

# The Heavens 31

## Chapter 31: Fight!

“Final match of the training,” said Grand Elder Ouyang, looking encouragingly at Meng Hao. “Meng Hao and Wang Tengfei. The victor shall be promoted to the Inner Sect.”

Everyone stared at Meng Hao as he leapt up onto the platform. Wang Tengfei opened his eyes and casually stepped up. Conversations erupted amongst the Outer Sect disciples.

“Meng Hao really dares to step onto the platform. His Cultivation base is pretty good, and he did kill Han Zong, but this is Elder Brother Wang he’s fighting. He really doesn’t know his own limitations.”

“There will always be stumbling blocks on the path to power. This is just a little pebble that Elder Brother Wang has to walk over on his rise to the top.”

“I remember when he snatched a magical item that Elder Brother Wang had given someone as a gift. When Elder Brother Wang took it back, he was like an ant in front of him.” Conversations filled the air, filled with ridicule. It wasn’t that everyone felt great enmity towards Meng Hao, but rather, in their hearts, Elder Brother Wang was someone you just didn’t mess with.

“If he dies under Wang Tengfei’s hand, it won’t be easy to get his bag of holding,” thought Shangguan Xiu, frowning. He looked at Meng Hao.

Even as everyone in the crowd sneered at Meng Hao, once again putting him at odds against the world, suddenly, a shrill, clear voice suddenly rang out.

“Go Meng Hao! You’re gonna win! The next Inner Sect disciple will definitely be Meng Hao!” It was Fatty, shouting out from down in the square in his cracking, teenage voice.

The jumble of voices reached Meng Hao, but they seemed very far away. He stood there calmly, staring coldly at Wang Tengfei. Meng Hao knew that from the moment he had entered the world of Cultivation until now, he had never faced a more powerful opponent. This would be his most difficult battle yet.

But he wouldn't shrink back. He would fight. He would attack. There are some things in life that a man must do, because of dignity.

The scene from that day continued to play out in his head, and he absentmindedly rubbed his bag of holding.

Inside were the ten blood-stained fingernails he'd plucked out of his palms.

Wang Tengfei stood there calmly, giving a cool look to Meng Hao. His eyes were placid, as if he were looking down at an insect. He looked just like he did that year.

He waved his right hand as if he were flicking away a bug, and in front of him a spinning whirlwind appeared, about as tall as a person. It whirled towards Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's eyes gleamed. He had nothing to say to Wang Tengfei. Everything he wanted to say could be said with swords, magic, and this most fierce battle in all his 18 years of life.

He stepped forward, lifting his right hand and sending a Wind Blade screaming toward the whirlwind. It radiated a savage wind as it flew forward.

Fight!

He slapped his bag of holding, and twenty flying swords flew out in a line. Some seemed to be bent, unable to fly straight, but their sword auras glittered blindingly. He lifted a finger on his right hand and pointed. The twenty flying swords became a rainbow as they shot with immense power directly toward Wang Tengfei.

Fight!

The dazzling sword auras were like rain, and as their combined power shot toward Wang Tengfei, the whirlwind slammed into them. An explosion reverberated through the air as the whirlwind was torn open. The flying swords, now directionless, were suddenly sucked up into the whirlwind. From a distance, it looked as if the whirlwind had transformed into a vortex of swords. But the whirlwind was growing weaker, and looked as if it would fall apart at any moment.

Wang Tengfei's expression didn't change in the least. He walked forward, and the power of his Cultivation base, at the peak of the sixth level of Qi Condensation, burst forth, forming into an unprecedented spiritual pressure. The fingers of his right hand moved in incantation patterns, and a thin, sparkling strand of water shot toward Meng Hao.

This was not a technique of the Reliance Sect, but rather Wang Tengfei's clan.

Seeing this, Meng Hao unhesitatingly popped a Demonic Core into his mouth. With his left hand, he called back the flying swords from within the vortex. They flew back to him unsteadily. With his right hand, he formed movements with his fingers to summon a Flame Python, a dozen or more meters long. It charged toward the Water Thread, roaring so loud that it seemed as if a tempest had struck.

"Water-Wind, slay!" said Wang Tengfei. Although he didn't look scornful, his calm expression was the same as it had been that day when he almost crippled Meng Hao's Cultivation base, confident and filled with disregard.

As soon as the words left his mouth, the glittered Water Thread melded with the whirlwind to form a massive, rapidly spinning column which then dropped down toward Meng Hao.

The twenty flying swords spun to block the descending column, and a boom rang out as the swords scattered. Some of them even broke to pieces. Meng Hao had already retreated to the edge of the platform. In front of him remained a large stain of water as wide as a hand and approximately nine meters long, frightening in appearance.

A line of blood appeared on Meng Hao's forehead. It slowly oozed down his nose, giving him an even more savage appearance.

Twenty flying swords had been able to shake Han Zong, but this was Wang Tengfei, and he hadn't even used any magical items yet, merely some techniques that Meng Hao had never seen before. Thankfully, Meng Hao had been able to evade death. Were his Cultivation base at the fifth level of Qi Condensation, he would not have been able to dodge.

"Wang Tengfei has powerful latent talent," thought Shangguan Xiu, "and has a lot of experience using the powers and abilities of Qi Condensation. Even someone of the seventh level would have a tough time with him. Meng Hao is definitely going to die." His frown deepened as he looked at Meng Hao, and his eyes shone with murder. However, he still didn't know how he would retrieve Meng Hao's bag of holding after he died.

Wang Tengfei seemed as calm as ever when Meng Hao evaded his attack. It was as his attack had been a mere afterthought. If an elephant wants to crush an ant, and its first step misses, the second will not. He gave a beautiful, indifferent smile then took another step forward, raising his right hand and waving a finger toward Meng Hao.

As soon as he waved his finger, Meng Hao heard a buzz from the surrounding audience. It reminded him of that day when he had stood against the world. Wang Tengfei had used one finger attack to bind him, one to destroy his jade pendant, one to take away the gourd bottle, and one to attempt to cripple his Cultivation base.

A powerful fighting spirit shone in Meng Hao's eyes. He had been humiliated by Wang Tengfei's finger attack, but he was a different person today. Even though he hadn't made up his mind to register for the Inner Sect training, but had rather been forced to sign up by circumstances, he had been prepared to do so for some time. In the past month, most of his time had been spent learning how to sacrifice a bit of dexterity to be able to control large amounts of flying swords.

As Wang Tengfei's finger descended, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding, consumed a Demonic Core, and then began moving his fingers in incantation patterns. Suddenly, the ten or so remaining flying swords began to tremble, then suddenly lifted off the ground and flew back toward him from all directions.

They rotated around his body, and he lowered his hands, then pointed toward Wang Tengfei. The flying swords shot out with shocking speed, screaming toward Wang Tengfei.

At the same time, more flying swords appeared from within his bag of holding, until his limit was reached. There seemed to be enough to break down a city wall. With frightening power, they filled the sky, flying toward Wang Tengfei's finger attack.

**BOOM!**

An explosion rattled the entire Outer Sect as twenty flying swords collided with the invisible power emanating from Wang Tengfei's index finger. Amidst the explosion, the twenty flying swords twisted about, some of them shattering into pieces. They had successfully blocked the finger attack.

Blood seeped out of Meng Hao's mouth and veins of blood filled his eyes. He consumed another Demonic Core. His killing intent flared, but he still hadn't spoken a single word. That was just his

personality; the more he wanted to kill someone, the more furious he became, the quieter he would be.

Wang Tengfei looked as placid as ever, as if he didn't give a care in the world that Meng Hao stood in front of him. Only he could be filled with such arrogance and disregard.

Taking another step forward, he made his second finger attack.

This was the attack that had shattered Meng Hao's jade pendant. Meng Hao didn't bother to spit the blood out of his mouth. He swallowed it. Fingers flickering with incantations, he sent the remaining scattered flying swords shooting toward Wang Tengfei in another attack. Then, surprisingly, he severed his control link to the swords, letting them fly forward with their own inertia.

He slapped his bag of holding, and suddenly more sword auras appeared, another twenty, forming a second wave that whistled forward. This was a sword rain that contained nearly forty flying swords in total!

Meng Hao knew that this tactic had its weaknesses. The flying swords wouldn't be dexterous, only fast and sharp. His opponent wouldn't find it difficult to avoid an attack. But Meng Hao was betting that considering his opponent's vast arrogance, he would most likely not try to dodge.

Even if he did try to dodge, Meng Hao would be ready. He had naturally considered this possibility, and was prepared for it.

The scene that was unfolding could only be described as an epic battle. For Cultivators practicing Qi Condensation, it was something seldom seen. In the entire State of Zhao in the past several hundred years, there had never been such a battle between two people of the sixth level of Qi Condensation!

Meng Hao had plenty of flying swords. After his experience on the black mountain, he had put a lot of thought into his use of battle magic. With the help of the Wind Blade, he could control large amounts of flying swords. However, it took a lot of spiritual power, and he could only summon twenty each time. Furthermore, his Cultivation base only permitted him to exercise basic control, enough to shoot them forward. He couldn't move them nimbly in the air, or cause them to change directions. He essentially sacrificed the dexterity of the flying sword and focused on its ability to fly.

As such, he could use even larger groups of them, the same way an ordinary person might just throw objects in succession. Except, he wasn't using his hands, he was using spiritual power to ensure their forward movement. As long as he had enough swords and his spiritual power didn't run out, he could pay the price.

Wang Tengfei didn't use Reliance Sect techniques, because he disdained the Reliance Sect and their techniques. He used techniques of his powerful Clan, enabling him to gain an edge on his peers.

Chapter 32: This Finger Brought me Humiliation, Today, I Cripple it!

Meng Hao's flying swords and Wang Tengfei's special magic techniques left the surrounding Cultivators awestruck. No longer did they look down on Meng Hao, but rather were stunned by his vast array of magical items.

It wasn't just them. Shangguan Xiu, Grand Elder Ouyang, and even Sect Leader He Luohua stared in amazement.

Wang Tengfei was strong, able to inspire fear into his Cultivator peers. Everyone knew this, so to see Meng Hao go toe to toe with Wang Tengfei caused everyone watching to feel shocked.

At the moment, forty flying swords descended upon him from multiple directions, a Sword Tempest that seemed as if it could rip apart any living thing that stood in its path. An ordinary Qi condensation sixth-level opponent would have difficulty standing up against it.

Meng Hao coughed up more blood. The only way to force himself to remain upright was to continuously consume Demonic Cores.

A booming sound erupted as Meng Hao's forty flying swords collided with the power of Wang Tengfei's second finger attack. More than half of them were destroyed, but the finger attack could do nothing to Meng Hao other than force him to cough up a bit of blood.

Anyone else would be cautious in their approach to dealing with Meng Hao, but Wang Tengfei was as dismissive as ever. He stepped forward and waved his finger a third time.

Meng Hao's spiritual energy was almost completely exhausted. But he had a lot of Demonic Cores available to replenish himself. During this entire time, he had managed to keep his spiritual energy at roughly an even level. As he watched Wang Tengfei make his third movement, he could not help but recall the same finger attack taking away the gourd bottle. The killing intent in his eyes grew

stronger. He didn't retreat, and in fact took a step forward, fingers flickering in incantation movements. Three or four of his bags of holding began to tremble, and then suddenly a succession of sword auras appeared, to the astonishment of all the onlookers.

Waving his sleeve, he sent forth one wave, two waves, three waves of flying swords. They transformed into a dazzling sword rain. One sword, ten, twenty, thirty swords... Seventy swords in four waves, an unbelievable sword aura. They shot toward Wang Tengfei.

Meng Hao constantly coughed up blood, then consumed medicinal pills. His eyes were completely bloodshot, but the killing intent in them was as strong as ever. Even if he ran out of spiritual power, he would spare nothing!

Wang Tengfei gave a cold harrumph. With so many people looking on, he didn't want to dodge the attack, but there were just too many flying swords. They appeared to be approaching in a direct line, and yet something about the attack looked off. He had a dark premonition that if he attempted to dodge the attack, he would still be walking into death.

For the first time, something flickered within Wang Tengfei's eyes. Lifting his finger, he immediately moved into the fourth finger attack. A ripple appeared in front of him, and even as it began to spread out, Meng Hao's fingers stopped moving and he clasped his palms together flat in front of him.

"Wind-construct Sword!" As soon as the words came out of Meng Hao's mouth, the seventy flying swords suddenly began to combine together.

The onlookers gaped in shock as the fourth wave of swords picked up speed, slamming into the third wave, which then swept into the sword rain of the second wave, and then finally smacked into the back of the first wave. Then a sweeping wind pressed in from multiple directions to form them into the solid shape! From a distance, it appeared as if they had formed a gigantic flying sword.

This was Meng Hao's Flying Sword Matrix, created along with the issuance of his Wind Blade. It was a sword technique he had developed after his time on the black mountain. It shot toward Wang Tengfei with irresistible force. Popping sounds filled the air as the ripple in front of Wang Tengfei began to warp as if it were being pushed against by a massive force. This in turn caused Wang Tengfei, for the first time ever, to take a step backward.

"How arrogant of you to force me to take a step back." This was the first time he had spoken to Meng Hao during the entire battle. His left hand slapped his bag of holding and a glittering, crystal statue appeared. It was a statue of a horse, vivid and lifelike, seemingly full of energy and spirit.

A neighing sound filled the air, and the crystal statue seemed to come to life, leaping out of Wang Tengfei's palm and flying straight toward Meng Hao's giant sword. As soon as they collided, the giant sword began to collapse, starting from its tip. Layer after layer of swords peeled away, torn apart by the crystal horse. Within an instant, a huge portion of the giant sword had been destroyed, and the only thing left was the hilt. Flying swords scattered about in all directions.

Seeing this, the onlookers' hearts raced, and they had little time to even process in their minds what was happening. They appeared shocked beyond belief.

And then, just as the giant sword was broken down into a mere hilt, a new sword flew out from the midst of the other swords. A sword made of wood. It shot toward the crystal horse, and when the two hit each other, a sound boomed out louder than any sound which had been heard so far during the battle. It echoed out multiple times.

As of now, the wooden sword was the only sword under Meng Hao's control. Everything up to this point had been a ruse to keep it concealed, then use it in a surprise move.

The sword, once meant for Wang Tengfei, was now in Meng Hao's hands. To Wang Tengfei, it was a treasure, but to Meng Hao, it was worth two thousand Spirit Stones. Regardless of how powerful it was, it was the most powerful weapon he had, so of course he would use it.

Amidst the deafening boom, the crystal horse began to shake, and a multitude of cracks appeared on its surface. Then, it simply collapsed into pieces.

Wang Tengfei's expression changed instantly. Carrying with it the remaining flying swords, the wooden sword shot toward him. As it neared, he reflexively lifted his arm, focused his Cultivation base on his finger and shot out an explosive force. The force sent all the flying swords spinning, but not the wooden sword. It continued on, stabbing into his finger and shredding it to bloody pieces. Then it spun back to hover next to Meng Hao.

"That finger brought me humiliation," Meng Hao said slowly. "Today, I cripple it!" He spat out a mass of blood, staggering back several paces. Blood dripped from the corners of his mouth.

Wang Tengfei took several heavy steps back, ignoring the pain of his finger, eyes filled with disbelief. He stared at the wooden sword floating next to Meng Hao. The words Meng Hao had just uttered rang in his ears. And then, an unspeakable rage welled up within him.



He recognized this sword!

The moment Wang Tengfei's finger was shredded to pieces, all the Cultivators in the square were shocked. The buzz of conversation again arose.

"Meng Hao destroyed Elder Brother Wang's finger. This... this can't be!"

"Elder Brother Wang is injured. He's a Chosen, but Meng Hao decimated his finger... Meng Hao..."

"It's scary that he has so many flying swords. And he used seventy of them to make a giant sword. How astonishing!"

Shangguan Xiu sucked in a deep breath. Everything that was happening seemed unimaginable. He wasn't the only one surprised. Grand Elder Ouyang had stood up and was looking at Meng Hao, his eyes filled with deep admiration and intense anticipation.

Even He Luohua, standing atop the East Mountain, stared down at Meng Hao, his eyes glittering.

The buzz of conversation reached Wang Tengfei's ears, but he paid it no heed, as if he hadn't heard it at all. Fury burned in his eyes, and he stared murderously at the wooden sword circling Meng Hao.

"So it was you!" Wang Tengfei didn't even bother to stop the blood from gushing out of where finger had once been. He had only been furious once before in his life, and that was the day in the cave when he realized the treasure he had hunted for years had been snatched away. His inner humiliation and madness, and his hatred toward that unknown person, had seeped into his very bones.

This matter was his biggest regret. His shrill screams that day still seemed to echo in his ears. Often, he was shaken from meditation deep in the quiet of night, his heart dripping with blood, feeling like a fool. Every time he thought about it, he fought the urge to go crazy.

Today was the second time in his life that he was furious. He recognised the sword. In his eyes, it belonged to him, his own treasure with which control heaven and earth. And today... here it was in Meng Hao's hands.

“So it was you!” Wang Tengfei’s eyes overflowed with murder. His desire to kill Meng Hao could not be any stronger. This look was so different from his usual calm visage that the surrounding Cultivators could not help but murmur to each other about it.

“It was you who stole away my treasure!” Wang Tengfei stared at the wooden sword, murder roiling in his eyes. He felt an impulsive desire to rip Meng Hao to pieces. He suddenly laughed, and as the laughter rolled out across the square, he seemed to grow even more awe-inspiring.

“I have no idea what Elder Brother Wang is talking about,” said Meng Hao coldly, wiping the blood off of his mouth. “This sword is yours? Are you sure you haven’t made a mistake?” He consumed several Demonic Cores.

“I planned for years to get that sword. It is one-of-a-kind, the only like it in the world. The gold lines on its surface were etched by Heaven itself. Of course I haven’t made a mistake.” Wang Tengfei looked up to the skies and laughed. It was a grim laugh, a laugh that seemed to make everything around it grow cold.

### Chapter 33: Is This Sword Yours Too?

Wang Tengfei glared at Meng Hao with cold eyes, then took a step forward. He slapped his bag of holding, and two glittering beams of light shot out. Two magical treasures appeared, one a stone tiger, the other a stone aquatic dragon.

They were accompanied by two sounds which reverberated across the square, one, the roaring of a tiger, the other, the howl of a aquatic dragon. The treasures immediately transformed. The first became a white tiger, a few dozen meters in length, the other, a magnificent aquatic dragon. They circled around Wang Tengfei, making him look even more imposing.

“You can refuse to admit it, but that sword is mine,” said Wang Tengfei, his voice ghastly. “I never agreed to let you have it and you are not permitted to leave with it.” His fingers moved in an incantation pattern, and the white tiger roared and leaped toward Meng Hao. The aquatic dragon howled as it followed, its body becoming a streaking rainbow.

Meng Hao moved backwards, waving his right hand. The wooden sword flashed forward, followed by a Wind Blade and a Flame Python.

A boom reverberated out and Meng Hao coughed up a mouthful of blood. As he flew back, he saw Wang Tengfei walking out from the explosion, his snow-white robes and long hair floating in the wind, a look of murder on his beautiful features. His eyes shone forth with ridicule.

“Absurd!” said Meng Hao. “You clearly see that the sword is extraordinary, so you want to use the Inner Sect training as an opportunity to rob it from me!”

“It’s useless to keep talking. I will kill you today, and then you will know that you aren’t qualified to take things which belong to Wang Tengfei.” His eyes cold, he waved his hand again; roaring and howling, the white tiger and the aquatic dragon once again charged Meng Hao.

“One-of-a-kind? The only one like it in the world?” Meng Hao laughed, his eyes sneering. He made no attempt to hide the cold ridicule. “Why don’t you take a look and see if the sword really is one of a kind like you say?” His left hand slapped his bag of holding, and a black beam shot out to circle around Meng Hao. A loud humming sound rang out, like that of a sword. It was his duplicate copy of the wooden sword!

Now that it had appeared, two wooden swords swirled around him. They looked exactly the same in every aspect, their sword auras shining brightly and with immense power.

When he laid eyes on the second wooden sword, Wang Tengfei’s body shook and his eyes went wide, filled with disbelief. His mind dissolved into chaos, and he felt as if he had just been crushed by an entire mountain. He immediately lost control of the white tiger and the aquatic dragon.

“This... this...” His head spun. This unexpected turn of events had caught him completely off guard. He didn’t know what to think, and couldn’t even control his mind.

“Is this sword yours too?” Meng Hao’s eyes flashed, and he stepped forward, suddenly radiating the power of his Cultivation base. “Is this your one-of-a-kind sword?” He took another step forward.

Wang Tengfei couldn’t answer. Feeling the pressure of Meng Hao’s spirit, he involuntarily took two steps backwards.

“Is this the only sword like it in the whole world?” Meng Hao’s eyes flickered as if with lightning. He continued moving forward, as if all the power he possessed were supporting him.

Wang Tengfei’s face grew pale, and he continued to retreat.

“Wang Tengfei, these two swords are Meng Hao’s! My swords of heaven and earth!” Eyes burning, Meng Hao leaped into the air, incantation patterns flashing in his hands. The two wooden swords glowed brightly, shooting toward the white tiger and the aquatic dragon.

A boom rang out as the white tiger was broken to pieces and the aquatic dragon shattered. Filled with power that seemed capable of destroying anything in the world, the two wooden swords shot toward Wang Tengfei.

Seeing them approach, Wang Tengfei suddenly lifted his head. He slammed his right hand down onto the ground, and a massive incense stick appeared. As it burned, tendrils of smoke curled up and then shot in Meng Hao’s direction. As they moved, they transformed into two figures which slammed into the two wooden swords. A thunderous boom sounded out.

The incense stick was smashed, and the wooden swords retreated back to Meng Hao, who spat out a mouthful of blood. He watched as Wang Tengfei moved forward through the smoke. He didn’t walk on the platform, but rather flew through the air, carried forward by tendrils of smoke. He looked at Meng Hao with a strange expression, then eyed the two wooden swords. At the moment, he was still completely at a loss about them, and had begun to doubt himself.

According to his research in the ancient records, the wooden sword really was unique in heaven and earth. There could not be a second one. Regardless of that, the sword was exactly the same one he had seen before, except now there were two...

Meng Hao looked at Wang Tengfei soaring through the air and let out a cold snort. He slapped his bag of holding and two ordinary flying swords appeared. He stepped forward onto them, and they carried him flying into the air. This caused quite a stir amongst the observing Cultivators.

“Only Cultivators who have reached Foundation Establishment can fly. But look, he’s flying...”

“Brother Wang has some magical item that lets him fly temporarily, but Meng Hao... he’s not sparing any spiritual energy at all. He’s using the flying swords to fly.”

Killing intent flickered in Wang Tengfei’s eyes as he stared at Meng Hao. He put the matter of the wooden swords out of mind. Regardless of whether or not these were the treasures he had sought, he would take them away.

As the killing intent filled the air, Wang Tengfei slapped his bag of holding, and a strip of yellow paper appeared in front of him, a talisman. Its surface was inscribed with various mystical patterns,

and it emitted a strong spiritual pressure. It shined with a golden light. This talisman appeared to be quite different than the one Han Zong had used.

“If you allow me to take the treasure, you can feel some pride when you reach the yellow springs of the underworld,” said Wang Tengfei, glaring at Meng Hao. He felt somewhat distressed. This talisman was the last magical item in his bag of holding. He had spent everything else he possessed in his search for the wooden sword.

He would not have used the talisman were it not necessary. Normally, it could be used three times. But with the level of his Cultivation base, he could only use it once. Even still, it was powerful, enough to slay a Cultivator of the eighth level of Qi condensation.

Glaring coldly at Meng Hao, Wang Tengfei suddenly lifted his right hand and waved it in front of him. At the same time, he spat out some of his spiritual energy, transferring it to the talisman.

The talisman glowed with immeasurable brightness; as Meng Hao flew through the air, he looked down at it, and suddenly felt a stabbing pain inside him.

It was at this moment that Wang Tengfei’s face changed. He suddenly realized that he didn’t have enough spiritual energy... In fact, he now noticed that the spiritual energy in his body was continuously draining out through his wounded finger.

Because he had been enraged upon seeing the first wooden sword, then shocked and confused by the second, he hadn’t sensed it until now. As of now, there was not enough spirit energy to fully activate the talisman, and not enough time to consume medicinal pills to replenish himself.

“Even though the talisman can’t be fully utilized, it’s still strong enough to kill someone of the sixth level of Qi condensation. Killing you will be as easy as falling off a log!” With no hesitation, he flung the talisman out. It suddenly appeared to be a golden sun which shot toward Meng Hao.

At this life-and-death juncture, a strange light appeared in Meng Hao’s eyes. Even as he flew through mid-air, he suddenly caught a glimpse of the dream he had experienced the day he consumed the Flying Rain-Dragon’s Demonic Core. In the dream, he had looked down into a lake and seen the reflection of the ancient Flying Rain-Dragon. Now, he could see the same thing again.

“A sovereign of the sky...” Meng Hao felt as if he were filled with good fortune. He closed his eyes, and as the golden sun summoned by the talisman approached, the Demonic Core which rested in his

Core lake began to shudder. Then, a massive force of spiritual power burst out, filling Meng Hao's body and causing him to snap his hands out in front of him.

All of the various swords laying around, which he had previously lost control off, suddenly began to shake, then lifted into the air and sped toward Meng Hao. At the same time, the rest of the flying swords in his bag of holding flew out, along with the rest of the various magical items he possessed. They began to merge together, glowing with an intense brightness. All of this was happening, not because of Meng Hao's spiritual energy, but because of the Demonic Core's!

For some reason, the Demonic Core had suddenly been stirred into action, and its eruption had utilized some sort of underworldly power to control the nearly one hundred flying swords and magical items. In the blink of an eye, they had merged together to form... an ancient Flying Rain-  
Dragon!

Its form was somewhat indistinct, perhaps indistinguishable to the onlookers. Even Wang Tengfei wasn't aware of it, now that he had lost his Blood connection to the Legacy. Only Meng Hao could sense it.

The two wooden swords were the Flying Rain-Dragon's fangs. It let out a roar filled with the power of heaven and earth then charged toward the talisman. As soon as they met, a thunderous explosion rang out which shook the entirety of the Reliance Sect. The surrounding Outer Sect disciples retreated backward, nearly deafened. Some of the disciples with low-level Cultivation bases were nearly knocked senseless.

Both the talisman and the Flying Rain-Dragon contained power far beyond the sixth level of Qi condensation. When they smashed into each other, even someone of the seventh level would be shaken. Only someone of the eighth level might possibly be able to withstand the power.

As the reverberations from the explosion rang out, the golden sun faded rapidly, and the Flying Rain-Dragon began to fall apart. Layer by layer, one sword, ten swords, one hundred swords... they slowly fell, along with the other magical items which had merged together to form the dragon. They fell and transformed to ash, which drifted away in the wind.

The talisman slowly faded away, and the magical items forming the Flying Rain-Dragon disappeared... but not the two wooden swords. Instead, they shot forward toward pale-faced Wang Tengfei.

Wang Tengfei watched as the swords approached, stabbing toward his chest. Just as they were about to plunge into his heart, a light, sighing voice could be heard descending from the East Mountain.

“Very well, there’s nothing left to do.” Along with the sigh came a gentle force which appeared next to Wang Tengfei, blocking the wooden swords. Wang Tengfei was lifted up and pulled back, off of the platform and down onto the square. He coughed up blood, his eyes blank and confused. He couldn’t believe it... he had lost.

He Luohua had appeared on the platform. Grand Elder Ouyang immediately saluted him with clasped fists. “Greetings, Sect Leader.”

A buzz arose among the surrounding Outer Sect disciples. Each and every one greeted the Sect Leader and saluted respectfully.

Meng Hao looked pale. His spiritual energy was completely dried up. If the Flying Rain-Dragon’s Demonic Core had not exercised its power, he would not have been able to continue. His bags of holding were now completely empty of any magical items. As far as he was concerned, this battle had been a bitter one indeed.

Although he wasn’t quite willing to let Wang Tengfei continue to live, with the Sect Leader here, he had no choice. He would not be able to kill Wang Tengfei this day.

Without a word, he descended onto the platform, his stubborn personality forcing his body to remain upright. He took a few steps forward, then reached down to pick up the Wang Tengfei’s talisman, which had drifted to the ground, and placed it into his robe. Then he lifted his head and looked at He Luohua.

“In this match, Meng Hao is the winner,” said He Luohua, looking at Meng Hao with a slight smile. “From this day forth, he is the third member of the Reliance Inner Sect.” His words rang out over the silent square. The minds of the onlookers were still reeling, the details of the battle replaying in their heads.

Wang Tengfei looked confused, and when he heard He Luohua’s words, he let out a bitter laugh. He looked around at the crowd, who already seemed to have forgotten him, and his heart filled with regret. He laughed again, then coughed up some blood, and collapsed into unconsciousness.

As he collapsed, Meng Hao bit down hard on his own tongue. He saluted He Luohua, then sat down cross-legged and began to meditate.

Grand Elder Ouyang looked at him, his eyes filled with admiration. He slapped his own bag of holding and produced a medicinal pill, which flew forward toward Meng Hao. Meng Hao grabbed it and popped it into his mouth.

He was exhausted to the extreme. Despite his eyes growing dim, he continued on with his breathing exercises, slowly attempting to recover.

Chapter 34: Fame from 1,000 Years Ago!

Fatty beamed with joy, happy beyond belief, heart pounding. For Meng Hao to become an Inner Sect disciple was almost like he himself had.

Shangguan Xiu stood in the crowd, face grim. After a bit of time passed, he lowered his head, turned, and left. As he left, his face grew darker, but there was really nothing he could do. Now that Meng Hao was a member of the Inner Sect, even his status as an Elder didn't give him the right to interrogate him. Now, Meng Hao was a true member of the Reliance Sect.

"I reached the seventh level of Qi condensation before I was thirty. I was the number one disciple in the Inner Sect. But now..." Shangguan Xiu sighed. He was loath to give up, but had no choice.

Just then, something happened that no one noticed, neither Shangguan Xiu nor Grand Elder Ouyang. Not even Sect Leader He Luohua. Far away from the Reliance Sect, on the peak of the tree-covered black mountain, standing outside of the empty cave, was a mysterious, powerful figure.

The figure was indistinct, its face unclear. But its body was wreathed in an aura vastly different from the spiritual power of heaven and earth, an aura that actually seemed to have been rejected by the Heavens. The wind around the figure changed, filling with indistinct cracks that circled around him... and yet an onlooker would not be able to see any of this.

"Reliance Sect... what a vulgar name," the blood-red figure's voice was hoarse as it spoke, filled with a Demonic air. "The name was intentionally changed one thousand years ago to prevent the Heavens from carrying out the punishment of withholding reincarnation. But it is still... The Demon Sealing Sect! And a disciple of the Demon Sealing sect actually dared to consume the Core of the Flying Rain-Dragon, and accept its Legacy... interesting. It seems it was not in vain that I helped you those two times." Even as its voice continued to echo out, bolts of red lightning began to fall. The destructive lightning fell over and over again, but it was over three thousand meters away, as if the Heavens had no power to touch the figure.



The red figure seemed to frown, then looked up coldly into the sky. "Sooner or later, you shall be defied, Heavens!" Then it turned toward the Southern Domain and took a step forward.

"My true self has been slumbering, and in my boredom, my divine clone has swept throughout heaven and earth. What I've just seen is interesting. Very interesting." Laughter rang out, and the figure disappeared, gone in the blink of an eye.

The figure's arrival and departure, the roiling heavens, the approach of the lightning, onlookers could not see any of it!

Time raced by, and soon seven days had passed.

During the seven days, everyone in the Outer Sect was talking about Meng Hao's ascension to become an Inner Sect disciple.

Even though everyone had seen the event with their own eyes, it had left them shocked to the core. Despite seven days having passed, they would often lift their heads to gaze at the East Mountain, eyes filled with envy.

There were some people who felt sorry for Wang Tengfei, but they didn't say anything. It was as if after the battle, Wang Tengfei's name had become a thing of the past.

Disciples who had been Meng Hao's enemies were even more disturbed than before, filled with dread. But Meng Hao was no longer present in the Outer Sect, so all they could do was find Fatty to fawn over.

Fatty's prestige exploded in just a few days. He was the new shop owner at the Low-Level Public Zone, having taken over for Meng Hao. He revelled in the attention of his fellow disciples, filing away at his teeth triumphantly. He was even able to move into one of the nicer residences in the Outer Sect.

Meng Hao was quite busy during the seven days. The Reliance Sect might have been in decline, but there were still rules to follow. Meng Hao bathed and donned new clothes. He kowtowed to the image of Patriarch Reliance and the other Patriarchs of the Sect. Of course, there were many complicated procedures and details involved in all of this.

During this time, he didn't see Elder Sister Xu at all, as she had secluded herself in meditation. However, he did see Elder Brother Chen Fan [1. Chen Fan's name in Chinese is 陈凡 (chén fán) – Chen is a common family name. Fan means “mortal” or “ordinary”], dressed in his silver robe. From his time in the Outer Sect, Meng Hao's impression of him was that he rarely smiled and was rather old-fashioned. But after getting to know him he found that no matter what question he had, Elder Brother Chen would patiently give a detailed explanation. Meng Hao actually liked him. He thought back to the rumors he'd heard, that Elder Brother Chen Fan cared only about righteousness and the Dao, ignoring matters of the mortal world.

After the seven days had passed, Meng Hao was granted an Inner Sect Immortal's Cave on the East Mountain. Its Spirit Spring bubbled with thick Spiritual Energy, much more so than his previous Immortal's Cave.

Unfortunately, his good mood changed a bit the first time he laid hands on the Spirit Stones and medicinal pills available for Inner Sect disciples. He stood there, staring down at them stupidly.

These Spirit Stones were clearly better than the ones available in the Outer Sect. They were larger, and were not completely transparent, but rather filled with an indistinct, mist-like substance. Meng Hao's face grew pale.

“These are mid-grade Spirit Stones?” murmured Meng Hao. “And Inner Sect disciples get one per year... It's worth one hundred low-grade Spirit Stones from the Outer Sect...” His head spun as he absorbed the information from the ancient piece of jade in front of him, which described the identification methods and differences between the different types of Spirit Stones available to Cultivators engaged in Qi condensation.

“Above mid-grade Spirit Stones are high-grade Spirit Stones.... which don't even exist in the State of Zhao. One of those is worth at least ten-thousand low-grade Spirit Stones... they're basically priceless.” Meng Hao's insides twisted, and he took out the few large Spirit Stones he had left in his bag of holding. His face looked more and more unsightly.

“You can tell the value of a Spirit Stone by looking at its size and its internal composition. High-grade Spirit Stones are the largest, and are at least half-covered inside with thick mist formations... The Spiritual Energy inside won't leak out, and can only be used by a Cultivator who has reached Foundation Establishment.” Meng Hao looked mutely at the Spirit Stone he held in his hand. It was larger than a mid-grade Spirit Stone by at least three times, and was almost completely filled with mist formations. It was dazzling, and not a drop of Spiritual Energy emerged from it.

“This... this can’t be a high-grade Spirit Stone! I... I squandered two thousand high-grade Spirit Stones!” Meng Hao’s heart dropped, and he tried to comfort himself. He thought about the extraordinary wooden sword and how much Wang Tengfei cared about it. And then he thought about the price he had paid the copper mirror to duplicate it. He simply couldn’t comprehend the price he had paid in Spirit Stones...

“But how come it seems like this Spirit Stone is even bigger than the descriptions of high-grade Spirit Stones, and has even more mist formations inside?” His heart quavered, and he didn’t dare to think about it anymore. His face was pale, and he felt pained to the core.

It took him a while to get control of himself, whereupon he put away the Spirit Stones.

“An insignificant two thousand high-grade Spirit Stones,” muttered Meng Hao. “It was nothing, nothing at all.” But when he said the word ‘insignificant,’ it sounded a bit forced.

More days flew by.

“Junior Brother, I watched your battle. You used a lot of magical items. If you had run out, you would have been in a difficult situation. You should go to the Magic Pavilion more often. There are a thousand years of ancient Reliance Sect records there that you could study from.”

“Junior Brother, I noticed that you’re always hunting small creatures and cooking them for food. That’s not correct. Us Cultivators should breathe in the spiritual energy of heaven and earth and cast off our mortal bodies. If you’re always eating animals, aren’t you wasting your spiritual energy?”

“Junior Brother, you have too many bags of holding on your person. You shouldn’t do it that way. You should have all your items in one bag, that way they are easier to take out.”

As the days passed, Meng Hao forced himself not to think about Spirit Stones. It didn’t take long before he understood Elder Brother Chen Fan a lot better, and soon he spent most of his time with him, being instructed. He soon realized that this Elder Brother was nothing at all like the rumors in the Outer Sect held him out to be. Although he was very focused on the Dao, he wasn’t taciturn at all. In fact, when he started talking, he would keep going for hours and hours, sometimes even an entire day.

Soon it came to the point that if he didn’t go looking for Chen Fan, then Chen Fan would come looking for him in his Immortal’s Cave, and the discussions would begin.

Meng Hao couldn't refuse. He could only force a smile and listen. Sometimes he would fall asleep in the middle of it, only to wake up to find Brother Chen Fan still talking. He couldn't help but feel sorry for him.

"There aren't enough disciples in the Inner Sect, so Elder Brother Chen doesn't have anyone to talk to. Therefore, he's developed this strange tendency..." Meng Hao now understood why Elder Sister Xu went into secluded meditation so often. Even he himself had thought of going into meditation to get a break from Elder Brother Chen.

Whenever he left his Immortal's Cave, Elder Brother Chen would be there to accompany him.

"I wonder when Elder Sister Xu is going to come out of meditation," thought Meng Hao with a smile. "I can't wait to see the look on her face when she sees me." He now wore a silver robe, and his long hair fluttered behind him as he sat on a mountain crag. He stared at the setting sun, ignoring Elder Brother Chen's constant yammering.

"Junior Brother must be wondering when Junior Sister Xu will be coming out of meditation," said Elder Brother Chen with a smile, looking at Meng Hao.

"Yeah... Uh, what?"

Elder Brother Chen's sudden change of topic left Meng Hao speechless.

"No need to be shy, Junior Brother," bantered Elder Brother Chen with a smile. "Junior Sister Xu Qing [2. Xu Qing's name in Chinese is 许清 (xǔ qīng) – Xu is a family name. However, it has a variety of other meanings as a character including "to praise" and "to allow." Qing means "pure" or "clear"] is a natural beauty, it's perfectly normal for you to have a crush on her." He had a uncomplicated disposition, and was easy to get along with. Meng Hao liked him. As soon as they had met, he had been willing to take Meng Hao on as a Junior Brother.

"Xu Qing?" Meng Hao coughed. He decided to change the topic. "No, no, I never... oh, right. Elder Brother Chen, a while back you were saying something about what happens after a Cultivator completes his Qi Condensation?"

“After Qi Condensation comes Foundation Establishment, the shedding of the mortal body. This is true spiritual cultivation, and truly being a Cultivator.” Elder Brother Chen smiled at Meng Hao, shaking his head. He was no longer bantering, but speaking warmly.

“During the process of establishing the Spiritual Foundation, nine Dao pillars will arise within your Core Lake, deep and bottomless. They will grow within your body, and this is Foundation Establishment. Of course, there are different types of Foundations, based on the various magical methods used to congeal the Dao pillars. If nine cracks appear, it is a Flawless Foundation. If eighteen cracks appear, it is a Cracked Foundation. More than eighteen cracks means it is a Fractured Foundation. Of these, Flawless is the best, Cracked is good. Fractured is the most common.

“The Reliance Sect used to have a manual describing a method to Establishing a Flawless Foundation, acquired by Patriarch Reliance. Because of this, he was famous in all of the State of Zhao. His name was even known in the Southern Domain. Sadly... when the Patriarch went missing, the technique was not handed down.” Chen Fan explained everything slowly and in great detail. This was just his personality, and Meng Hao had gotten used to it over the days.

“After Foundation Establishment is the great path to Core Formation. The Sect Leader is in this stage. After that, when you develop a Nascent Soul, then you can live forever, and be a true Immortal of this land.”

“What about after the Nascent Soul stage?” asked Meng Hao, listening intently and feeling longing in his heart.

“After the Nascent Soul stage is Spirit Severing. That was the stage the Patriarch was at. It is the most difficult stage, where life hangs on a thread. Spirit Severing involves several Severings before complete success. That year, Patriarch Reliance left the Sect to meditate in seclusion, and still hasn’t returned.” Chen Fan spoke calmly throughout his explanation, but his attachment to cultivate was clear from his expression.

“Perhaps one day I, Meng Hao, will have a chance to enter the Spirit Severing stage,” he murmured. “What is after that?”

“The stages after Spirit Severing are too high,” said Chen Fan lightly. “I don’t know the details. You have to go to the Southern Domain to learn about those things. In any case, the whole point is Immortal Ascension.”

“Immortal Ascension?”

“Immortal Ascension.”

The mountain breeze gently lifted the hair of the two disciples, carrying their voices off into the distance.

“Junior Brother, if one day you go out into the world to continue your training, you cannot limit yourself to the State of Zhao.” Elder Brother Chen looked at Meng Hao kindly. “Don’t forget, the State of Zhao is a remote state in the Southern Domain of the lands of South Heaven. The Spiritual Energy here is not abundant, and there are few Cultivators.

“The Southern Domain is the true world of Cultivation. Even though the law of the jungle is brutal and ruthless there, it truly represents the peak of the southern regions of the lands of South Heaven. Heroes abound, as do Chosen. Compared to there, the State of Zhao is quite calm and peaceful. Cultivators of my generation must climb mountains and tread upon piles of bones to succeed.” A strange light filled his eyes, as if he weren’t speaking to Meng Hao, but rather to himself.

Meng Hao felt quite moved by Elder Brother Chen’s words. Before, he had been somewhat ignorant, but having things so clearly explained left his head buzzing, as if a giant map had suddenly been rolled out in front of him. On the map was the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands, and the heroes of the Southern Domain.

“To follow the path of spirituality, one must abandon the mortal world. You are no longer a mortal. You are a Cultivator, destined to defy the Heavens. If you are not strong, then you are not qualified to exist. If you are not strong, you are not qualified to practice Cultivation. If you are not strong, then you are not qualified to stay alive, but only to be trampled over. Are you willing to live this kind of life?” Brother Chen gazed at Meng Hao. As his words entered Meng Hao’s ears and sank into his heart, his eyes began to glitter, and he began to think.

“I am a scholar from Yunjie County. My parents went missing when I was just a child, and my dream was always to be become rich and never again live in poverty, then eventually go see the the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands.” The chill night wind blew at his hair as he lost himself in contemplation, the same way he had that year on the top of Mount Daqing.

Chapter 35: I’m Not Willing!

Time slipped by, and at some point, Elder Brother Chen left. Even though Meng Hao had just entered the Inner Sect, he was still a junior Brother, and it was Chen Fan’s responsibility to explain matters to him, to help him understand what Cultivation truly is. To help him to know what it means

to move forward lest one fall behind, and to comprehend the life-and-death path that was the Cultivation world.

Entering the Inner Sect was his first true step across the threshold into that world. The next step was Foundation Establishment.

Meng Hao sat alone on the boulder, staring into the sky at the moon and the vast multitude of stars. He was silent, his mind filled with countless thoughts. He felt somewhat confused.

Time continued to pass, and soon it was the middle of the night. Wang Tengfei sat in his Immortal's Cave, looking down at his right hand with its missing index finger. He looked confused. In front of him was a jade slip, broken in half. When he had regained consciousness, that was the first thing he had done.

He hadn't managed to enter the Inner Sect, and thus had not accomplished his second goal. He was on the verge of despair. As soon as he had regained consciousness, he had snapped the jade slip in two with a bitter smile.

He had been defeated, thoroughly defeated, and by none other than an insect. He had been defeated by Meng Hao's sword and weak Cultivation base. Had He Luohua not intervened, he would be dead.

This defeat ended his path here at the Reliance Sect. He had not emerged from his Immortal's Cave after awakening. He had simply sat there in a daze.

He was a Chosen. His Clan's reputation in the Southern Domain was indomitable. He had been insufferably proud since childhood, as if the world lay at his feet. That was why he had refused to stay in his Clan, but rather came here to the State of Zhao and the Reliance Sect, to search for the Legacy and treasure. He had even postponed Foundation Establishment in order to pursue his two goals. As of now, though, everything had blown away like ash in the wind.

Wang Tengfei's bitter laughter echoed throughout the Immortal's Cave. He laughed and laughed, clenching his fists tightly. Although, his nails were not very sharp, so he couldn't experience the pain Meng Hao had that day.

He just could not accept it. If he had been defeated at the hands of a Chosen, then he could bear the loss. But the person who had robbed his place in the Inner Sect, who had trampled him underfoot,

was someone he didn't even deign to look at, an insect whose name he hadn't even been able to recall. He just couldn't accept it.

At this moment, the main door of Wang Tengfei's Immortal's Cave suddenly disintegrated noiselessly. The entire door turned into ash, which floated down to the ground of the Immortal's Cave.

A middle-aged man stood in the doorway, wearing a black robe, hands clasped behind his back. He seemed somewhat emaciated, but carried a haughty air. The moonlight fell onto him, and seemed to quiver and turn into ripples. It was as this man's mere existence could cause the surrounding mountain chains to tremble.

Next to the middle-aged man was a young woman, perhaps eighteen or nineteen years of age. She was incredibly beautiful, tall and slender. She wore no makeup, and yet her face glowed like the dawn. Her hair was pinned up in the shape of a swallow's tail, and her body seemed as if it were carved from jade. She wore a thin, light green garment. Standing there in the moonlight, she emanated a magical aura, cool and composed, refined and free from worldly vulgarity. She looked just like a female celestial, descended from heaven.

"The Wang Clan is one of the three great Cultivation Clans in the Southern Domain," said the middle-aged man coolly. His voice contained an awe-inspiring coldness difficult to describe. "It has outmatched many Sects, and has existed for ten thousand years in the Southern Domain.

"You are a Chosen of the Wang Clan. From birth, you have been destined to do extraordinary things, to rise higher than the highest heavens. You were foreordained to engage in struggles with other Immortals."

As Wang Tengfei listened to the middle-aged man's words, he slowly lifted his head, ignoring his severed finger.

"What do some minor setbacks count for? This paltry State of Zhao wouldn't count for anything in the Southern Domain. It's filled with ants. If I sent a single Nascent Soul stage Clan member here, he could wipe this place clean." The middle-aged man spoke with complete certainty, leaving no room for argument. Wang Tengfei clenched his fists, and fire appeared in his eyes.

"Your true enemies are the other Chosen members in the Clan, the successors of the two major Clans in the Southern Domain, and the disciples of the rest of the five Clans. Only they are worthy to be your enemy. If they saw your sorry state now, how could you dare to claim the name Wang?!"



“Tell me, what is your family name?” said the middle-aged man with a flick of his sleeve.

“My name is Wang!” Wang Tengfei stood, his eyes gleaming.

The middle-aged man looked at Wang Tengfei for a long moment, then his eyes grew soft.

“You are a Roc of the Wang Clan. In a few years, you will reach Foundation Establishment. In the future, on the great path to Core Formation, you will have the assistance of the Violet Qi from the East technique of your fiancée’s Sect. You will successfully achieve Core Formation soon. After that, you will have your Nascent Soul. When that happens, you will find that the pitiable person who defeated you here in the State of Zhao, is still practicing Qi Condensation.

“Then you can truly look down on him like the insect he is.” He gave Wang Tengfei a meaningful look, then turned away.

“Tengfei,” said the beautiful girl. Her light voice was pleasant, and combined with her beauty, made her incredibly enticing. She was perfect, in the same way Wang Tengfei was perfect. Were they to be together, they would truly be a match made in heaven, the envy of anyone traversing the path of Immortality.

Wang Tengfei looked at the girl silently. This was his fiancée, Chu Yuyan [1. Chu Yuyan’s name in Chinese is 楚玉嫣 (chǔ yù yān) Chu is a family name. Yu means “jade” or “beauty,” and Yan means “captivating”], daughter of the Sect Leader of the Violet Fate Sect. She was a Chosen of her Sect, and one of four most famous women in the Southern Domain.

“Let’s go back,” she said softly, gazing at Wang Tengfei tenderly.

Wang Tengfei nodded. He followed the girl out of the Immortal’s Cave. Along with the middle-aged man, they walked forward, and suddenly a rumbling sound shook the night sky. A massive lightning bolt shot down from the sky, transforming into a flying battleship, nearly three hundred meters long. The ship was black, and emanated the feeling of death, especially the massive flagpole from which flapped a red flag, embroidered with the character “Wang.”

On the ship stood numerous men with expressionless faces, standing at attention, radiating cold auras.

The massive noise which had just rung out, as well as the battleship, left the disciples of the Reliance Sect trembling in fear. They looked up at the sight, disbelief written across their face.

Meng Hao still sat on the peak of the East Mountain. Pulled out of his contemplation, he looked up at the shocking black battleship and red flag, and his heart quivered.

“I should never have agreed to let you come to this backwater place,” said the middle aged man as they stepped foot onto the ship. “Even if the Sublime Spirit Scripture was rumored to have been seen here, that was something that occurred hundreds of years ago.” Wang Tengfei stood there, looking out at the Reliance Sect. He slowly wiped away all the memories of the recent years.

No longer was his gaze warm and gentle, no longer was his smile kind and sincere. He had become cold, especially his eyes, which radiated hatred. He now seemed completely different from the old Elder Brother Wang.

He looked down at Meng Hao sitting there on the mountaintop. The two of them stared at each other for a moment, and then Wang Tengfei’s eyes once again filled with disregard. As far as he was concerned, Meng Hao was a bug. Pride filled him, because his family name was Wang!

At this moment, the middle-aged man caught sight of Meng Hao sitting there. He didn’t reveal his Cultivation base, but his gaze itself was enough to cause a thunderous roar which shook the entire East Mountain. Like a sharp sword, his it toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao’s expression changed, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. His entire body felt ice-cold, and he sensed an intense, deadly force fall upon him. His head spun, and he lost the power to even think. He was so weak that he felt as if he could collapse from a single blow.

He felt death upon him. His body would shrivel up, his soul would wink out. Blood dripped down from his forehead.

Aloneness. Helplessness. Death. They melded together into a giant hand which pushed down on him, slowly crushing him to pieces, smashing him into a place beyond recovery.

Suddenly, a cold snort rang out, filling the entire Reliance Sect, and a figure in blue appeared in front of Meng Hao.

“Your Cultivation base is in the Core Formation stage. Not a Mixed Core, either, but at least Purple or Crimson. And yet you bully a Qi Condensation pup like this? Are you really Wang Xifan [2. Wang Xifan’s name in Chinese is 王锡范 (wáng xī fàn) Wang is a family name. Xi means "tin." Fan means "model" or "example"] of the Wang Clan of the Southern Domain, Third Generation Dao Protector?” It was Sect Leader He Luohua. Suddenly, a deafening, earth-shaking roar erupted.

The sound thundered out, seeming as if everything in sight would crumble from it. Then it turned into layer upon layer of ripples, emanating from He Luohua. He stood there as if he were the only person in the world, staring coldly toward the Wang Xifan as he stood there in the battleship.

“I’ve incurred Fellow Daoist He’s ridicule,” said Wang Xifan with a gentle laugh. “I’m here to take Tengfei away. Thank you for caring for him these years.” His eyes were filled with an indescribable arrogance. He flicked his sleeve. The battleship began to hum, then it transformed into a streak of colors and shot off into the starry sky, leaving behind only the twinkling starlight.

Meng Hao coughed up some more blood, but continued to stare off into the distance, his cold eyes glittering.

He Luohua looked back silently at Meng Hao, then sighed and left. Meng Hao gazed off into the distance toward the disappearing battleship.

“So that was a Core Formation Cultivator. He could crush me with a single look. And that’s just Core Formation. After that is the Nascent Soul stage and then the Spirit Severing stage, and even more... The Southern Domain, the Wang Clan!” Meng Hao ground his teeth angrily, fire burning in his eyes.

“If you’re not strong, you don’t qualify to exist. If you’re not strong, you don’t qualify to practice Cultivation. If you’re not strong, you don’t have the right to keep living, but can only be taken advantage of.... Are you willing to live a life like this?” Elder Brother Chen’s words echoed in his head, more and more strongly, burning indelibly into his mind, into his bones, into his soul.

“I’m not willing!” said Meng Hao slowly, clenching his fists. His voice was weak, but in his heart, the voice resounded like a thunderclap.

“I’m not willing to let anyone take advantage of me!

“I’m not willing to be weak!

“I’m not willing to be deprived of the right to fight back!

“I will be strong! I will become powerful!!” Meng Hao had always wanted to become rich and travel to the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands. He still had that desire, but in addition to that, he had a new belief. He would become powerful. On the path of cultivation, the path of defying the Heavens, if you are not powerful, you are dead.

#### Chapter 36: The Perks of the Inner Sect

Half a month passed, during which Meng Hao spent most of his time sitting cross-legged in the Sect’s Magic Pavilion, studying the ancient records. Now he had a much deeper understanding of the State of Zhao and the Southern Domain.

He had even discovered a hand-drawn map of the sprawling lands of South Heaven, which showed the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands, the Northern Reaches with its Qiang Di flutes, the Barbarian Western Lands, and of course the Southern Domain, where he was currently located.

The whole world was neatly displayed on the map, and its image was now burned into Meng Hao’s brain. The Southern Domain comprised a vast section of the lands of South Heaven, whereas the State of Zhao was just a tiny dot on its perimeter.

“The Southern Domain is so big that it could hold thousands of the State of Zhao...” He looked out at the blue sky outside the Magic Pavilion, his eyes filled with a fascinated look.

“So it turns out that traveling to the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands isn’t that simple. You have to cross the Milky Way Sea...” After a while, Meng Hao looked back down at the map, looking at all the four major regions of the lands of South Heaven. The Eastern Lands and the Northern Reaches formed a subcontinent, separated from which by a large ocean were the Western Barbarian Lands and the Southern Domain, which formed another subcontinent.

When the sun began to fall behind the western mountains, and dusk approached, Meng Hao rubbed his eyes, returned the map to its place, and left the Magic Pavilion. He looked off into the distance toward the east for a while, then turned and headed back to his Inner Sect Immortal’s Cave.

Inside the Immortal’s cave, the luminescent pearls inlaid into the ceiling emitted a soft light onto the light green walls. There were five stone rooms, and a gurgling Spirit Spring, filling the cave with dense Spiritual Energy. This was a perk available only to disciples of the Inner Sect. Meng Hao

entered and sat cross-legged onto a slab of white jade. It was not made of Spirit Stone, but meditating upon it helped one's mind to be clear, and was a relatively rare treasure.

This also was something only for Inner Sect disciples.

“Only Inner Sect disciples can truly be considered members of the Reliance Sect,” thought Meng Hao, quietly looking around. The light green stone walls were carved with various birds and beasts, each of which seemed to be filled with deep meaning. Even looking at them left one feeling refined.

“These are very different perks from those in the Outer Sect. This is in order to emphasize the outstanding qualities of Inner Sect disciples. Just like in the mortal world, there is a division of layers. By struggling, one can surpass the Outer Sect. After that, if one wishes to become exalted, one must become stronger!

Soon, dusk fell, and then Meng Hao heard a respectful voice from outside.

“Elder Brother Meng, Li Fugui from the foot of the mountain requests an audience.” It was the voice of a boy, a servant. After Meng Hao had joined the Inner Set, this boy had been assigned to help him care for his daily affairs.

This was yet another perk of life in the Inner Sect. At first, Meng Hao had a hard time getting used to it. He had never had someone waiting upon him before. But when he saw Elder Brother Chen's servant helping him, it was easier to accept. However, he still held firm to his desire to grow stronger.

Only the strong can have power over others, and prevent others from controlling them. The law of the Cultivation world and rules of the Reliance Sect were the same. It was not reasonable or fair, but it existed, and that was the way of life.

Existence was truth. The world is fundamentally unreasonable, and naturally, there is no true fairness.

“Send him in,” said Meng Hao coolly. Filled with reverence, the young servant complied. After being assigned to wait upon Meng Hao, his very life belonged to him.

Shortly thereafter, Fatty entered, clicking his teeth and striding with long steps. This was not his first time to visit, but rather his third. Every time he came, he was filled with excitement. This was not a place Outer Sect disciples could visit without the consent of the person they called upon.

The young servant led Fatty in respectfully. Fatty looked around, rubbing his hands along various items in wonder, even the white jade slab that Meng Hao sat on.

“It’s not your first time here,” said Meng Hao with a laugh, watching him.

“Meng Hao, this place is just too amazing. Every time I come, I just can’t control myself. The Immortal’s Cave of an Inner Sect disciple. It’s a place of legend! You know, after the last time I came here, a bunch of Outer Sect disciples crowded around me asking all sorts of questions. I’m important now!” His body trembled, and it took a moment for him to stop thinking about it. He sat down in front of Meng Hao.

“If you’d like, I can request for Wang Tengfei’s Immortal’s cave to be given to you.”

“That... that would be incredible,” said Fatty, looking excited, but at the same time a bit shy.

“Zhao Hai,” said Meng Hao coolly. He waved his right hand, and the main door opened. The young servant rushed in and gave Meng Hao a deep salute.

He looked to be about fourteen or fifteen, close to Fatty’s age. He had delicate features, and had only arrived on the mountain recently. It was said he was from the same village as Little Tiger, and that his family was rich.

“Take my spirit tablet to the Cave Dispensing Pavilion and retrieve the jade slip to Wang Tengfei’s Immortal’s Cave.” He waved his hand, and a white jade slip flew out into the young servant’s hand.

The young servant accepted the assignment, then left with a respectful expression on his face.

“Meng Hao, when are you going to come down off the mountain?” asked Fatty eagerly. “I promised the Outer Sect disciples you would go to inspect them. You can’t go back on your word, I promised them.”

“Grand Master Ouyang said that I would preside over the next Pill Distribution Day,” he said with a smile. “I believe that would be the day after tomorrow.” The two of them had entered the Sect together, three years ago. A deep friendship had long since grown between the two of them.

“Great, the day after tomorrow it is. Oh, right, our business has been doing well in the past half month. I already separated out your 80%.” He handed a bag of holding to Meng Hao, looking pleased with himself. It seemed he too understood the meaning of the Reliance Sect. With Meng Hao to rely on, who in the Outer Sect would dare to even say one wrong word to him?

Even better, the beautiful female disciples of the Outer Sect had begun to fawn over him until he fairly floated in the air. For the moment, Fatty was quite popular.

“Has Shangguan Xiu caused you any problems recently?” asked Meng Hao suddenly, his eyes flashing.

“Nobody has seen that bastard recently,” replied Fatty, his voice becoming grave. “I’ve assigned a disciple to do some spying for me, and he said that Shangguan Xiu sits in secluded meditation all day. He never comes out.”

“Just be careful,” he warned, and not for the first time. “If anything happens, snap the message token I gave you.”

Soon, the young servant Zhao Hai returned with the jade slip to Wang Tengfei’s Immortal’s Cave. Meng Hao gave it to Fatty. The two of them laughed and chatted deep into the night. It seemed Fatty didn’t want to leave. In fact, he seemed to be growing more excited.

Meng Hao was surprised at this, but when he remembered what day it was, and laughed.

“Today is the day Medicinal Fruits are distributed in the Inner Sect,” said Meng Hao.

Fatty licked his lips and nodded, his heart filled with envy at the differences between the Inner and Outer Sect disciples. Every month Medicinal Fruits were distributed, a special type of Spiritual Fruit infused with Medicinal Pills. The fruit itself tasted like a Medicinal Pill, but was much more effective than ordinary Medicinal Pills.

Inner Sect disciples received the fruits once per month.

After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the young servant Zhao Hai entered. He actually despised Fatty, but didn't show even the slightest hint of it on his face. In his hands he carried the Medicinal Fruits, wrapped up in a large green leaf.

A delicate aroma wafted out from it, causing Zhao Hai to swallow deeply. He put the fruits down and then left.

When the large leaf was removed, the medicinal fragrance filled the air. Inside the leaf were two small, semi-transparent, light-red fruits. They seemed so delicate that they might break if you touched them. Inside each one could just barely be seen a medicinal pill.

Fatty's eyes went wide. He had never eaten Medicinal Fruit before, but had heard it mentioned recently by some Outer Sect disciples. After making some enquires, he had discovered the distribution date, and so had hurried eagerly to visit Meng Hao. He picked up one of the fruits and put it into his mouth. He bit down, then swallowed, and a delicious flavor filled his mouth. Then, a hot sensation filled his head and spread out through his whole body.

"Amazing, amazing. I must be the first Outer Sect disciple to ever eat a Medicinal Fruit. When word gets out, the girls will be envious to death. Everyone will be envious of Master Fatty's good fortune." It suddenly seemed as if he had remembered something, and he snapped his mouth shut, not letting any of the fragrant aroma escape. Using his hands, he signaled to Meng Hao that he needed to leave, then ran off.

"I have proof!" he thought. "I have to find some of those female disciples and let them smell it." The more he thought about it, the more excited he got, and he raced down the mountain even faster.

Fatty's clever plan was obvious, causing Meng Hao to laugh. He slowly placed the remaining Medicinal Fruit into his mouth. It tasted delicious, filled with dense Medicinal flavor.

"This is something else that Inner Sect disciples..." As he ate the Medicinal Fruit, he sighed. This life was not something that Outer Sect disciples could enjoy. If he wanted to, he could simply make a gesture, and any of the beautiful female disciples would instantly become devoted to him.

Soon, two days had passed, and Pill Distribution Day arrived. Meng Hao walked out of his Immortal's Cave, followed closely by the young servant Zhao Hai. In his hand he carried a purple bag of holding, which was filled with Spirit Stones and Medicinal Pills to be distributed.



A mountain breeze welcomed the dawn as Meng Hao descended the mountain. Along the way, the Outer Sect disciples he ran into would look at him in surprise, then stop and give him a deep salute with clasped hands.

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng.”

“Elder Brother Meng is as elegant as ever. I haven’t seen you in many days, Junior Sister has missed you.”

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng. Your latent talent is spectacular, your Cultivation base astonishing. You will definitely be a pillar of the Sect.”

Amidst all the flattery Meng Hao walked along until he reached the square, which was already filled with a good number of disciples. Catching sight of him, they saluted, and then the air filled with their flattering words.

He nodded, smiling, then leaped up, carrying Zhao Hai with him onto the platform. This was not his first time here, but it was his first time to distribute Medicinal Pills.

His gaze swept across the crowd. Every single person’s face was filled with reverent devotion. Gradually, Meng Hao’s face grew distracted, and he thought back to his first Pill Distribution Day, and then to the time Wang Tengfei had humiliated him. Many memories flitted through his mind.

Finally, he heaved a deep sigh, and said, “Sound the bells.”

Chapter 37: Water and Ink in the Evening

The bells rang out, reverberating both in Meng Hao’s heart and throughout the Reliance Sect. Soon, Meng Hao could see countless disciples hurrying forward.

Before long, the square was packed. As the disciples entered, they looked at Meng Hao in shock, then saluted.

Fatty stood in the crowd, looking pleased, filing away at his teeth with his flying sword. He was surrounded by a group of fawning disciples.

“So Elder Brother Meng is distributing the Medicinal Pill today... ai, I remember back when he was an Outer Sect disciple like us, but now he’s a member of the Inner Sect.”

“Elder Brother Meng is scholarly and refined. I heard that he used to be a scholar of high rank, but he cared more about Cultivation, so he quit and joined the Reliance Sect.”

“Now that you mention it, I remember the first time I saw Elder Brother Meng those years ago. I could tell that he wasn’t ordinary. During his whole fight with Wang Tengfei, I knew that Elder Brother Meng would achieve victory.” The buzz of conversation filled the air, eventually reaching Meng Hao’s ears. He let out a dry cough.

Even though it was a relatively quiet cough, it caused all the disciples in the square to suddenly go silent. They looked up at him respectfully. The morning sun shone down onto his silver robe, and he truly looked like a celestial being.

Meng Hao caught sight of Zhou Kai in the crowd; his face looked conflicted. Then Meng Hao caught sight of somber Yin Tianlong, who gave him a forced smile. He also saw the other Qi Condensation fourth level disciples whom he recognized from that day. When his gaze fell upon them, their faces filled with ingratiating looks.

He even saw Cao Yang, standing there trembling.

“Today, I shall preside over Pill Distribution,” said Meng Hao. He was a scholar, so he had no need to prepare words; he just spoke naturally. When he spoke, his words carried force, piercing into the hearts of the onlookers. “Fellow disciples, please devote yourself to Cultivation, and eventually you will pass the sixth level. I look forward to that day, when the Reliance Inner Sect has one more member.”

The force of his words came not from his Cultivation base, but rather his status as an Inner Sect disciple.

“We will remember Elder Brother Meng’s admonitions.” Several people below spoke out, faces filled with emotion, as if they had just heard the voice of Heaven. One after another, they saluted Meng Hao.

Soon everyone was repeating the words, until the whole square spoke together in harmony.

Meng Hao took the bag of holding from the young servant at his side, opened it, and waved his sleeve. Medicinal pills and Spirit Stones shot out to everyone.

After that, his right hand flashed over the bag of holding, then held up a milky white Medicinal pill. It emanated white aura and a fragrant aroma. It seemed as if it contained the glow of dawn.

“It’s... it’s a White Spirit Pill!”

“That pill is extraordinarily effective for anyone of the fourth level of Qi Condensation or lower. They haven’t distributed one for a long time. Finally one appears!” Soon, everyone in the square below was breathing heavily, staring at the Medicinal pill in Meng Hao’s hand.

His eyes scanned the crowd. Fatty was smiling. This pill wasn’t anything rare as far as he was concerned. He already had a few in his bag of holding, which Meng Hao had given him.

“This pill is extraordinary. All of you must surely know that I planned to give this only to a suitable disciple. And yet, I, Meng Hao, keep old friendships in mind. I just caught sight of an old friend, so I shall bestow the pill to him.” His gaze fell onto Cao Yang, who suddenly began to tremble. Meng Hao flicked his right hand, and the pill shot forth.

“I’m finished!” thought Cao Yang, looking like he was about to cry. “I’ll be recuperating from the injuries for months...” He wailed inside, and now he knew that Meng Hao could hold a grudge. Even though he had become an Inner Sect disciple, he had not forgotten about all the things that had happened before.

As the lights in the square faded, Meng Hao flicked his sleeve and left, not staying behind to watch the fighting break out.

Fatty ran over to follow him, his face flushed. He glared at the young servant Zhao Hai, motioning for him to step back a distance. It seemed he was worried the boy might replace him. He walked next to Meng Hao.

“Elder Brother Meng,” he said with anticipation, “why don’t we take a stroll around the Outer Sect?”

Thinking back to how he had done the same thing with Elder Sister Xu so many years ago, Meng Hao nodded his head with a smile.

The two of them walked forward, with Zhao Hai following in the rear, looking irritated. Not long after leaving the square, they saw Zhou Kai hurrying to catch up with them.

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng,” he said, his expression somewhat perturbed. He had offended Meng Hao more than once, and had assumed that upon joining the Inner Sect, he would show more restraint. But upon seeing Cao Yang’s fate, he was nervous, and so rushed over.

Meng Hao looked him over, but didn’t say anything. Fatty took a step forward and said loudly: “What do you want?”

“A few days ago, I, Zhou, came across a treasured item. As soon as I saw it, I could tell that it was destined for Elder Brother Meng. Please, accept my gift.” Biting his tongue, he pulled out a bag of holding from within his robe and presented it to Meng Hao. Fatty gave a cold harrumph and grabbed it, then handed it to Meng Hao with a wide smile.

Meng Hao accepted it and glanced over its contents. Then he nodded to Zhou Kai, turned, and walked off, his expression as cool as the clouds in the sky. Zhou Kai watched on helplessly, sighing in his heart.

“I’m not worthy to be an Inner Sect Disciple, perhaps these items will leave you dissatisfied...”

As Meng Hao walked away, Yin Tianlong, off in the distance, let out a sigh. With a smile on his face, he hurried forward. He too said that he had found some items which were destined to be Meng Hao’s. He also offered up a bag of holding, inside of which were fifty Spirit Stones. Meng Hao accepted it with a slight frown.

“We’re both fellow disciples,” he said. “The grievances of the past are not worth keeping track of. There’s no need to act like this.”

Upon hearing this, Yin Tianlong’s heart thumped, and he understood Meng Hao’s true meaning. Inwardly cursing Zhou Kai for giving more, he clenched his jaw and produced another bag of holding, whereupon Meng Hao nodded.

As he walked, Meng Hao met more people who had offended him in the past, and they all acted similarly. Soon he had ten new bags of holding.

“What do you think?” said Fatty, looking pleased. “I handled things pretty well, didn’t I? I found all of them earlier and gave them a bit of coaching. I told them that one must offer up a bit of blood now to avoid trouble in the future.”

Meng Hao laughed and shook his head. He had sensed something odd about the goings-on and had guessed that Fatty must have been up to something over the past half month.

“What about that fifth-level disciple who tried to kill you that day?” asked Meng Hao.

“Oh, him. I used the jade slip you gave me to make him go see the Minister of the Outer Sect, who arranged for him to go out into the wild mountains to catch some Demonic beasts. He can’t return until he gets 100.” As far as Fatty was concerned, anyone who offended him would have to pay the price.

“Just don’t do something publicly that could box you into a corner,” said Meng Hao, his eyes flashing and his voice low.

“I understand,” said Fatty in a similarly low voice. “It’s taken care of. Zhou Kai and Yin Tianlong will get rid of him for good.”

They looked at each other, then laughed. They never brought up the matter again.

After making a circle around the Outer Sect, and having been greeted by many disciples, they finally reached the Pill Cultivation Workshop. Meng Hao paused for a moment to look at it, then a smile broke out on his face and he entered.

When the middle-aged man who ran the workshop saw Meng Hao, he stood up.

“Greetings, Elder Brother Meng.”

Meng Hao smiled and nodded his head, glancing around at all the Medicinal pills.

“Don’t worry, Elder Brother Meng,” said the middle-aged man. “Junior Brother Li Fugui is taking care of the Pill Workshop. Business is good. I definitely won’t give any other disciples a chance to buy Medicinal Pills.” He thumped his palm onto his chest.

Fatty beamed with joy. Previously, he had given the middle-aged Cultivator a bag of holding when no one was looking. Soon, the man had grown accustomed to this. Although the Medicinal pills here belonged to the Sect, and weren't personal property, the man wasn't opposed to making a bit of profit of his own.

Thanks to Fatty's anticipation and stubbornness, it wasn't until midday that Meng Hao was able to satisfy him. They walked around the entire Outer Sect until everyone had seen them together. Finally, after much begging and pleading, they went to the Treasure Pavilion.

The shrewd-looking man at the Treasure Pavilion had been waiting outside for some time. When he saw Meng Hao approaching, he made a long, grand salute, then in a loud, clear voice said, "Treasure Pavilion disciple Sun Tiandi gives greetings to Elder Brother Meng. Elder Brother Meng is a dragon among men, powerful and imposing beyond the ordinary..." The man was not very educated, and his words were a bit over the top. His expression was one of excitement, but inside he was a bit worried, although only he knew that.

He feared that Meng Hao would bring up the matter of him cheating him all those years back. He glanced at the eager-looking Fatty.

Fatty cleared his throat. "My friend here wants me to go in to take a treasure," he said, sounding a bit embarrassed. "If it breaks any rules, you can place the blame on him."

Meng Hao was a loss for word. Finally, he went in with Fatty to inspect the Treasure Pavilion. After a while, they left, despite Fatty's pleas to stay. By the time Meng Hao arrived back at the East Mountain, the sun was beginning to set. He sat down on a boulder outside the Immortal's Cave, thinking about the day's events. Now he had an even deeper understanding of what it meant to be a member of the Inner Sect.

As evening fell, Meng Hao looked out at the rosy sky. Then he noticed that off in the distance, a woman approached. She looked like some sort of celestial being, wearing a silver robe, with long black hair and a pale face that was beautiful even though she wore no makeup whatsoever. Her face, though cold, seemed to Meng Hao to contain something delicate and touching.

"Elder Sister Xu," said Meng Hao, cupping his hands in greeting.

“Congratulations, you’ve become a member of the Inner Sect.” Just like her name, Elder Sister Xu was cold and cheerless. That was her personality, and yet, she didn’t treat everyone coldly. For example, upon hearing her young servant mention Meng Hao, she had come here to see him.

Meng Hao smiled, standing next to her. Their long robes rippled in the mountain breeze.

“Today I went to the Pill Cultivation Workshop and traded for another Cosmetic Cultivation Pill.” He lifted it up and handed it to her.

She said nothing, looking at the pill for a while, then eventually accepting it. She stood there with him, silently looking off into the rosy horizon.

She was incredibly beautiful, seemingly flawless, like jade. The glow of the setting sun reflected off her, increasing her beauty.

Time seemed to come to a standstill. As they stood there on the East Mountain, their shadows merged together in the evening sun, like ink blending with water. It was something which would last for an eternity.

The evening sunlight slowly faded past the horizon, and then the moon peeked out. Finally, Elder Sister Xu turned and began to walk off. She had only taken five steps before she stopped.

“I went to the Pill Cultivation Workshop. The Cosmetic Cultivation Pill you gave me before wasn’t purchased by you.” With that, she left, not looking back.

Meng Hao stared in shock, and wasn’t even able to react until some time had passed. He scratched his head. His eyes gradually filled with light. He had never imagined that something like this would happen. And yet, it seemed it had...

Chapter 38: Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture

Two months passed in the twinkling of an eye. Meng Hao had already been a member of the Inner Sect for an entire season. He did not continue to visit the Outer Sect often. Like a fish in water, Fatty had grown accustomed to surviving on his own, and was quite at ease.

Most of Meng Hao’s time was spent in the Magic Pavilion.

One day, he sat there cross-legged, a calm expression on his face as he read a bamboo text. He raised his right hand and began to make incantation gestures, causing a magical light to circulate around it and cast flickering shadows onto his face.

A Water Globe appeared, but then unexpectedly transformed into mist and dissipated into the surroundings. Meng Hao frowned, putting down the bamboo text. He reached into his robe and pulled out a glowing jade slip.

It was pure white and blurry inside, as if it were filled with mist. A closer inspection revealed that the surface was actually translucent, like crystal.

“Chen Fan, Xu Qing, Meng Hao. Come to the main temple hall on the East Mountain.” The words were spoken by a dignified voice which transmitted out from within the jade slip. It was easily identifiable as belonging to Sect Leader He Luohua.

Meng Hao straightened up the bamboo texts, stood and strode silently out of the main door of the Magic Pavilion, making his way toward the top of the East Mountain.

At almost the same time as he walked out, two figures shot toward the peak. One had a warm, gentle face, filled with righteousness: Chen Fan. The other was beautiful but cold: Elder Sister Xu Qing.

Xu Qing cast a glance at Meng Hao. This was the first time they had seen each other since that evening the previous month.

The three sped toward the peak of the East Mountain, eventually arriving at the main temple hall. It had an ancient feel, the rich ornamentation giving the feeling that it had seen many ages pass. This was a very important place to the Reliance Sect, a place that throughout the generations, only Inner Sect disciples could visit.

Within the main temple hall were nine statues. The foremost one was of an old man, his expression not one of anger, yet still filled with might. His dark eyes seemed to shine with life. His left hand was lifted up in front of him, his chin raised as if he were staring down his nose at all creation. He seemed to emanate a sort of indescribable, domineering air. Behind him, eight statues were arranged neatly, all of them possessing the demeanor of transcendent beings.



Meng Hao had visited this place during his first seven days in the Inner Sect. He had kowtowed before these statues, and knew well that the calm, powerful old man was none other than Patriarch Reliance. The other statues were the other Patriarchs of the Reliance Sect.

Sect Leader He Luohua stood beneath the statues, his back toward Meng Hao and the others as they entered. He stared at the statues as if he were in a trance. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking. Next to him was Grand Elder Ouyang. He nodded to the three of them, a solemn expression on his face.

“Pay homage to the Patriarch,” he said, his voice profound.

Meng Hao, Xu Qing and Chen Fan bowed deeply to Patriarch Reliance, their faces somber.

“I joined the Sect when Patriarch Reliance had been missing for one hundred years,” said He Luohua. “At that time, the Reliance Sect was still in its glory days.” He sighed and turned around. Meng Hao, Chen Fan and even Xu Qing gazed at him with shining eyes.

He was silent a moment, before slowly continuing: “You have read about Patriarch Reliance in the ancient records, and know how glorious our Reliance Sect used to be... We even had a complete understanding of the three levels of Foundation Establishment. I’ve called you here today to explain the complete truth.

“The former glory of the Reliance Sect was all due to Patriarch Reliance. Because of his Cultivation base, he dominated the entire State of Zhao. His reputation even shook the Southern Domain. All of that was because of one of the manuals of the Sublime Spirit Scripture.” As He Luohua spoke, Chen Fan’s eyes began to shine brightly. Even Xu Qing’s grew sharp.

Only Meng Hao stared blankly; he had no idea what the Sublime Spirit Scripture was.

“The Qi Condensation manual?” said Chen Fan lightly. He was a senior disciple of the Inner Sect, and knew many secrets. Other things he had worked out through speculation.

“The Sublime Spirit Scripture is one of the three great classic scriptures in the lands of South Heaven,” continued He Luohua softly. “It was passed down through the generations since ancient times. Originally it was comprised of seven manuals, but most have been lost. One of them was the Qi Condensation manual, which describes how to establish a Flawless Foundation. The Foundation Establishment manual describes the method to Form a Purple Core, not a Crimson or Mixed Core.

The Core Formation manual can enable one to develop a four-colored Nascent Form... In other words, each manual enables one to reach the strongest stage.

“That year, Patriarch Reliance obtained the Qi Condensation manual. The reason the heir to the Wang clan joined the Reliance Sect was because of the Sublime Spirit Scripture’s Qi Condensation Manual.”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered, and his heart began to race. He had heard Elder Brother Chen speak of the different levels of Foundation Establishment. Now that he knew how powerful this magic was that Patriarch Reliance had obtained, he understood why Wang Tengfei had joined the Reliance Sect.

“If I could obtain it...” The strong desire in his heart suddenly began to burn even hotter.

“Sadly, even I have never laid eyes on this Qi Condensation manual, let alone others,” said He Luohua. “The scripture was not handed down. It exists only in the memory of the Patriarch.” Meng Hao remained silent, and Chen Fan’s face flashed with realization. Xu Qing raised her head to look at the statue of Patriarch Reliance.

Silence reigned in the main temple hall.

“Four hundred years have passed, and everyone in the outside world assumes that the Patriarch died during his meditation. Only myself and a few others know that the Patriarch... is absolutely not dead.” As his words drifted out into Meng Hao’s ears, they seemed to transform into a thunderous roar.

“Four hundred years ago, the Patriarch’s Cultivation base had reached the late Nascent Soul stage. And yet, he was reaching the end of his life. In order to break through to the fabled Spirit Severing stage, one must be at least one thousand years old. If not, how can he defy the Heavens to sever his Spirit?”

“The Patriarch chose to meditate in seclusion, in order to sever his Spirit body and be reborn. It was a meditation of... four hundred years.

“When he went into meditation four hundred years ago, the Patriarch left a command. Every one hundred years, he would send out some pieces of Vorpall Jade, formed from his own blood. Then, the outstanding members of the current generation of Inner Sect disciples could use the Vorpall Jade to enter his meditation zone. By kindling the Qi and blood inside the Vorpall Jade, they could have a

chance, if lucky, to gain enlightenment of the knowledge he permeated throughout the area. Knowledge of... the Sublime Spirit Scripture.” He Luohua’s words echoed out. Meng Hao lifted his head up, as did the others.

“Success is success. Failure is failure. If things had stayed the same, surely a disciple would have succeeded already. But two hundred years ago, the Patriarch experienced an accident in his cultivation. He almost lost his life. Afterwards, the chances of enlightenment in his meditation zone grew weak, and the restrictive spells stronger. He didn’t send any more Vorpals out until five years ago... When he did, he sent out three pieces.

“Three pieces of Vorpals indicate that three individuals may enter. It also reveals how powerful the restrictive spells are in the Patriarch’s meditation zone, and means that there are only three areas where enlightenment may occur.” He Luohua’s voice reverberated throughout the main hall. He flicked his right sleeve, and three blood-red streaks shot toward Meng Hao and the others, to stop floating in front of them.

They were jade-smooth Blood Crystals, also known as Vorpals.

“You three are the only disciples of the Inner Sect, and therefore I bestow these Vorpals to you. Whether or not you gain the enlightenment of the Sublime Spirit Scripture will depend on your luck.” With that, he flicked his sleeve again, and the statue of Patriarch Reliance began to hum. Its eyes shone with boundless radiance, and a vortex began to form in front of him.

“Enter,” said He Luohua, his voice sounding out like thunder. “I wish you luck in enlightenment.” Meng Hao and the others seemed to transform into auroras as they gripped their pieces of Vorpals and shot into the vortex, disappearing inside. Outside, the vortex remained, but without a Vorpals, no one, not even a Cultivator at the Nascent Soul stage, could enter it.

Looking up at the vortex, Grand Elder Ouyang quietly said, “Who knows which of them will acquire the Sublime Spirit Scripture, or... perhaps they will all come up empty-handed.”

“It depends on personal fortune, there’s no use in thinking too much about it.” He Luohua sat down cross-legged next to him and began to meditate.

When Meng Hao entered the vortex, a blinding light appeared in front of his eyes which forced him to close them. A rumbling roar sounded in his ears, and then he heard strange shrieks and screams coming from all directions. After what seemed like years, he felt his body suddenly tremble, and then the sounds ceased. The shrieking turned into silence. He opened his eyes to find himself standing on top of a sacrificial altar that was several meters tall. He looked around.

The place was enormous. Up above was black earth, dotted with small crystals that shone like stars, casting a dim light on the surroundings. Nothing was very clear, as if everything were covered with gauze. Various buildings rose up out of the fog.

“How desolate! It seems like no one has been here for hundreds of years.” It was Chen Fan’s voice, drifting from some distance away. Eventually, he appeared, walking through the fog. In the direction from which he came could be seen another altar, several meters tall.

“The soil up above has restrictive spells cast on it. These are the Sect catacombs.” Xu Qing appeared from another direction. Dressed in her silver robe, she appeared matchlessly beautiful.

“I entered the Sect earlier than both of you,” said Chen Fan. “Once I performed guard duty at the main temple hall, so I know a few secrets that you two don’t. These are definitely the Reliance Sect catacombs. Directly above is the Outer Sect.”

Meng Hao walked off the altar to stand next to Chen Fan and Xu Qing. Looking around at the hazy images of buildings around them, he could see plenty of withered plants and flowers. Everything was deathly still.

“This fog is a restrictive spell,” said Meng Hao with a frown. “It’s making everything appear to be black and white. No color whatsoever.”

“Precisely,” said Chen Fan with a serious look. “Don’t attempt to touch it. Because of the Patriarch’s weak state, he’s lost control of it. Let us use our Vorpals to find our places of enlightenment.” He looked at them. “We don’t know how much time we will have to gain enlightenment. Let’s all wait for each other, then leave together. Junior Sister Xu, Junior Brother Meng, I wish you success.” He cast his spiritual power into the Vorpals, whereupon they emitted a blood-red glow and began to drift away. Chen Fan followed, soon disappearing into the distance.

Xu Qing nodded at Meng Hao, then followed the blood-red glow of her Vorpals in a different direction.

Meng Hao looked around, then was about to activate his own Vorpals when suddenly, a shrill shriek rang out. It grew closer and closer, until it seemed to be only about thirty meters away.

Chapter 39: Patriarch Reliance!

Meng Hao's expression changed. He suddenly saw the fog roiling, and then about thirty meters away a shrieking man appeared. He wore a long tattered robe as he charged toward Meng Hao.

He emanated a fierce heat, which transformed into a ruthless killing aura. Seeing him approach, Meng Hao retreated as fast as possible. This turn of events had happened too quickly. The figure advanced rapidly, and in the blink of an eye it was only nine meters away. Suddenly, it caught sight of the Vorpai Jade in his hand, and its eyes filled with dread and fear.

Meng Hao's heart churned. He poured the spiritual power from within his body into the Vorpai Jade, and suddenly it began to glow blood-red. It illuminated the man in the dilapidated robe, allowing Meng Hao to see him clearly. He was middle-aged, his body gaunt, like some sort of evil spirit.

Blood-curdling screams shot out of his mouth as he retreated. Moving with incredible speed, he disappeared into the fog.

Sweat broke out on Meng Hao's forehead, and he took a deep breath. The feeling the middle-aged man gave him was the same feeling he got from Grand Elder Ouyang, boundless and majestic.

"Don't tell me he was a Cultivator of the Foundation Establishment stage?" Meng Hao hesitated, remaining on guard. He followed the direction of the blood-red light, moving forward carefully. After about half an hour, he stopped in shock. Several figures had appeared, and each of them seemed to have a Cultivation base equal to Grand Elder Ouyang's. Some even seemed to be as powerful as Sect Leader He Luohua.

"Could they be... automatons?" Upon closer inspection, the figures didn't actually seem to be alive. They floated around him in circles, none of them approaching him, seemingly terrified of his Vorpai Jade.

Time passed enough for an incense stick to burn, and they slowly disappeared. Meng Hao continued forward numbly, his breathing agitated, a blank look in his eyes.

"This... this..." he murmured. Ahead of him was a mountain, approximately three hundred meters tall. An ordinary mountain would not cause Meng Hao to act in such a way. This mountain was made... of Spirit Stones!

Countless Spirit Stones piled together to form a Spirit Stone Mountain!

Meng Hao had never seen so many Spirit Stones in his entire life. His head spun, and he unconsciously wanted to go take them, but after taking a single step forward, he stopped. The Spirit Stone Mountain was gray in color and seemed to be covered with a fine mist. It was a restrictive spell which prevented anything from touching it.

He struggled for some time, not quite willing to give up. When he reached a position about sixty meters from the Spirit Stone Mountain, he suddenly felt a fierce sense of imminent danger. Looking at the mountain with a sigh, he stopped in place.

He knew that if he got too close, his body and soul would be reduced to ashes.

At a loss for a long moment, he turned his head and reluctantly left the Spirit Stone Mountain behind.

More time passed as he followed the blood-red glow, enough for an incense stick to burn, and soon the hazy image of a building appeared in the fog ahead of him. It had a courtyard, filled with withered plants and weeds. A stone sat in the middle of the courtyard, about half the size of a person. It was the only thing in sight that was neither black nor white, nor was there any fog visible near it.

The Vorpall Jade floated toward the large stone, then stopped above it. The blood-red glow began to fade.

Meng Hao walked forward and inspected the area around the stone. This must be one of the areas for enlightenment. He sat down cross-legged onto the stone and looked at the Vorpall Jade floating in front of him. His eyes began to gleam.

“Throughout all these years, many people have come here, and none have successfully achieved enlightenment. When the blood-red glow of the Vorpall Jade fades, it means the time to attempt enlightenment has arrived.” Meng Hao frowned. A strong desire burned in his heart to acquire the secrets of the Qi Condensation Manual. Originally, Wang Tengfei should have been given this opportunity. But Meng Hao knew that his latent talent was simply ordinary, and he had little chance of success.

He didn't allow the Vorpall Jade to fade, but instead looked up at it, a strange light shining in his eyes. After a bit of time passed, he clenched his jaw, then grabbed it stubbornly.

“This time, I don’t care what happens; I will achieve the enlightenment of the Sublime Spirit Scripture!” Determination filled his voice as he slapped his bag of holding and produced the copper mirror. Grabbing a handful of Spirit Stones, he prepared to begin the duplication process.

Meng Hao had been a member of the Inner Sect for a month. Inner Sect disciples received significantly more Spirit Stones than Outer Sect disciples. Combine that with his profits from the shop as well as the Outer Sect disciples who were trying to ingratiate themselves to him, it ensured that his bag of holding contained many Spirit Stones.

But suddenly, his expression changed as he found that the Spirit Stones distributed by the Sect were incapable of duplicating the Vorpall Jade. It wasn’t that the copper mirror had lost its efficacy, but rather that there simply weren’t enough Spirit Stones. Even mid-grade Spirit Stones were useless.

He stared at the Vorpall Jade for a while before suddenly pulling out seven or eight of the extraordinarily large Spirit Stones he had left. He hesitated for some time, then ground his teeth. Eyes growing red, he put one of the Spirit Stones down onto the mirror, and before he could even put down another piece, the Copper Mirror began to glow with a blinding light, and instantly, fifteen pieces of Vorpall Jade appeared. Meng Hao stared, dumbfounded. Originally, he had assumed he would need multiple Spirit Stones to make it work. But then he ended up with fifteen of the Blood Crystals.

These were Blood Crystals, congealed from Patriarch Reliance’s own blood. Seeing fifteen of them appear left Meng Hao stupefied.

“What... what kind of Spirit Stones are these?” He sat in a daze, thinking back to how he had used two thousand of them that time, and his heart ached.

These large Spirit Stones were definitely some type of extraordinary object.

For now, the most important thing to Meng Hao was the Sublime Spirit Scripture. He clenched his jaw and set aside the matter of the two thousand Spirit Stones. Extending a Blood Crystal, he caused it to fade. As it did so, the blood red glow settled around Meng Hao and an indistinct voice could be heard. He slipped into a dream-like trance, unaware of the passing of time.

At this same moment, Xu Qing and Chen Fan, in their respective enlightenment areas, were also surrounded by the blood-red glow. Their latent talent was beyond ordinary, so their chances of achieving enlightenment were somewhat greater. In Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zone, everything was based on latent talent. So-called luck is the same.

After an indeterminable period of time passed, the red glow around Meng Hao faded, and he began to regain his senses. He seemed to be somewhat at a loss. After some time passed, he had completely recovered, and yet his mind was blank. Not even a scrap of information from the Sublime Spirit Scripture was there.

He sighed, having anticipated this all along. He took out another Blood Crystal and continued to seek enlightenment. Time passed, and even after having used up fourteen Blood Crystals, he still had not succeeded. His heart ached, and he wasn't sure if he should continue. Gnashing his teeth, he pulled out another large Spirit Stone and duplicated more of the Vorpall Jade Blood Crystals. Once again, he activated the blood-red glow, which then covered his body as he began to seek enlightenment.

By this time, the blood-red glow surrounding Xu Qing and Chen Fan had faded. However, they did not rise, instead choosing to remain seated in meditation, not sure when enlightenment might occur.

As for Meng Hao, he seemed to have gone mad, continuously activating Blood Crystals, trying again and again to achieve enlightenment. Anyone who saw this scene would surely go crazy with jealousy.

After activating the twenty-seventh Blood Crystal, Meng Hao suddenly heard what sounded like a voice murmuring next to his ear in the dream-like trance world. He could clearly hear two words.

“Sublime... Spirit...”

When Meng Hao opened his eyes, they were filled with determination. Without hesitation, he pulled out the twenty-eighth Vorpall Jade Blood Crystal, and once again sought enlightenment.

By this time, Xu Qing and Chen Fan had returned to the altar to wait for Meng Hao. They were a bit surprised when they didn't see Meng Hao, but they weren't sure which direction he had headed in, so they couldn't easily search for him. They decided to sit in front of the altar and wait for him.

By the third day, they were beginning to grow impatient and also a bit worried. Of course, they did not even consider that he might have achieved enlightenment, but rather worried that some sort of accident had befallen him.

“Did something happen to Junior Brother Meng?” said Chen Fan worriedly.



Xu Qing didn't respond, but she looked worried.

After a bit of discussion, they decided to begin looking for him. Unfortunately, because of the frequent appearance of the automatons, their search went quite slowly.

Meanwhile, Meng Hao sat, hair disheveled, eyes bloodshot, murmuring to himself. His words made no sense; they seemed to simply express his desire for the Sublime Spirit Scripture. He pulled out the forty-third Blood Crystal, and the thick, red glow again surrounded him. In fact, the area he was in never lacked the red glow. Meng Hao had gone all out in his search for enlightenment. If he ran low on Blood Crystals, he simply duplicated more.

As of now, he could clearly hear the voice in his ear, but just couldn't commit it to memory. He could only continue on in another attempt.

There was something that nobody, not Chen Fan or Xu Qing, nor frenzied Meng Hao, had noticed. After the Blood Crystal ceased to glow, it would transform into a barely discernible blood-red light, which would then enter into the ground and pass into a secret chamber below the catacombs.

There, a withered body sat cross-legged, seemingly lifeless. The room was filled with the feeling of death.

Every time one of the blood-red lights entered the room, the body would assimilate it, and begin to change slightly. By the time the third light entered the body, there seemed to be some shred of life in it.

The light of life was dim, though, and the body was unable to do anything except sit there.

This was Patriarch Reliance. The Vorpall Jade Blood Crystals were congealed from his own blood, and contained his aura. After being activated, they would return to him, continuing his life. Without them, he would be thoroughly dead.

Originally, he had planned to postpone his death in this fashion, until the very last spark of his ruthless and ambitious life was extinguished, where upon he would pass into death. He was already in a state of despair. He spent most of his time in deep sleep, awaking only occasionally, and briefly, whereupon he would sink back into slumber. He had no energy to waste on superfluous matters.

As for the Vorpai Jade, this was an arrangement he had prepared many years ago. Were it not for them, he would have passed into death hundreds of years ago.

“These are the last three pieces of Vorpai Jade...” Now that they had returned, he had regained consciousness. He sighed and went back to sleep, knowing that he would probably never wake up again.

And yet suddenly, a fourth blood-red light entered the secret chamber and fused with his body. He woke again, shocked.

“I am... already out of Vorpai Jade. Could I have remembered incorrectly... Hm?” Even as he talked to himself, a fifth blood-red light appeared, making its way into his body.

He observed, dumbstruck, as a sixth, seventh, eighth blood-red light appeared... By the third day, countless blood-red lights had appeared, one after another, continuously fusing with his body. Patriarch Reliance’s heart surged with excitement, and his face filled with hope. Suddenly, his eyes opened.

“These... holy hell, these are clearly not my blood, but they are definitely my Blood Crystals. What’s going on? What the hell is going on?”

#### Chapter 40: Sublime Spirit Scripture

At the same moment that Patriarch Reliance opened his eyes, Meng Hao activated the fiftieth Vorpai Jade Blood Crystal. His head vibrated violently, and a scriptural text floated around him. Each and every character of the scripture emitted a bright golden light which pierced through his body. It completely overpowered the blood-red glow, leaving behind a glowing golden aura.

As the golden aura spread out, Meng Hao began to change. His Core lake churned violently as it began to take on a golden hue. As the lake water became gold, a thunderous roar sounded out, transforming his entire body.

His body filled with loud cracking sounds. His bones grew longer, his blood and flesh grew stronger. In an instant, he grew more powerful, both inside and outside.

His Qi vessels seemed to be as transparent as crystal, completely integrated into his physical body. His hair grew longer as he transitioned into a new state according to the mnemonics of the Sublime Spirit Scripture.

More time passed, approximately six hours, and then another boom sounded out inside Meng Hao. When he opened his eyes, they shined with a golden light.

Time passed, and the golden glow faded. He looked excited. Within his mind he could clearly see a mnemonic, branded indelibly onto his spirit. He understood every single line. This was ... the Sublime Spirit Scripture.

This was something that could cause blood to spray like rain in the outside world. This was the Qi Condensation manual that countless Sects would fight like mad for. And here it was, inside Meng Hao's head.

After the six hours of transformation, Meng Hao was still at the sixth level of Qi Condensation. But as for his new Cultivation method, it could be counted as one of the three best in all the lands of South Heaven.

This good luck was something that even the disciples of the great clans and Sects would have a hard time achieving.

Using the Cultivation method of this Qi Condensation manual, if Meng Hao was able to reach the Foundation Establishment phase, then he would definitely be able to establish a Flawless Foundation. In addition, his spiritual power would be much deeper than that of his contemporaries. Perhaps it would not be the most powerful, but as time passed, the power would slowly accumulate, and by the time he reached the Foundation Establishment stage, like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, he would have a Flawless Foundation rarely seen in the world!

As of right now, if he ran into Wang Tengfei, he would not be put into the precarious position he had been that day. In fact, he could now simultaneously control ten flying swords without losing any of their dexterity. His power had doubled!

Filled with excitement, Meng Hao clenched his fists, his heart filling with intense longing. After a while he took a deep breath, descended from the stone slab, and walked off.

At the moment, Patriarch Reliance was going wild with even more excitement than Meng Hao. Upon opening his eyes, he could see Meng Hao, as well as Chen Fan and Xu Qing. He waited eagerly for Meng Hao to produce another Blood Crystal, then watched in a daze as Meng Hao suddenly achieved enlightenment.

“Dammit, dammit. I should never have placed the enlightenment field out there. No, no, no. If I didn’t, how could I get the young pups to come here in the first place. But, but, but.. why did he have to gain enlightenment with only fifty Blood Crystals? A hundred would be better, two hundred, at least three hundred. If there were five hundred, I wouldn’t need to continue meditating here!” Patriarch Reliance was filled with depression. This was his greatest hope, and he was watching it disappear before his eyes. Without Blood Crystals to replenish himself, he could only continue on wasting away. And yet he knew there was nothing he could do.

“I didn’t do myself any favors that year. I closed myself up in here with no way out, and its very difficult to transmit my voice out. As far as magic goes, I’m currently too weak to do much of anything. What to do? What to do? I have to think of something...” His face grew anxious as he watched Meng Hao meet Xu Qing and Chen Fan out in the catacombs above the secret chamber. They proceeded toward the altar, clearly preparing to leave.

“If I caused all of the members of the Cultivation World of the State of Zhao to come here, I could use the power of their Cultivation bases to break me out of this meditation zone. If I can break out, then I can absorb their life force, then have a chance at my Second Severing.” Patriarch Reliance gnashed his teeth, squeezing as much as he could out of his weak Cultivation base, then slapping his right hand down onto the ground. It began to rumble.

At that same moment, Meng Hao was trying to come up with an excuse for why he had gone missing for those few days, and why his body looked different. Chen Fan smiled and nodded, and Xu Qing, seeing that Meng Hao wasn’t harmed, didn’t say anything. The three of them stepped up onto the altar, getting ready to depart.

Suddenly a roaring sound filled the air, and the entire catacombs began to shake. Their expressions changed as a giant crack split the earth in front of them and a massive stone stele slowly lifted up. After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, and it had finally completely emerged.

It was approximately thirty meters tall, inscribed with golden characters. It was a scripture, none other than the Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture!

The three of them stared in shock, especially Meng Hao. After all the trouble he had gone through to acquire the Qi Condensation manual, here it was in front of him. He looked at it in a daze. But after examining it further, a strange expression appeared on his face. The first two lines of the scripture inscribed on the stele were accurate, but the rest was a complete fabrication. It appeared to be filled abstruse mysteries, but since Meng Hao knew the details of the true scripture, he could tell instantly that this one was false.

He hesitated for a moment but didn't say anything.

Chen Fan's eyes glittered. He walked forward to stand beneath the stele, as did Xu Qing. They looked at it for some time, then exchanged shocked glances.

"We should take this with us," said Xu Qing slowly, "and let the Sect Leader decide what to do with it."

Meng Hao blinked, then nodded as if he completely agreed.

When Patriarch Reliance saw this, he laughed, more than pleased.

"Take it, take it, quickly! Take it out and let as many people know as possible. Hahaha! I'm so smart. I was worried people might break in here during my meditation, so I prepared that false stele. Of course, fearing it might be identified as false, I prepared a little trick. Once it's removed from this place, it will project a sign into the sky which people in all directions will be able to see. Originally it was designed to cause harm, but now, it's going to be quite helpful to me. Excellent. Excellent!" Excitement filled Patriarch Reliance's heart, but then suddenly, his eyes widened.

"We must not!" said Chen Fan in a dignified voice. After examining the stele carefully, his face filled with resolution. He shook his head, looking at Meng Hao and Xu Qing. "This stele is extremely important. If we take it out, then we would be bringing calamity upon the Sect. If an outsider learned of its existence, it could bring about our destruction. Let's each of us use a jade slip to make a copy of the scripture inscribed onto the stele. That way, we can take the contents out, but leave the stele in place. That is the safest method." Chen Fan's face was filled with sincerity and righteousness. What he said was completely selfless in nature, and also took the safety of the Sect into consideration. Xu Qing nodded, and Meng Hao, of course, did not disagree. They immediately copied the contents onto their jade slips, then stood onto the altar and made their departure.

Patriarch Reliance watched on in shock, then let out a furious howl.

"Dammit! Dammit! I will crush this generation's Sect Leader! How could you let a guy like this into the Inner Sect? He's completely honest and upright, which I despise! In my day, everyone in the Sect was dark and crafty. Take the scripture and keep it secret, that's a real disciple of my Sect. As for you, you righteous little pup, you... You've brought about my death!! Why did you have to stop them? Dammit! My Cultivation base! I, I, I..." Patriarch Reliance was so furious that his body trembled. He ground his teeth, and with an air of abandon, held his breath for a moment, then let out a low shout. He slapped the top of his own head, then spat up a mouthful of blood. The blood

transformed into a shapeless blood-red glow, which then began to send a reverberating hum throughout the secret chamber.

Amidst the reverberations, the blood-red glow suddenly shot toward Meng Hao and the others as they left the catacombs.

As soon as they stepped foot into the main temple hall of the Reliance Sect, as soon as He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang saw them, before they could even open their mouths, the blood-red glow shot out. None of them noticed.

Suddenly a thunderous sound rang out, and a bright light spread out, millions of meters in all directions, turning the entire sky bright red. Then, in the middle of it all, amidst a multitude of colors, appeared a strange sign.

There were a multitude of characters. Most of the characters weren't able to be seen clearly, but two were. They read...

Sublime Spirit...

The sign filled heaven and earth in all directions. The multitudinous characters of the scripture glowed brightly, especially the two characters "Sublime Scripture," shining out across the entire State of Zhao. Within the three Great Sects of the State of Zhao, all the disciples stared up in astonishment at the strange phenomenon. Streak after rainbow-like streak flew from the various closed-door meditation zones as multiple Sect Patriarchs emerged.

"This...."

"The Sublime Spirit Scripture!!"

"The Sublime Spirit Scripture has appeared. It appears to be located in the Reliance Sect. Could it be... could it be that the legendary Qi Condensation manual really is there?"

In the space of a moment, powerful members of several great Sects of the Southern Domain emerged from meditation. For the Sublime Spirit Scripture and the Qi Condensation manual to appear was an exciting matter. Without hesitation, they shot from the Southern Domain directly toward the State of Zhao. They all feared that if they weren't fast enough, their opportunity could be lost to the other powerful Southern Domain clans, or other Sects.

In the Southern Domain, the wind had shifted.

Prismatic streaks of light shot toward the Reliance Sect, as nearly twenty Cultivators from the three great Sects of the State of Zhao moved into action. The weakest among them was of the Foundation Establishment stage. Six were of the Core Formation stage. They cut through the sky with earth-shattering power.