s for sure the only twelve year old kid in the entire county who could pull that off!” They exchanged a glance, and their expressions grew more fanatical. As far as they were concerned, anyone who could enter the legendary bordello and get a mistress, had skill that reached to the Heavens. To be able to talk about it openly made them feel even more proud.

Soon, enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn. Evening had fallen, and the moon was rising. The second floor balcony door opened, and a beautifully dressed young woman led a middle-aged man out by the arm. He appeared to be drunk, and they talked in soft tones as they emerged.

The moonlight was thin, and the sky somewhat dark, making it difficult to see their exact appearance. However, Meng Hao could instantly recognize Peach Blossom. Immediately, his eyes grew red, and he shouted, “You crusty son of a b\*tch, young master’s gonna beat you to death! You dare to see my Peach Blossom!” With a howl, he hurled the brick. With equally vicious howls, the two kids also threw their bricks.

“Young master is gonna... huh?” Meng Hao was just about to charge into the courtyard when his body began to tremble. The drunk, middle-aged man easily dodged the three bricks and then raised his head furiously. As soon as he saw Meng Hao, he gave a slight smile. Then, his fury burned hotter.

“You little bastard!” he cried. “This is mutiny!”

Meng Hao instantly began to shiver.

“Father...” All of his ardor and sincerity evaporated, as if freezing water had been poured over his body. He immediately leaped off of the wall and began to run. His two sidekicks’ faces went pale with fear, and their calves burned as they raced off.

“We’re finished. Finished! Fang Mu’s father is the former #1 Bully in the county! Now he’s a constable, so he can kill people without blinking an eye...!” The two kids’ faces were as pale as death as they fled.

After the three of them vanished, the middle-aged man stood in the courtyard, both angry and amused. The idea of a son making a move on his father was both infuriating and hilarious.

“That little bastard never studies and has no skills whatsoever. Sending him to study in boarding school is definitely the right decision!”

Late that night, Meng Hao ambled through the streets, heaving continuous sighs. When he finally reached the main gate of his house, he looked at the lights shining from within and gave a deep frown.

“Why did it have to be dad...? Oh, mother, you left too early. If you hadn’t gone, things wouldn’t be like this. I’m going to go have a few words with him for you!” He had just pushed open the gate leading into the courtyard, when suddenly he began to cry.

“Mother, I miss you! Mother, you visited me in my dreams last night and told me to go visit Peach Blossom.... Mother....”

“Shut up!” bellowed an angry voice from within the house. The door opened to reveal Meng Hao’s father, the middle-aged man from before. His brow was furrowed, and he looked haplessly at Meng Hao. “Quit your faking! Why aren’t you in bed yet? I’m taking you to the boarding school early in the morning to meet your new teacher.”

“I’m not going!” cried Meng Hao, taking a step back. “I want to go to regular school! All the people in the city are going to laugh at me!”

“You little bastard. Still up to the same old tricks at your age...” The man frowned, then suddenly rushed forward and grabbed Meng Hao, who was just getting ready to run away. He lifted him into the air and spanked him on the bottom a few times.

The slapping sounds rang out clearly, but there was no pain. Things had been like this for Meng Hao since he was young. He and his father had only each other to depend on. Every time they had some sort of disagreement, his father would put on the appearance of being very strict, but couldn't actually bear to hit him hard.

"What good is regular school?" his father roared. "You need to learn to respect the teachers and their teachings! You need to learn about ethics! Are you gonna go, or not!?"

"I'm not going!" cried Meng Hao, his eyes rolling.

"You...!" Meng Hao's father raised his hand high into the air.

Meng Hao hurriedly said, "If you promise to never go see Peach Blossom again, then I'll go.... You can go see anybody else, just not her!" He was afraid his father might actually start to spank him hard this time.

Meng Hao's father wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. He lowered his hand, placing it onto Meng Hao's head and tousling it gently.

"Alright. You're growing up, kid, and I can see that you have a fertile imagination. Fine. From now on, I'll never see Peach Blossom again. I'll leave her for you. After you grow up, I'll arrange for her to be your concubine!"

"Really?" said Meng Hao, his eyes growing bright.

"You're still not in bed?!" He glared at Meng Hao as he released him. Meng Hao beamed with joy as he ran into the house, threw off his clothes, and jumped into bed. He had some beautiful dreams that night.

Early the next morning, when the sky was just beginning to grow light, Meng Hao's eyes were still blurry as his father dressed him.

Father glanced at son, and could see that he clearly hadn't gotten enough sleep. A solemn expression covered his face, as well as love and kindness, something Meng Hao didn't often see.

He reached down and picked up Meng Hao, just like he had when he was young. Meng Hao's head fell onto his shoulder, and he continued to sleep. Meng Hao's father grabbed the gift he planned to present to the teacher, and then left.

Along the way, his gait was a bit unsteady. Carrying such a large boy wasn't an easy task.

An hour later, they reached the main gate of the house of a famous old man who lived in the east part of the city. Meng Hao's father woke Meng Hao up and then put him down. Then, he knocked on the door, and entered the courtyard.

Meng Hao was left yawning out in the courtyard as his father entered the house, so he didn't see his father respectfully clasping hands and making other imploring gestures.

Not much time passed before his father emerged. Next to him was an old man with a full head of white hair. His features were ancient, but full of vigor. It gave him a noble and prestigious bearing, much different from that of an ordinary person.

This was especially true of his eyes. They were filled with profundity, as if they contained stars within them. Anyone who looked at them would be entranced. The old man gazed down at Meng Hao.

This gaze seemed to be able to see lives that had been lived, and lives yet to be lived.

This gaze seemed capable of piercing through the haze to see all three lives: past, present and future.

This gaze made it seem as if this young man's entire life had been lived for the purpose of coming here and kowtowing three times to become his apprentice.

A long moment passed, and the old man nodded slightly.

Meng Hao's father looked down at Meng Hao and said, "A Master is like a father. Fang Mu, I want you to respect your Master. Respect him even more than you respect me! If you can't do that, then you aren't my son!" With that, he left.

Chapter 289: Which Path to Choose?

Meng Hao gaped at his father. He'd forgotten how long it had been since he'd seen him act so strictly. The seriousness of his tone instantly caused him to wake up.

"A Master is like a father..." Meng Hao watched his father's back as he left. He clearly was wearing a simple, unlined robe. However, for some reason, it seemed to Meng Hao as if he were surrounded by a violet wind.

The wind seemed to shatter some barrier in his mind; suddenly an image appeared. It was his father. The image was blurry, but he could tell that his father was looking at him and sighing softly.

His mother was there too, gazing at him warmly. It looked like there were tears in her eyes.

For some reason... there was also a Tower of Tang, as well as many, many complicated memories. Meng Hao thought for a long moment before shaking his head roughly and turning to look off in the distance. There, in the middle of the county, was a very tall tower. It was... a Tower of Tang.

"That wasn't there before, was it...? No, it never was." A confused look appeared on Meng Hao's face.

In the midst of his vacantness, an ancient-sounding voice reached his ears. "This isn't a boarding school."

As his father disappeared into the distance, Meng Hao turned to look at the old man who stood in front of him. Now that his father was gone, only he and the old man were there in the courtyard.

The old man looked down at Meng Hao, then slowly continued, "Up to now, I've had seventeen apprentices. A few ended up returning to dust. A few left and forged their own path. There were also a few... who are still pondering what they wish to pursue. In fact, when you think about it, some don't really even count as my apprentices. As of today, you are my eighteenth apprentice. However, I'm actually going to call you... Little Ninth." As the man spoke in his ancient voice, all the sound in the air around Meng Hao seemed to fade until he was focused completely on the old man.

"You have a Junior Sister. She became my apprentice before you, but in a bit of an unorthodox fashion, so she ranks below you. She is surnamed Chu."

Meng Hao wasn't sure why, but he felt nervous. He didn't know whether to get onto his knees and kowtow, or bend from the waist with clasped hands. He was completely ill at ease.

“I haven’t used my own name for a long time,” said the old man. “Outsiders usually call me by my alchemist name, whereas friends usually call me Mr. East. I’ve never been married, so I have no heir. My apprentices are my heirs. Eventually, you will pass on my teachings, and the mark I have made on the world, will be extended by you. As far as I am concerned, you apprentices are... my closest relatives.” The old man gazed at Meng Hao, looking very majestic. However, his eyes were warm and filled with kindness and love. It seemed almost as if he had been watching Meng Hao for years, and had been testing him for a very long time. “From now on, I’m your Master!”

Without thinking, Meng Hao responded, “Respect Master, venerate the Dao. Master is like a father. I...”

“There’s no need to say such things,” said the old man, his eyes gleaming with a keen light. “As long as they exist in your heart, that is enough. Little Nine, kneel!” In the blink of an eye, his entire person seemed to become the pinnacle of Heaven and Earth.

Meng Hao couldn’t really describe exactly what he was feeling. It was as if in this instant, the old man had become the Heavens. And yet, he was not cold, but instead filled with deep kindness and warmth. It was as if he were a mountain that could shield against wind and rain alike.

Meng Hao bowed his head and got down on his knees.

As he was kneeling, he could not see how everything above him in the sky had stopped moving. The clouds were still. The birds no longer flitted about. The earth did not quake, but everything within the city grew silent.

“As my apprentice, you only kowtow twice in life, at least in the true sense of the word. The first time is upon becoming an apprentice. This kowtow sows Karma with me, whereupon our fates are intertwined. If you do not break this connection, then neither shall I! As for the second kowtow, wait until you come to your senses, then come ask me about it, and I will tell you.

“The first kowtow upon becoming an apprentice is actually divided into three further kowtows, those of the Innocence, the Roaming, and the Sunset Gazing. Your kowtow today is the kowtow of Innocence.”

Meng Hao didn’t really understand. However, he placed his hands onto the ground and kowtowed deeply.



With this kowtow, the sky sprung back into motion. The winds and the clouds swept along. The birds flew!

With this kowtow, the earth shook, as past events flitted dream-like through the minds of all the living creatures.

With this kowtow, past life Karma, future Karma, present life.... If you do not sever it, then I shall not sever it!

The old man laughed contentedly. It echoed about, filled with emotion, satisfaction, kindness and duty.

From this day forward, the young man in front of him was his apprentice. In the future, the young man's every action would be marked by him. From now on he was... the young man's Master!

This is Karma. Karma is not something predestined, but something decided by people. It can be called fate; not fate determined by the Heavens, nor doom from the underworld, but something decided between two people.

One person decides to take another as Master; the other decides to take an apprentice. This creates... Karma!

His voice soft, the old man said, "You must still experience the kowtow of Roaming, and the kowtow of Sunset Gazing. Throughout the process, you will be able to choose from many paths. As for which path you choose... that is your decision. If in the end you are able to perform the kowtow of Sunset Gazing, then that will name us Master and apprentice. No one will ever be able to sever that bond! I will accept no gifts in becoming your Master; I have already accepted everything I need to accept." He reached down and softly tousled Meng Hao's hair. His smile was kind as he helped Meng Hao to his feet.

Meng Hao still didn't really understand. As he stood, he looked at his master, and could feel the kindness and love within him. Beneath the man's gaze, he could also feel a warmth deep inside of himself.

He nodded his head solemnly.

Springs and autumns came and went. Years passed. Meng Hao was now nineteen years old. In the past seven years, he spent most of his time living with Master, studying, observing the cool breeze and the white clouds, gazing up at the moon and the stars.

After reading from many books, he finally understood what it meant to respect Master and venerate the Dao. He also understood that the world was a very large place.

During the seven years, his father had aged quite a bit. Master had grown even older. Peach Blossom's popularity in the bordello waned. Eventually, some moneybags from another county paid her debts and took her as a concubine.

Before she left, she came looking for Meng Hao. It seemed she viewed him as something like a little brother. She spoke some tender words, then, accompanied by Meng Hao's smile, got into a sedan chair and left Eastern Emergence County.

According to their agreement from years ago, his two friends really did grow up to become the biggest bullies in the county.

Meng Hao, however, no longer called himself a bully. He didn't wear fancy, expensive clothes, but instead, a simple scholar's robe.

It was green, just like the greenness of his youth. However, in just the same manner that spring changes into autumn, his face no longer carried the frivolity it used to, but instead, calmness. He liked to think, and to gaze off into the sky, even though he didn't really know exactly what it was he was looking at.

He liked the wind and the rain. He liked to stand in the pavilion and look at the lightning off in the distance, and hear the thunder. When the rain fell down onto the earth outside, he liked to open up a book and read about how life had changed throughout the ages.

Everything was like a dream. Seven years passed like the falling of a rainstorm. Meng Hao didn't feel like he had changed much, but from the perspective of others, he had changed quite a bit.

As he watched his Master continue to grow older, he often thought of bringing up the subject of the Roaming. He wanted to climb mountains, travel to distant lands, to see the realities of the world.

But in the end, he looked at the city, his father, and Master, and instead maintained his silence, saying nothing.

A year. Another year... soon, seven more years had passed. During autumn of that year, as the leaves drifted down to the ground, floating in the wind to return to the earth, his father fell sick. One night, a violet wind blew, and his father passed away.

Meng Hao stood in front of his father's grave, a blank look in his eyes. He vaguely remembered how, fourteen years ago, his father had held him in his arms and taken him to meet Master. In the blink of an eye, fourteen years had passed. Meng Hao stood there silently, sipping from a pot of alcohol.

Finally he turned and left. He found Master, and told him how he desired the Roaming. It was the only dream he possessed now, and had been fermenting in his heart for years.

Before he left, Meng Hao kneeled before Master and kowtowed a second time. This was... the kowtow of Roaming.

Master watched early one morning as Meng Hao shouldered his scholar's pack and walked off into the distance, framed by the rising sun.

Eventually, Meng Hao looked over his shoulder. By that time, Master was no longer visible. Later, he looked over his shoulder a second time, and even the Tower of Tang couldn't be seen.

He was thoughtful for a moment, then gradually seemed to come to an understanding. He looked forward once again, and continued to walk off into the distance. He did not look over his shoulder a third time.

He reached a mighty river and encountered a ferryman, with whom he chatted about some of the legends of the river. Supposedly, an Immortal resided somewhere here.

In the books Meng Hao had read, he had occasionally come across the title Immortal. He decided to live next to the river. Unfortunately, in the three years that he did, he never saw an Immortal. What did see, however, was his own inverted reflection in the river waters, a different him.

He saw himself flying in the sky, practicing cultivation in the mountains, and some place called the East Pill Division of the Violet Fate Sect, where he concocted...

It seemed as if all he had to do was jump into the water, and he could become that other person, and this life would be over.

By the time the three years had passed, Meng Hao was twenty nine years old. In the end, he did not jump into the water. Instead, he left the river and travelled far off to another place.

A year later, in the depths of a seemingly endless forest, on a blustery and nearly moonless night, Meng Hao caught sight of woman floating in the air. There was also an abandoned tomb, with no incense burning in front of it. The surrounding forest was pitch black, and Meng Hao was a bit scared. A moment later, he found himself surrounded by countless shadowy forms. Suddenly, a sealing incantation popped into his mind.

He extended his palm, and everything around him vanished.

Starting then, he was very curious about this dark, mysterious forest. He continued to travel about in it, sleeping in thickets when necessary. He saw many, many strange things, including a variety of fantastic fierce and wild beasts.

It took three years to travel through the forest. When he emerged, he looked back, and an absentminded look covered his face. He had the feeling that if he wished, he could stay and become a part of the forest.

In a place like this, a person could become one with Heaven and Earth, and transcend the mortal life.

As Meng Hao gazed at the forest, he thought back to Master's words from twenty-one years ago. There are many paths in life, as to which path he would choose... that was his decision to make.

"This place is not the path I wish to tread." Lost in thought, Meng Hao turned and walked off into the distance.

Chapter 290: This Life

Two years later, Meng Hao was thirty-five years old. It had been nine years since he left home. However, during that entire time, he had only lived in two places, the river and the forest.

This year, he ran into a gang of bandits.

Bandits are generally killers, but they didn't kill Meng Hao. Perhaps it was because of his worn scholar's robe, or the scholar's pack that he wore on his back. He certainly looked down on his fortune. The bandit leader was a beautiful, seductive woman. She asked him a single question.

"Can you keep financial records?"

Meng Hao shook his head. However, they took him anyway. They led him to their mountain fort, which was really a stockaded village where more than a thousand people lived. Most of them were the family members of the bandits, including quite a few children.

It was arranged for Meng Hao to become a teacher, which mostly involved instructing the children how to read. He didn't have to teach anything very complicated. They just needed to be able to read bank notes and understand basic messages, things that any good bandit should be able to do.

This was a requirement laid upon all the bandits by the beautiful bandit Chieftess.

Time trickled by. Meng Hao adapted himself, and quickly felt at home. He taught reading, and looked up at the sky. It was almost like life in Eastern Emergence County. Sometimes he thought of Master, or of his father, and how he hadn't gone back to sweep his grave for a very long time.

People died every month in the mountain fort. During a three year period, the camp moved locations twice. In the fourth year, the army came. The mountain fort faced overwhelming numbers; at a critical moment of life and death, Meng Hao unhesitatingly proposed using poison.

At the moment, a north wind was blowing, and the army was located to the south.

Meng Hao wasn't sure why exactly he had thought of using poison. It was just that, in the past few years, he seemed to have an abundance of knowledge in his head. The poison... was of course concocted by Meng Hao.

As the poison powder drifted south with the wind, Meng Hao closed his eyes. A long time later, he heard shouts of rejoicing. It had been a massacre. The mountain village had won.

Meng Hao was thirty-nine years old. That night, during the third watch, something like burning fire burrowed under the covers with him. It was the bandit Chieftess. During the day she was a conservative woman, but right now she was like a beautiful spirit.

Overnight, Meng Hao's life changed. He was no longer a teacher, but instead, a so-called military adviser. He had never experienced such a life before. It was fresh and exciting. Soon he was forty years old. He was past the prime of life when the blood boiled. And yet all of this was... addicting.

Killing. Plundering. For three years, no blood physically stained Meng Hao's hands. However, with his assistance, the number of lives taken by the bandits increased by tenfold.

That winter, Meng Hao finally got fed up with it all. He had not chosen this life, and he wanted to leave. But by now, the mountain fort had grown very large. When he brought up leaving, the beautiful Chieftess refused to allow it.

But Meng Hao... persisted, and left the mountain fort anyway. Therefore, they tried to chase him down and kill him.

They chased him for a year before finally giving up. In the end, Meng Hao wasn't killed. Exhausted, he turned, and there, one hundred or so paces behind him, was the Chieftess. She sat atop a horse, staring at him, a big black bow in her hand. She was older, but still beautiful, and within her eyes was a torn expression.

The wind blew past the two of them. Meng Hao shouldered the same scholar's pack he'd taken with him when he left his hometown, turned around, and walked off into the distance.

No arrow was loosed from the bow.

That year, Meng Hao was forty-three years of age.

Eventually, he caught sight of a Daoist temple located on top of a mountain.

It was autumn, and the leaves rustled as they drifted down onto the green limestone of the temple. The sky was overcast, and occasionally the soft rumbling of thunder could be heard. Rain was coming.

Meng Hao took up residence in the Daoist temple. He watched the Daoists practice their religious cultivation, observed them live their daily lives, and enjoyed a kind of peace he had never experienced before.

He had the unshakeable feeling that his hands were stained dark with blood that just wouldn't wash off. Perhaps in this place he could discover a way to cleanse it.

Two years later, Meng Hao was forty-five years old. He let out a soft sigh.

"It turns out there's no way to cleanse it. In that case, I'll just have to live with it." Shaking his head, he bid farewell to the Daoist temple, and strode out once again into the world.

Eventually, he reached the capital city. After he had been living there for a year, a bloody war broke out with a neighbouring nation. Despite his age, Meng Hao was forcefully conscripted into the military, and became a soldier in the army. The war between the two countries had just started at this point.

Two years into the war, Meng Hao used some poison that he had concocted to win a battle that shocked both of the countries involved. This sparked his rise to prominence. He was no longer a common soldier, but a Poison Specialist.

Five years into the war, he was a General. He led a special offensive, commanding a force of one hundred thousand soldiers, along with a special unit of one hundred personally trained Poison Specialists.

Eight years into the war, the enemy withdrew from the battlefield and turned to defense. Meng Hao was more than fifty years old, and his name was famous throughout the entire nation. He led his men into the enemy nation in a campaign to destroy them thoroughly.

By the tenth year of the war, Meng Hao was fifty-six. It had been thirty years since he left his hometown. The enemy was destroyed. He returned to his home nation, and was welcomed with grand ceremony.

He was now a legend, and as such, was conferred with the title Royal Advisor.

Everything was like a dream, and Meng Hao wasn't used to it. Perhaps it was because of him or perhaps because of the nation's growing power, but after becoming the Royal Advisor, the nation turned into an aggressor. A new round of wars began.

Year after year passed, and eventually, Meng Hao was sixty years old. Once again fed up with everything, he left the army and returned to the areas that had been scorched by the flames of war. Pestilence raged there. He was able to save the lives of a few people, after which, he was the Royal Adviser no longer, but a doctor, the Alchemy Doctor.

He continued to travel, pursuing the dream he'd had when he was young, climbing mountains and traveling to distant lands.

However many people he had killed in the past, that was how many he would save.

His travels lasted for twenty years.

Throughout those twenty years, Meng Hao traveled through countless nations and climbed to the top of who knew how many mountain peaks. He saved many people, and soon, word of "the miraculous hands of the Alchemy Doctor" spread throughout the land.

The year Meng Hao turned eighty, he looked thoughtfully up into the sky. His weathered face was covered with the evidence of a life full of memories.

"I've traveled many paths in life," he thought to himself, "but as for my choice... just what is it...? I did not choose to be the reflection in the water of the river. Nor did I choose to live the peaceful life of a hermit in the forest. I absolutely did not want to live the romantic life of a bandit couple, nor did I choose to become a Daoist priest.... I've long since given up on being a Poison Specialist or a Royal Advisor, on waging war.... I thought that my final decision would be to become an Alchemy Doctor. But now that I look back... that's not my path either. Just what am I pursuing in this life?" He looked up into the sky, but could not think of any answer to the question. The only thing he found was more frustration, and deep exhaustion.

He missed home. That autumn night, he sat beneath the stars looking up at the sky. Next to his foot was a fallen leaf. He didn't notice as the wind whispered through the forest, picked it up, and returned it back to the tree it had fallen from. At the moment, he was somewhat like that leaf. He had been way from home for almost a full sixty year cycle. Now, he needed to return.



Meng Hao began to walk. After he had left home, it had taken him fifty four years to reach this point. The return trip only took six.

Eastern Emergence County was still there, flourishing more than ever. Meng Hao's hair was white when he entered the city. He was just barely able to make out some of the traces of the past.

The bordello was gone. The wall had long since been knocked down, and the location was now home to a large mansion.

The house where he grew up had vanished with the passing of time. In its place was an inn. Meng Hao stood across from it for a very long time, staring at it. His face was covered not just with the ravages of time, but with a complex expression. Finally, he turned and left.

When he returned to Master's house, the person who opened the door was a stranger. After making some enquiries, Meng Hao turned his head to look at East Mountain off in the distance.

His father had been buried there more than fifty years ago. Master had been buried there more than twenty years ago.

Meng Hao sighed. Silently holding a pot of alcohol under his arm, he climbed the mountain. First, he visited his father's grave, which was covered in weeds. "I know this is all an illusion," he said softly, "and that you aren't my real father. However... you let me feel the fatherly love that I've been missing. It was only a simple embrace so that I could sleep...." About thirty years ago, in the Daoist temple, he had come to understand everything. This world was nothing but an illusion, a test to become an apprentice.

The real Meng Hao was still in the world of the Celestial Land in the Violet Fate Sect, atop Violet East Mountain.

He closed his eyes. A long time passed before he left his father's grave. Finally, he arrived at Master's grave. He looked at it for a while before speaking.

"Becoming an apprentice involves three kowtows," he murmured. "The first is during the time of innocence. The second is in the time of roaming. The third is when gazing at the sunset.... You gave me an entire life to decide whether or not to become your apprentice. Everything in this realm of illusions was created, not by you, but me. You only provided the starting point. Every person in the trial by fire will create their own world.

“In this world, I liberated my heart. I... I experienced everything. In the end, I’ve come back here. But I still haven’t found what it is that I wish to pursue....

“The Dao of alchemy? Obviously not.” He lifted the jug of alcohol and took a long drink.

“Eternal life?” he said quietly. “I’m not qualified.” Soon, the sun began to sink in the west, and the jug of alcohol was empty. He did not begin the third kowtow. Instead, he turned and headed back toward Eastern Emergence County.

He knew that once he performed the third kowtow, he would leave this world of illusions. But he still had not found his answer. Therefore, he would not leave. He would stay.

From then on, a very old man took up residence in Eastern Emergence County.

Outside of the world of illusions, within the Violet Fate Celestial Land, atop Violet East Mountain, tears seeped out of Chu Yuyan’s eyes. She opened them, and they were filled with grief, as if being immersed in her world had caused her to forget about reality.

A long time passed, and then a tremor ran through her body. She blinked. Her eyes were filled with confusion at first, but they quickly grew clearer. Her expression was one of melancholy. Eventually, she looked up and saw that there were two others with her here high atop Violet East Mountain.

One was Fang Mu. The other was Ye Feimu. Both of them had their eyes closed. One had a face filled with thoughtfulness, the other, confusion. The former was Meng Hao, the latter was Ye Feimu.

As for her, she was still about ten paces from the very peak of the mountain. Further behind her were the other two nameless candidates in the trial by fire.

It was at this moment that Ye Feimu suddenly trembled and began to awaken.