

The Heavens 361

Chapter 361: A Tiny Favor

As soon as the voice filled the air, Zhou Dekun put his pill furnace away. The three approaching figures never saw it clearly, nor the medicinal pills.

The approach of these three people caused the four Grand Elders' faces to fall.

One of them was a middle-aged man wearing a long white robe, with face like white jade. Though he was middle-aged, he stood tall and straight. His features were handsome and beyond ordinary, and a slight, amiable smile could be seen on his face. However, the more you looked at the smile the colder it seemed.

This man had no totemic Qi on him, but rather, a faint medicinal aroma.

The words he had spoken just now were still echoing around as he stepped foot into the square to stand between Zhou Dekun and Meng Hao.

He radiated loftiness, and his white robes were embroidered with glittering pill cauldrons. A condescending expression could now be seen on his face.

“Is this how the Southern Domain's Dao of alchemy works? What a great letdown! I'm afraid I, Yan, will have to return to the Eastern Lands disappointed.” The man shook his head. He hadn't actually seen Zhou Dekun and Meng Hao concocting pills; he had merely smelled the lingering medicinal aroma in the air, and seen Zhou Dekun putting away the pill furnace. All of that left him disappointed.

Zhou Dekun's face was unsightly as he looked over the three new arrivals. In addition to the middle-aged man was an old man wearing an inky green robe, with eyes that flashed like lightning. His expression was cold and haughty. The emanations of his Cultivation base revealed him to be of the great circle of the late Nascent Soul stage.

Even the four Grand Elders of the Frigid Snow Clan couldn't compare to such a Cultivation base.

However, there was a Qi on the man that was very different from the other Cultivators. It was thick, and did not emanate out, but was clearly visible, like a signal beacon in the dead of night.

On the back of the old man's hand was a totem tattoo. As for any other tattoos, they were concealed by his voluminous robes, and were impossible to see.

The final person among the three was a young man. He didn't seem to be very old, and yet, there was an ancientness to him. He strode forward, occasionally glancing around, a reminiscent look on his face, even the touch of a sigh. His body emanated a fusion of the fluctuations of a normal Cultivator, as well as totemic Qi.

There were many Cultivators like this young man in the Black Lands, who combined normal cultivation techniques with totem cultivation. There was nothing particularly extraordinary about that; however, there seemed to be something special about him, although it was difficult to say what.

When the Frigid Snow Clan Grand Elders caught sight of the young man, their faces flickered, especially that of First Elder. An anxious, doubtful expression could be seen, along with disbelief.

Meng Hao looked the three over and then glanced away.

The middle-aged man from the Eastern Lands shook his head in disappointment and was about to leave when suddenly he stopped in mid-stride and said, "Eee?" Suddenly, a brilliant glow appeared in his eyes, a shocked expression covered his face. "That's... that's...." He started panting as he lifted his right hand into the air with a grasping motion. Immediately, strands of Qi began to drift into his hand and then congeal. Moments later, an illusory mass of Qi appeared above his palm.

The mass of Qi was green in color, and looked like a medicinal pill. However, it was merely illusory, the work of this man's magical technique.

When Meng Hao saw this, his eyes narrowed, and a faint glow flickered therein.

"Illusory Qi Distillation!" he thought, looking at the man. To be able to distill Qi into an illusory medicinal pill was an ability that not even all Violet Furnace Lords could employ.

It was a technique a level above the one used by Meng Hao just now to condense the liquid into a pill.

Meng Hao's eyes flickered. "This guy's Dao of alchemy is incredible."

Zhou Dekun's eyes went wide and radiated astonishment. However, he quickly concealed it. His bearing was still one of arrogance, but deep in his heart, great waves of astonishment crashed about.

"That was no gimmick," thought Zhou Dekun, taking an unconscious step back. "That was real Illusory Qi Distillation. Dammit, this is the Black Lands. How could an alchemist like this suddenly appear. He's... he's at least at the same level as a Violet Furnace Lord, maybe even halfway to being a Grandmaster!" His heart pounded as he tried to figure out a way to get away. It was at this time when the man from the Eastern Lands suddenly looked up.

"This pill...." The man named Yan took a deep breath, and his eyes began to shine with an intense light. "So, such a pill does exist under Heaven. Furthermore, it appears to have been created somewhat frivolously. It seems to me that whoever concocted this pill did not do so in the spirit of an alchemy duel. It seems almost an afterthought, and yet, the result embodies the natural spirit of Heaven and Earth!

"This pill is designed for the mere Foundation Establishment stage. However, it contains a great Dao of alchemy. Even more shocking is that this glittering, translucent pill does not seep any medicinal aroma! Were it not for the special Sect technique I just used, it would have been impossible to distill the illusory pill.

"Even more inconceivable is that the medicinal strength of this pill is above eighty percent. It seems that this isn't anything extraordinary for whoever concocted this pill, and yet, the pill was clearly concocted casually. However... to casually concoct a medicinal pill with eighty percent medicinal strength is... it's...." Yan's face was filled with excitement as he allowed the illusory pill to dissipate. When it was gone, he let out a long sigh.

"Now that is a medicinal pill! Truly an amazing pill of Heaven and Earth! Whoever concocted that pill is a true Grandmaster! The medicinal aroma it emits seems exceptional, but in fact, to compare it to that other vulgar medicinal pill is pure blasphemy! Pills like that are dog crap! Who would even compare the two!?" The man gave Meng Hao a level look, then turned to Zhou Dekun. Obviously he took the green pill to have been concocted by Zhou Dekun.

This was surely because before coming to this place, he had heard inhabitants of the Black Lands speaking of Grandmaster Zhou.

Meng Hao gaped, then shook his head with a wry smile.

It wasn't just him who was gaping. The surrounding Cultivators stared wide-eyed. As for the four Grand Elders, they were completely shaken.

They didn't understand very much about the Dao of alchemy, but the medicinal pill the in the man's hand just now looked very much like the pill Meng Hao had just concocted.

Furthermore, the man's words regarding a medicinal pill that was vulgar dog crap seemed to have been referring to the medicinal pill concocted by Zhou Dekun.

“Um...”

“Something seems off. Could it be that Grandmaster Zhou concocted two medicinal pills?”

“Well, in any case, Grandmaster Zhou is of noble character, and stands at the pinnacle of the Dao of alchemy. Nothing could possibly go wrong.”

As strange expressions flitted across the faces of the audience, Yan turned to face Zhou Dekun, his expression serious, as well as embarrassed. He clasped hands and bowed deeply.

“I spoke disrespectfully just now, Grandmaster Zhou, I hope you don't take offense. I'm just obsessed with the Dao of alchemy and can't bear to allow anyone to profane the Dao of alchemy. I was too impulsive now and allowed the trivial to overshadow my view. My eyes were covered by a single leaf, so to speak. Grandmaster Zhou, the East Pill Division commands my utmost admiration, and you truly deserve to be called the number one alchemist in the Black Lands. That single medicinal pill is enough to prove your skill in the Dao of alchemy. It has absolutely reached the pinnacle of perfection.” With that, he let out a long sigh, then once again clasped hands and bowed deeply, thoroughly convinced of his analysis.

Zhou Dekun wasn't sure what to do. He subconsciously cleared his throat as his mind reeled. This sudden turn of events was difficult for him to accept, and he was feeling a bit weak at the knees. He suddenly looked over at Meng Hao.

Seeing the enigmatic smile on Meng Hao's face made him feel even more apprehensive.

However, as the saying goes, when you ride a tiger, it's hard to get off. That is exactly the situation Zhou Dekun found himself in. He obviously could not declare the man's words to be untrue. Therefore, he cleared his throat and nodded, not daring to say a word.

After bowing once more, the man named Yan turned to look back at the young man with the ancient air. "Fellow Daoist Hanxue, there's no need for any more analysis. To be able to lay eyes on a true Grandmaster of the Dao of alchemy like Grandmaster Zhou is enough. From the medicinal pill just now, I was able to confirm that Grandmaster Zhou's Dao of alchemy is incomparable. Of this I am certain."

The young man smiled. "Grandmaster Yan, there's no need to underestimate yourself in such a fashion. Although I don't understand much about the great path that is the Dao of alchemy, I do know that victories can only be determined by means of fighting. Furthermore, I haven't been back to this place for many years, and would love to reminisce a bit. Grandmaster Yan, why not engage in an alchemy duel with this Grandmaster Zhou?" He made no attempt to conceal the ancientness which emanated out of him. As he spoke, he looked around slowly, and by the time he finished, his gaze had come to rest in the direction of the four Grand Elders, whereupon he said, "Well, you've grown up."

The words caused the faces of everyone in the square to flicker. The appearance of these three people had been far too sudden, especially considering that the old man was clearly a Western Desert Cultivator. Holy Snow City had long since adjusted their invisible protective spell formation so that totem Cultivators could not enter.

And yet, these three people had approached with the greatest ease, in front of the eyes of the hundreds of Cultivators present.

That, in addition to the words of the man named Yan, caused strange expressions to appear on everyone's faces. These three people suddenly seemed to be veiled in even more mystery.

And then came the words of the young man. The Frigid Snow Clan Elders suddenly looked very serious, especially First Elder. The instant the young man had appeared, his expression had been strange, even anxious. His eyes shone with disbelief.

As for the other three Elders, they looked suspiciously at the young man. This was because they were able to sense some of the Qi of their Clan on him.

"You...." said First Elder, panting.

Meanwhile, the man named Yan shook his head. Obviously he didn't agree with the young man's suggestion. Ignoring the shock on the faces of the surrounding Cultivators regarding the young man, he once again clasped hands and bowed deeply to Zhou Dekun.

“Grandmaster Zhou, I believe that there is no reason for us to compete in alchemy. However, I do have a tiny favor to ask.” He clasped hands and bowed reverently. “Would you please produce that pill you just concocted and allow me to bask in its glory? What do you say?!”

Zhou Dekun's heart was pounding. He kept a smile plastered on his face, but inside, he was on the verge of tears. “Uh... which pill are you talking about?”

Meng Hao coughed lightly, but didn't say anything.

Chapter 362: Still Won't Believe

Yan waited for a long time, but seeing Zhou Dekun's lack of even a nod, he finally clasped hands and bowed once again. His voice filled with sincerity, he said, “Grandmaster Zhou, I'm aware that such a request is a bit boorish. However, considering our mutual affection for the great Dao of alchemy, I am willing to trade one of the pills I personally concocted, just to be able to gaze upon that pill of yours.”

His Cultivation base was at the Nascent Soul stage, so for him to bow to Zhou Dekun in such a way showed the depth of his sincerity, as well as his devotion to the Dao of alchemy.

Everyone watching was of the opinion that for Zhou Dekun to not produce the pill for the man to look at would be extremely egotistical. After all, the man had made a polite request, and only wished to look at the pill. He was even willing to offer up payment to be able to do so.

Zhou Dekun's face was turning pale, and he was about to speak when Yan frowned.

“Grandmaster Zhou,” he said earnestly, “I merely wish to look at the pill. Will you really refuse such a simple request? Grandmaster Zhou, please, fear not. I would never go back on my word! I only wish to look at it!”

Meng Hao blinked, but didn't say anything. A faint smile twitched at the corners of his mouth, and he looked a bit embarrassed.

Anyone else who was bowed to so many times would feel honored. However, with each bow, Zhou Dekun's heart filled with more trepidation.

Gnashing his teeth, he decided to throw caution to the wind. Things had already proceeded to the point where he couldn't control the matter any more. He smacked his bag of holding to produce the pill he had just concocted, which he then threw over to Yan.

Yan's eyes flashed with excitement as he caught the pill with both hands. He looked down excitedly, filled with his love of the Dao of alchemy. He took a deep breath, closing his eyes to settle himself and place himself in the optimal state of mind. He looked as earnest as someone about to go on a holy pilgrimage.

At the same moment as he had gazed earnestly at the pill, the young man from their group of three, the one who had provoked such a nervous reaction from the Frigid Snow Clan's four Grand Elders, glanced around musingly.

"I can still sense father's aura," he said with a smile. "It seems he's not dead after all. Although, his aura couldn't possibly be any weaker. It seems that my father is still asleep."

These words didn't provoke any reaction from First Elder, but the faces of the other three immediately changed. They suddenly remembered an event which had occurred a very long time ago, a subject which was taboo within the Clan.

"Hanxue Zong!" said First Elder gratingly, staring angrily at the young man. [1]

His words echoed out, booming in the ears of the three other Elders and stabbing into the hearts of the other Clan members. They gaped in astonishment and disbelief, apparently all recalling some particular matter.

Suddenly a great commotion arose among the Frigid Snow Clan Cultivators.

"Hanxue Zong? That guy.... I remember! In the Clan histories there is a record of a Chosen of the Frigid Snow Clan from one thousand years ago. His name was Hanxue Zong!"

“There was such a person! According to the Clan histories, he was incomparably evil, even cannibalistic! He reached the Nascent Soul stage in less than one hundred years, and then began to absorb the life force and Cultivation base of his own father Hanxue Bao, who was one of the two Spirit Severing Patriarchs in the Clan at the time!”

“I remember that too. However, the Clan histories didn’t say what happened to Hanxue Zong after he was defeated. Didn’t Patriarch Hanxue Bao kill him?”

All the other Cultivators who were present heard and were shocked. Meng Hao’s eyes glittered. If what the Frigid Snow Clan members said was true, then the young man with the ancient voice was someone truly to be feared.

The young man laughed. “I’ve been away for so long, I never imagined the Clan would remember me.” His eyes glittered brightly as his gaze fell upon Zhou Dekun.

Zhou Dekun’s face was unsightly. He actually didn’t care a bit about the gaze of the young man; his heart was like a pile of ashes as he continuously sighed. The reason for this, of course, was because of the strange look on the face of the Yan Cultivator.

It started out as one of incredulity, then perplexity, and finally disbelief. His body began to tremble.

“I’m finished, finished....” thought Zhou Dekun bitterly. His heart was trembling.

The man name Yan suddenly took a deep breath and slowly looked back up at Zhou Dekun.

“That Pill...” began Zhou Dekun. Before he could continue, however, Yan once again clasped hands and bowed deeply.

“Grandmaster Zhou, sir, my Dao of alchemy does not compare to yours. However, there is really no need to produce some other medicinal pill with the intention of shaming me.” His tone was cool, but deep in his heart he was furious. “I know that you didn’t concoct this medicinal pill, Grandmaster Zhou. Why would you embarrass me with something so shoddy!?”

“I...” said Grandmaster Zhou, feeling even more anxious. He was about to try to explain, but was cut off.

“Grandmaster Zhou, I only want to take a look at that one medicinal pill. If you’re not willing to show it to me, then would you at least concoct a new pill for me to take a look at? Grandmaster Zhou, I plead with you to fulfill my wish!” He continued to suppress the anger he felt at heart. His desire to personally see such a medicinal pill caused him to once again clasp hands and bow.

In his heart, Zhou Dekun was cursing. He was filled with despair, and wanted to yell out, ‘that is the pill I concocted!’

However, everyone was looking at him, including the four Grand Elders. Even more importantly, the two young women behind him were also watching on.

In addition, the surrounding Cultivators were now starting to throw out words of encouragement.

“Grandmaster Zhou, why not let this outsider look at your medicinal pill? Let him know how awesome our Black Lands alchemists are!”

“Yeah, that’s right, Grandmaster Zhou! Teach this guy a lesson, show him that you’re a true Grandmaster!”

“Grandmaster Zhou, make this Eastern Lands Cultivator’s wish come true! Show him what it really means to be a Grandmaster!”

Once voice after another rang out. Normally, such words would cause Zhou Dekun to feel quite smug. Right now, however, they made him want to weep.

“I... I...” In his heart, Zhou Dekun was letting loose a torrent of curses, but on the outside, he was smiling. However, his smiling face looked much more unsightly than a crying one. When he looked over and saw Meng Hao gazing at him with a bashful smile, he felt like he couldn’t take it any more. It was then that he suddenly realized that Meng Hao’s embarrassed grin looked very familiar. However, because of his nervousness, he didn’t have time to consider the matter.

Gritting his teeth, Zhou Dekun slapped his bag of holding and retrieved the best pill he had ever concocted in the Southern Domain. He threw it over to the man named Yan.

Yan immediately caught it. After studying it for a moment he frowned. He was losing control of his rage, and it was now seeping onto his face. His body was also starting to tremble.

“Grandmaster Zhou, there’s no need to repeatedly insult me! Your Dao of alchemy may be incredible, but these second-rate pills you keep producing are nothing compared to the pill from earlier. Have you reached such a level that you refuse to produce pills that you yourself have concocted?! Do I, Yan, really not qualify to even look at your medicinal pills? Grandmaster Zhou, to be so overbearing is really going overboard!! I... I just want to look at that medicinal pill. Why can’t you just do me this one little favor!?”

Yan was extremely frustrated. The favor he had asked was not a very big one was it...? Finally, he suppressed his anger, and once again clasped hands and bowed. “Grandmaster Zhou, again, I plead with you to grant my wish. This is the last time I will ask.”

This last bow was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Zhou Dekun was on the verge of collapse. Panting, he suddenly exploded in a fury: “Favor! Favor!?! All you want is a favor!?! I’ve given you my medicinal pills. You can see that I concocted them myself! My Dao of alchemy is only average. What’s it to you?! That’s how I am. The pill you were looking at before wasn’t concocted by me! That guy concocted it!!” He pointed at Meng Hao. “That was his pill!! You think you’re pissed off? I’m even more pissed off than you!! You’re the one who made the mistake! If you want to look at that pill from before, then ask that guy!”

Zhou Dekun flicked his sleeve. His face was ashen and filled with rage as he turned to leave. His heart was pounding as he scrambled to come up with a way to salvage the situation.

The man named Yan stared in shock, then spun to look at Meng Hao.

It wasn’t just him. Everyone, including the four Grand Elders, and the hundreds of surrounding Cultivators, all slowly turned to look at Meng Hao. All eyes were now glued on him and him alone.

Most of the gazes were filled with shock and incredulity.

“Whether or not you concocted that pill doesn’t matter,” said Yan to Zhou Dekun. “Events today have reached the point that an alchemy duel is required in order to prove who is the alchemist that I so revere!” His glare shifted from Meng Hao to Zhou Dekun.

“Grandmaster Zhou,” he continued earnestly. “After I defeat this guy, I hope that you will no longer humiliate me, but will allow me to look at that pill.” Without looking at Meng Hao, he lifted his right hand up, and a pill furnace appeared.

Zhou Dekun was on the verge of tears. Even after everything that had happened, he didn't understand why this man just wouldn't believe him. Perhaps the act he had put on before had simply been too convincing. The man apparently really did believe that he was looking down on him.

Meng Hao cleared his throat and then hesitantly said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm not a local alchemist. I just lost a match to Grandmaster Zhou, and was told to leave the city. I'm afraid I can't compete with you in alchemy." He sighed, looking apologetic.

Hearing this, Zhou Dekun's face immediately fell, and he began to howl inwardly with anguish. "You're my ancestor, alright? My ancestor! Can you just not do this to me...."

Second Elder, the one who had previously demanded that Meng Hao leave the city, now looked angrily over toward Zhou Dekun. "Why can't you just take out the medicinal pill, Grandmaster Zhou," he thought. "Why cause all this trouble?"

Chapter 363: A First Glimpse at the Five Elements

Inwardly, Zhou Dekun was constantly cursing, although he wasn't sure exactly who he should be cursing. He was filled with consternation and regret.

The man named Yan frowned. He was starting to think that this Holy Snow City was really annoying. All he wanted to do was take a look at that medicinal pill. And yet after all this time, he hadn't been able to lay eyes on it for even a second.

Face grim, he turned slowly to look at the young man.

Hanxue Zong had been watching everything that was happening. He gave a slight smile, and then his body flickered; a moment later, he was standing directly in front of Zhou Dekun.

First Elder suddenly said, "Hanxue Zong, I don't know why you're not dead yet, but...."

"But what?" he said with a laugh, cutting off First Elder. "The reason I'm not dead is because the old man was soft-hearted. However, his soft-heartedness hasn't influenced my cultivation. I have nothing to do with the Frigid Snow Clan now. I'm a vassal of the Five Moons Tribe of the Western Desert, and I'm responsible for eradicating Holy Snow City! Furthermore, I've heard of this Grandmaster Zhou, and I'm interested in seeing for myself what his Dao of alchemy is like."

The surrounding Cultivators immediately broke out into an uproar. The four Grand Elders' faces were unsightly. After all, the old man among the group of three was at the great circle of the late Nascent Soul stage. His aura was threatening to the extreme, causing great pressure to bear down on everyone.

“Oh, don't worry,” said Hanxue Zong with a slight smile. “Nobody understands Holy Snow City and its resources better than me. But I'm not here today to fight. I just want to see this Grandmaster Zhou in an alchemy duel! The stakes are a grand bit of good fortune! Or maybe you could say the difference between life and death. Whoever wins, I promise that the Western Desert Cultivators won't attack the city for three months. That should give you plenty of time to prepare. Although, if you refuse, well....” It was at this point that shouts suddenly rang out from beyond the city walls. Prismatic beams of light shone in the air as a sea of wild animals appeared.

Spell formations glittered in the sky, surrounding everything with an intense pressure.

The Cultivators in the square were all shocked by the sight. Everyone in all of Holy Snow City looked up, minds reeling. The four Grand Elders' faces were extremely unsightly.

Hanxue Zong's appearance meant that all their previous preparations were now flawed. They would definitely need time to make adjustments. They weren't sure why he was giving them three months' time, but even if it was a trap, the Frigid Snow Clan had no choice but to leap into it. They needed those three months.

Hanxue Zong laughed as he looked at the Frigid Snow Clan Grand Elders. “However, it seems circumstances are a bit different now. Grandmaster Zhou isn't willing to produce his medicinal pill. If Mr. Yan is willing, then why not first have a little competition with this youngster. That way, Grandmaster Zhou will be able to see if Mr. Yan's Dao of alchemy can be taken seriously.”

First Elder looked a bit embarrassed, and was already quite irritated at Zhou Dekun. Second Elder was thinking the same thing. They had taken Zhou Dekun at face value, and determined that he was truly a Grandmaster. But now, it seemed he wasn't willing to show off any of his skill, and was instead pushing someone else to do so.

They weren't sure how to handle the situation.

First Elder frowned as he considered the situation. Finally, he sighed and looked over at Meng Hao. “Young friend, we would like to request that you concoct a pill. Regarding the matter of the Frigid Snow Larva, we can renegotiate after the current matter is settled. What do you say?”

Meng Hao smiled. He really didn't want to cause Zhou Dekun to lose face. But as far as anyone else was concerned, he wouldn't hesitate to humiliate anyone when it came to the Dao of alchemy, especially some self-proclaimed Eastern Lands alchemist.

So, he responded to First Elder with a nod.

Before he could even finish nodding, a flash of irritation could be seen on Yan's face. Obviously, he thought Grandmaster Zhou suspected his Dao of alchemy and wanted to use this method to probe him out.

With a cold harrumph, Yan glanced over Meng Hao and then looked back toward Zhou Dekun. With clasped hands, he said, "I am Yan Song, of Mount Alchemy in the Eastern Lands." This, of course, was the formal introduction before an alchemy duel. However, despite competing with Meng Hao, Yan Song obviously took it as a duel with Zhou Dekun. [1]

Zhou Dekun gave a bitter laugh in his heart. He was even more nervous and perturbed now. As far as he was concerned, everything on this day was a huge misunderstanding. However, there was no way to resolve the issue now.

Meng Hao's expression was the same as usual. Seeing that this was an official alchemy duel, he took a deep breath and was about to introduce himself in the formal way when Yan Song flicked his wide sleeve.

"There's no need for you to speak," he said. "I'm not interested in your name or where you're from. Just make the best medicinal pill you can make, alright?"

The disregard made Meng Hao frown.

Yan Song lifted up his hand, hovering above which was a pill furnace. Suddenly a flame emerged from his palm. This was no ordinary flame, but rather Nascent Soul fire. Only Nascent Soul Cultivators with a Fire-type Nascent Soul can produce such a flame.

The flame was reddish-orange and sent ripples out through the air. It took only a moment for the pill furnace hovering above his palm to turn bright red. Yan Song slapped his bag of holding to produce several small white bags, each of which was filled with various powders.

He measured out various portions of powder and then fed them into the pill furnace. Meng Hao narrowed his eyes at the sight of this, and Zhou Dekun took a deep breath.

“He’s not concocting pills with plants....”

“In Mount Alchemy in the Eastern Lands, we don’t concoct pills with plants,” said Yan Song coolly. “We use the five elements as the foundation. By procuring objects which conform to the five elements, then reducing them to powder, we can use the power of the five elements to concoct pills. This is the true great path of the Dao of alchemy!” His pill furnace began to emit intense rumbling sounds. Suddenly, dark clouds began to gather in the sky above and peals of thunder rang out.

Zhou Dekun’s heart began to race with alarm. It was obvious that the clouds up above were Pill Tribulation!

The surrounding Cultivators were shocked, and the four Grand Elders were breathing raggedly. They didn’t understand much about the Dao of alchemy, but they had heard of Pill Tribulation. To see it with their own eyes caused their hearts to tremble.

Yan Song glanced up proudly at the Tribulation. “In the Eastern Lands, we don’t worry about Pill Tribulation. In fact, inducing Pill Tribulation lets us harness the power of lightning, allowing the full power of the five elements to be unleashed!” As he spoke, booming sounds filled the air as multiple bolts of lightning shot down toward the pill furnace. In the blink of an eye, the lightning bolts merged together into a massive sheet of lightning

Yan Song lifted his head up and howled. He slapped the pill furnace with his left hand, causing the lid to open. A six-colored medicinal pill flew out, which Yan Song grabbed. Immediately, the clouds up above dissipated. However, the lightning continued to fall downward, slamming into the ground around Yan Song, making him look completely shocking.

“Unfortunately, the process was a bit rushed,” said Yan Song, glancing over at Meng Hao. “The end result is not the best it could be.” He then looked at Zhou Dekun, his eyes flashing, as if he were throwing down the proverbial gauntlet.

Zhou Dekun maintained his noble visage, but his heart was trembling violently.

Meng Hao’s eyes flickered in thought for a moment. Then, he waved his right hand to produce a pill furnace.

Yan Song glanced at Meng Hao's pill furnace, and his previous tranquil expression began to fill with a proud aura. This was a look he hadn't displayed when interacting with Zhou Dekun. Now that he was dealing with Meng Hao, however, he naturally acted differently.

However, after looking at the pill furnace for a moment, a look of surprise flitted across Yan Song's face momentarily. This was the pill furnace Meng Hao had acquired in the Black Sieve Sect, the Ten Thousand Refinements furnace.

The instant Zhou Dekun saw the pill furnace, his mind began to spin. He had seen a Ten Thousand Refinements furnace before that looked almost exactly like the one Meng Hao currently held in his hand. When it came to pill furnaces, to find two that looked exactly the same, especially a Ten Thousand Refinements furnace, might not be a common occurrence, but wasn't impossible.

Zhou Dekun hesitated for a moment and then suppressed his suspicions.

As for Meng Hao, his eyes glittered as he hefted the pill furnace in his right hand. Inside of him, the East Pill Everburning Flame kindled to life and then emerged to fill his palm. The flame itself was invisible, but the air around Meng Hao's hand twisted and distorted.

The sight of it caused Yan Song's eyes to narrow. For the first time, a look of doubt appeared on his face.

Based on an alchemist's concocting technique, it was possible to get a vague impression of his Dao of alchemy. Yan Song could instantly see that Meng Hao's techniques were beyond ordinary. That was especially true of the intangible flame which Meng Hao wielded. His heart filled with shock.

"That flame...." he thought. His heart filled with hesitation.

It was not the first time that Zhou Dekun saw Meng Hao's invisible flame, but this time, he examined it more closely than the before. After detailed examination, his heart began to flutter. However, his face was still plastered with the same enigmatic expression. He sported a slight smile, along with a look of commendation, as if watching someone of the junior generation concoct pills made him very happy.

The look on his face made everyone in the audience feel reassured that everything that was happening was all part of Zhou Dekun's plan, and that he really felt it beneath his dignity to let Yan Song look at his medicinal pill.

Inwardly, Zhou Dekun sighed. He felt bitter and nervous, and yet, also a bit proud. What he didn't notice was that Hanxue Zong was looking at him with an expression of intense interest.

Meanwhile, after a moment's thought, Meng Hao slapped his bag of holding to produce a medicinal plant. As soon as it appeared, he crushed it into a powder and fed it into the pill furnace.

For him to do so with only one medicinal plant was nothing special. However, Meng Hao subsequently pulled out one medicinal plant after another. Each one he crushed up into a powder before placing it into the pill furnace. This caused Yan Song to frown, and then smile coldly.

"So you want to imitate my five elements method of pill concoction," said Yan Song coolly. "Well, I think you really overestimate your capabilities. You might be good at concocting pills, but when it comes to my five elements concoction method, unless your skill in the Dao of alchemy exceeds mine, then you will never succeed!" However, as soon as he looked at Zhou Dekun, his heart began to pound. Zhou Dekun's expression was one of complete calm. His profoundly mysterious aura made Yan Song suddenly feel a bit uncertain.

Chapter 364: The Last Main Ingredient!

Meng Hao's expression was calm as he began to use the Alchemy Dao Transmutation Incantation. In the blink of an eye, the flame in his palm split into two sections. Deep inside of him, a vast array of various medicinal pill variations flitted about. He began to make adjustments, and as he did, the pill furnace slowly began to turn bright red.

Meng Hao's eyes glittered as he repeatedly performed various incantation gestures with his hand and then pushed onto the pill furnace. Every time he touched it, the pill furnace would rumble, and loud cracking sounds could be heard from within. Soon, a medicinal aroma began to emanate out. Strangest of all, almost as soon as the aroma emanated out, people tried to smell it, but couldn't!

The aroma was right there in front of them, but they couldn't smell it! This bizarre phenomenon caused all of the surrounding Cultivators' expressions to change. The four Grand Elders stared with wide eyes.

"What's going on? What pill is this guy concocting? You can sense that there's a medicinal aroma, but it's like it doesn't exist at all!"

“What a bizarre pill. This alchemist may be young, but obviously can’t be looked down upon.”

“Ah, it’s not a big deal. It’s probably some kind of illusion magic. Just look at Grandmaster Zhou, he obviously knows what’s going on.”

Zhou Dekun was inwardly dumbstruck, but without even thinking about it, he smiled, as if all of this was part of his strategy. He seemed to be offering his praise to a member of the junior generation.

He had practiced this expression to the point where the proverbial furnace flame had grown green. It had reached the pinnacle of perfection. At this point, it was as if Mt. Tai was crumbling in front of his very eyes, but even as it did, he calmly let everyone know that it was his doing.

This was one of the reasons he had been able to rise to prominence in the Black Lands. By being able to display an expression like this without even thinking about it, he left all onlookers scared stiff.

Yan Song’s expression was one of extreme concentration as he gazed at Meng Hao’s pill furnace. Slowly, his eyes began to fill with disbelief.

“That’s... Self-Contained Pill Aroma! The pill is not yet complete, so the aroma of the pill is illusory. It emanates out for the purpose of absorbing the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth! Everyone can sense it, but are unable to actually smell it! This is a realm of pill concocting that exists in legend! This guy...” The more Yan Song thought about it, the more shocked he became. He glanced over at Zhou Dekun. Seeing the man’s deep, unfathomable expression caused his heart to pound.

“Just how profound is this Zhou Dekun’s Dao of alchemy?” he thought.

As the onlookers continued to be overwhelmed with shock, Meng Hao waved his left hand to produce some more medicinal plants. This time, he did not crush them into powder, but rather, collected sap, twigs, and the like, which he then fed into the pill furnace. The red glow of the pill furnace grew even more intense. Soon, an hour had passed, whereupon Meng Hao finally slapped the pill furnace.

A booming sound filled the air, causing everyone to assume that the pill was finally fully concocted. It was at this time that the ground began to tremble, and suddenly, something like a screaming wind kicked up. However, it only took a moment for everyone to realize that this was no wind!

It was spiritual energy!

All of the spiritual energy in Holy Snow City began to rush in, forming something like a massive vortex.

The nucleus of this raging vortex of spiritual energy was none other than the pill furnace in Meng Hao's hand.

"This...." First Elder strode forward slowly, panting. He had never before heard of such an upheaval of spiritual energy occurring because of pill concoction.

The other Grand Elders watched on dumbstruck, filled with shock. The other Frigid Snow Clan members, including Hanxue Shan, all watched on with expressions of disbelief.

Everyone was equally shocked, including the hundreds of other Cultivators that made up the audience. Their breaths came in ragged pants, and soon, a buzz of conversation filled the air.

"Can pill concocting really cause such an influx in spiritual energy? What... what pill is this?"

"Just what pill is he concocting, exactly? This is almost completely unbelievable!"

As the conversations filled the air, Zhou Dekun continued to watch on proudly. He even lifted up his hand to slowly stroke his beard, exuding a look of admiration. It seemed as if the incredible goings-on were all meticulously planned by he himself.

Of course, inside, Zhou Dekun's heart wouldn't stop racing, and he was on the verge of screaming.

"Inhuman," he thought. "Bizarre! I never imagined that there could be someone besides Fang Mu who is such a freak when it comes to the Dao of alchemy. Just what exactly is he doing? What pill is he concocting...?" As his nervousness grew, his look of pride and complacency continued to emanate out.

When people saw his expression, Yan Song included, it only served to increase his standing in their eyes.

“There’s no Pill Tribulation,” thought Yan Song, looking up into the sky. “This medicinal pill seems shocking, but actually isn’t that amazing.” He felt a little bit better because of this.

It was at this point that Meng Hao casually said, “Ladies and Gentleman, I’m afraid you’ll have to wait just a little bit longer. This pill is still lacking the final important ingredient.” The pill furnace was bright crimson, and the air around it twisted and distorted. Vast amounts of spiritual energy continued to pour in from all directions, sucked into the pill furnace. It was so bright now that it looked like Meng Hao was holding a small sun in his hand.

As of this moment, Meng Hao looked wildly impressive.

The audience was instantly astonished.

“It’s missing the final main ingredient? What’s that supposed to mean? Why doesn’t he just put the final ingredient in right now?”

“Something seems off. Could it be that he’s waiting for someone to come deliver the final ingredient?”

The four Grand Elders frowned in confusion and then looked over at Zhou Dekun.

It wasn’t just them. Yan Song looked over at him with complete perplexity.

In addition, Hanxue Zong, as well as the late Nascent Soul stage Cultivator, who hadn’t spoken a single word so far, were both looking at Zhou Dekun.

Zhou Dekun gave an indifferent smile as he continued to stroke his beard. He looked calm and enigmatic, as if he were enjoying watching his plans play out. His ability to project this air of superiority really had been perfected to the limit.

Inside, though, he was nervously cursing everything including Heaven, Earth, and even the audience. Two alchemists had appeared, each one seemingly more inhuman than the other; and yet, everyone who was watching assumed that he was the strongest of all.

Only someone with quite a strong will would be able to prevent themselves from collapsing. Zhou Dekun cleared his throat. Everyone was looking at him, awaiting his explanation.

“Grandmaster Zhou, please clear things up for us.”

“Yeah! Grandmaster Zhou, what’s the final main ingredient that this guy needs for his concoction? Will it be here soon?”

Even Yan Song clasped hands toward Zhou Dekun and earnestly said, “Grandmaster Zhou, please clear up this confusion.”

“I’ll clear up your sister’s confusion! How the hell would I know what the final ingredient is!” Of course, this was merely what Zhou Dekun said in his heart. His face remained as proud as ever. He smiled slightly and looked up toward the sky.

“In my estimation,” he said, “the final ingredient is incredibly extraordinary in nature. It is simple, and yet mysterious. It is extraordinary in its ordinariness. The Dao of alchemy which requires such an ingredient is not something that the likes of you could understand. Since you can’t understand, why do you request an explanation?” Zhou Dekun maintained his air of superiority as he made this vague explanation. If everyone hadn’t already decided that he was an amazing Grandmaster, they would definitely take such an explanation to be poppycock.

However, because of their preconceptions, it actually seemed profound and enigmatic.

In fact, the reason Zhou Dekun looked up into the sky as he made his explanation was because he had the feeling whatever this final main ingredient was, if it was missing, that meant someone would have to deliver it. And if someone were to deliver it, they would definitely do so by flying over with it.

Even if it wasn’t delivered by someone via flight, he had another reason for looking up into the sky. Medicinal plants were a product of Heaven and Earth. Therefore, looking up toward the Heavens could not possibly be an incorrect strategy.

Meng Hao noticed what Zhou Dekun was doing, and suddenly got a strange feeling. All of a sudden he realized that Zhou Dekun was far more amusing in the Black Lands than he had been in the Violet Fate Sect.

Meng Hao also glanced up at the sky and then thought, "I've been here for about seven or eight days. According to my calculations, the time should be close. I shouldn't have to wait much longer." Even as he was thinking this, his expression suddenly changed. It was without hesitation that he slapped his bag of holding. The Li Clan Patriarch suddenly appeared, flung up high into the air.

A boom rang out as a lightning bolt shockingly appeared in the middle of the boundless blue sky. The deafening sound it made far exceeded that of the Pill Tribulation. It slammed down onto the Li Clan Patriarch, who instantly let out a miserable shriek. The lightning bolt immediately began to weaken, and before the Li Clan Patriarch could even begin to curse, Meng Hao put him back into his bag of holding. Then, he redirected the weakened lightning bolt directly into the pill furnace.

The final main ingredient Meng Hao had been waiting for was none other than Tribulation Lightning!

A boom echoed out of the pill furnace. The lightning danced, sending out shocking peals of deafening thunder. The pill furnace began to tremble, and then the lid flew off of it. A medicinal pill shot out, which was surrounded by lightning.

The instant the pill appeared, the sky filled with dense black clouds. These were not Tribulation clouds, but rather naturally occurring ones. It seemed as if this medicinal pill could attract natural thunder and lightning. Up above, the clouds roiled, causing the very earth to quake.

The medicinal aroma which had been emanating out suddenly roiled and was sucked into the medicinal pill, congealing therein. The pill instantly turned translucent and began to emanate blinding light. It was clearly far beyond ordinary.

At the same time, all of the spiritual energy in the area surged like tidewaters. The pill seemed to suddenly give birth to a huge vortex that sucked in all of the spiritual energy. The thunder from up above grew even louder.

Just as it seemed that the lightning was about to begin falling, Meng Hao reached out and grabbed the lightning-covered medicinal pill. He gave it a close look and then nodded.

This was the first time he had attempted to concoct something like this. After seeing Yan Song use his five elements concocting technique, he had been inspired to fuse that method with his own. Although he hadn't completely succeeded, it had opened up a new branch of thought within his mind.

“Using this method to concoct pills actually leads to better results,” he thought. “Furthermore, the variations within the five elements make it possible to concoct pills according to the theory of creating something from nothing....” With a final glance at the pill, he looked calmly over at Yan Song.

Everyone in the audience was panting, including the four Grand Elders. They stared at the pill surrounded by lightning, as did all of the hundreds of Cultivators in the square.

Yan Song was watching on, stupefied. When Meng Hao had started his concocting, Yan Song had looked down on him. But as the process continued, his attitude gradually changed. When the illusory pill aroma appeared, astonishment took root in his heart. By the time the spiritual energy of Heaven and Earth began to surge toward it, he was thoroughly shaken. When the lightning appeared, he was positively, absolutely stunned.

His breathing was ragged and his eyes wide as he stared at the medicinal pill and realized that the technique used to create it was above and beyond his own five elements concocting technique. This new technique was a true fusion.

Chapter 365: A Grand Scam

“That’s impossible! How could it be...? This guy...” Yan Song glanced subconsciously over at Zhou Dekun. If he hadn't already come to the conclusion that the man was truly a Grandmaster, then at the moment, he would definitely be thinking that the true Grandmaster was actually Meng Hao.

Despite his certainty, he was still shaken. After hearing Zhou Dekun's words just now, it was hard to tell... whether he had planned all of this or whether it just happened because he had been embarrassed by Yan Song.

Yan Song wasn't the only person looking at him in this light. The Cultivators in the audience, the four Grand Elders, and the former Frigid Snow Clan member Hanxue Zong were all inwardly moved by Zhou Dekun.

As they all looked over at him, what they saw was his cool, indifferent smile, and his expression of praise. He was clearly concerned about the member of the junior generation, which caused everyone to gape in astonishment.

His proud bearing, which exuded the air of a Grandmaster, caused everyone to muse about how Zhou Dekun truly was at the peak of the Dao of alchemy.

Even Yan Song was hesitating now. Zhou Dekun's performance was really too perfect. In fact, it even caused Meng Hao to feel surprised. If he didn't personally know Zhou Dekun, then even he would have been fooled.

Zhou Dekun's tranquil smile actually covered up the quavering of his heart. Inwardly, he was filled with shock and astonishment. How could he ever have possibly imagined that what Meng Hao was waiting for was a bolt of lightning?

"He used lightning as his final main ingredient for the pill?" he thought. "He's inhuman! A freak! He's even more of an aberration than Fang Mu!" However, the more his heart trembled, the calmer his face was. This skill which he had been working on over the years in the Black Lands really had reached the acme. In fact, it was at such a level that sometimes he even convinced himself of his own marvelousness.

Most of the time, he was clearheaded about the matter, but right now, he was moaning inwardly. Because of his well-honed skill, he had gazed proudly up into the sky just now, an action which now caused the onlookers' eyes to suddenly realize what had happened.

"So, Grandmaster Zhou was looking up into the sky just now because he knew all along that lightning was the main ingredient!"

"That's right! I was wondering about that. Now it's really obvious that Grandmaster Zhou is a true Grandmaster of the Dao of alchemy!"

Yan Song took a deep breath, and his face filled with a look of admiration. This was not to mention even the four Grand Elders, and Hanxue Zong of the Frigid Snow bloodline, who didn't really know much about the Dao of alchemy, but made their judgement of Zhou Dekun based on Yan Song's reaction.

"What pill is that?" asked Yan Song, a serious expression on his face. As of now, there was no look of contempt on his face. Meng Hao's medicinal pill had thoroughly proven the level of his Dao of

alchemy. Yan Song was now very much interested in him, and even placed him on a similar level as Zhou Dekun.

Meng Hao smiled. “Just a simple pill that should be able to release a Lightning Sea.” This was not the type of pill that you could consume, but rather more like a magic pill. Meng Hao had come to the realization that using the five elements concocting method was more effective when used to concoct magic pills.

Yan Song stood there thoughtfully for a moment. There was no need for him to examine the pill closely. Considering he had observed the concoction process as well as the final result, he was now able to tell without a doubt that Meng Hao’s words were true.

This pill was something he himself couldn’t concoct unless he got incredibly lucky and had lightning fall during the concoction process to provide as the main ingredient!

In the past, he had seen lightning used to make pills, but it was usually just a shortcut used to improve the effectiveness of the five elements. It was nothing like what Meng Hao had done, in which he actually used lightning as the main ingredient.

The difference between the two made the superior and inferior completely obvious.

Zhou Dekun cleared his throat and then somberly said, “Excellent. That pill concocting technique of yours is very interesting. Going forward, you should put more thought into it. Perhaps you can open up a new path on the Dao of alchemy. When traversing the great road of the Dao of alchemy, one can never be complacent. Alchemy is boundless, and the Dao is infinite. We must maintain an inquisitive heart in order to validate the great Dao of alchemy of Heaven and Earth!” His face was filled with the arrogance of seniority, as if he were a great master giving some pointers.

A strange expression was written on Meng Hao’s face, like a smile, but not. Yan Song took a deep breath and then clasped hands and bowed to Zhou Dekun.

“Grandmaster Zhou, your words are the pinnacle of truth. I, Yan Song, am now thoroughly convinced. There is no need for me to look at that medicinal pill from before. I also understand why you are not willing to let me look at it. You feel that my Dao of alchemy is insufficient, and that looking at the pill would disturb my heart and mind. Grandmaster Zhou, I will remember your kindness for the rest of my life.” Once again, he bowed with utmost sincerity.

Zhou Dekun's expression was as proud as ever as he smiled indifferently. This, in turn, caused the other onlookers to view him with even more admiration. The four Grand Elders now looked at Zhou Dekun with even more veneration.

All of this caused Meng Hao to stare in shock. He looked down at the pill in his hand, and then over at Zhou Dekun. He wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. The pill he had laboriously concocted was casually commented on by Zhou Dekun, and then everyone took his words at face value.

"Zhou Dekun really has mastered some new skills here in the Black Lands," thought Meng Hao. As he gazed at the man, Zhou Dekun looked at him, and suddenly began to tremble inwardly. Then, he opened his mouth with the intention of offering some true praise toward Meng Hao.

However, it was at this moment that the late Nascent Soul Cultivator who stood next to Hanxue Zong suddenly shot toward Zhou Dekun.

The four Frigid Snow Grand Elders had been watching this man for some time now, so as soon as he made his move, they flew to intercept him.

They all slammed into each other, and a huge boom echoed out. Blood sprayed from the mouths of the four Grand Elders. The old man from the Western Desert trembled. Suddenly, he changed direction and shot toward Meng Hao.

The four Grand Elders fell back, flashing incantation gestures, after which they pointed toward Zhou Dekun. A glittering shield immediately surrounded him.

Zhou Dekun's heart was quivering, and yet without even thinking about it consciously, he caused utter calm to remain on his face. He looked as supercilious as ever. Seeing this caused Hanxue Zong to feel even more excited. He also shot forward.

He moved with incredible speed, appearing instantaneously next to the shield protecting Zhou Dekun. He lifted his hand up and pressed gently down onto the shield; it instantly shattered into pieces. The four Grand Elders howled, and were about to charge forward when Hanxue Zong waved his right hand and swept them away. At the same time, his left hand snaked out to grab ahold of Zhou Dekun.

Zhou Dekun's body suddenly trembled in fear, and he was about to scream.

“There’s no need to be alarmed, Grandmaster Zhou,” said Hanxue Zong. “I won’t hurt you, sir. I just feel that leaving a Grandmaster as talented as you in a place like this is a true waste. Come with me to the Western Desert. The tasks you will face won’t measure up to the requirements laid forth in this place. However, if you refuse, then I’ll be forced to help you understand what it means to live a life worse than death!”

Having been grabbed in this fashion, Zhou Dekun was no longer able to keep up the charade. His face was pale white, his body shivered, and intense fear filled his heart.

“This is a mistake!” he blurted. “It’s all a misunderstanding. My... my... my Dao of alchemy can’t even compare to his!” He raised a trembling hand to point at Meng Hao. “If you want to take someone, take him! If you take me, you’ll be losing out big time!”

A cold light appeared in Hanxue Zong’s eyes. “Grandmaster Zhou, you could see the lack of lightning as the main ingredient in that pill. Don’t think you can fool me with such words!”

“I’m... I’m really not that good!” shrieked Zhou Dekun, his heart sinking. “I swear! Look, everything I said was just empty talk, not some sort of absolute truth! Take him! He’s the actual Grandmaster! He can compare with my Junior Brother Fang Mu.... He’s exponentially more amazing than me!”

When Meng Hao saw the Nascent Soul Cultivator approaching, he used the Bloodburst Flash without hesitation, disappearing and then reappearing several dozen meters away.

“Eee?” said the Western Desert Cultivator. He was about to continue in pursuit when Hanxue Zong flew up into the air, clutching the trembling Zhou Dekun in hand.

“There’s no need to cause trouble for him,” said Hanxue Zong coolly. “We came here to invite only the most outstanding Cultivator to join us. Now that we have Grandmaster Zhou, that other guy is unessential.”

“I’m not the most outstanding!” cried Zhou Dekun, his scalp going numb. “Dammit, I’m really not, okay!? This is a mistake! A misunderstanding! I was putting on an act just now. Really, it was an act! I’m not a Grandmaster, I’m just a regular old Furnace Lord from the East Pill division. That guy is the real Grandmaster. It’s true, he’s the Grandmaster. Take him, okay!?!?” He wished to weep, but no tears would come out. His deception had been too good and he had completely lost control of it.

He began to tremble and wail mournfully.

“There’s no need to act this way, Grandmaster Zhou,” said Hanxue Zong, laughing disapprovingly. “I was watching you this entire time, and couldn’t possibly be mistaken. Whatever method you used, you were able to spot the clues and identify the final main ingredient. That, is true skill! I, Hanxue Zong, could not possibly be mistaken. You are the true Grandmaster of the Dao of alchemy. The act you are putting on right now, unfortunately, is simply too fake!”

“Correct,” said Yan Song. “From the moment I arrived until now, Grandmaster Zhou has been tuned in to all of the fine details, and has grasped each key moment. Whether it be the pill aroma or the lightning as the main ingredient, Grandmaster Zhou consistently had an expression of praise for the junior generation. Enlightenment regarding the Dao of alchemy is something that cannot be faked. I do not possess such skill, nor do other alchemists. Only Grandmaster Zhou has this skill. There are few people I truly admire, but as of today, there is one more on my list: Grandmaster Zhou!” With that, he clasped hands politely and bowed.

By this point, Zhou Dekun was actually wailing. He felt as if he were the one who had been scammed, not by others, but by himself.... The tears were welling up in his eyes. He looked down at the beautiful girls, and he already missed them. He thought about the barrenness of the Western Desert, and how frightening of a place it was, and he began to tremble and blabber more explanations.

“I’m really not a Grandmaster. I was in the wrong. Truly, in the wrong! I won’t pretend to be a Grandmaster anymore. Take him, okay! You should take him! Dammit! He’s the real Grandmaster....” Zhou Dekun’s heart grew dark and filled with regret. It didn’t matter what he said now, no one would believe him.

“Quit the act, Grandmaster Zhou,” said Hanxue Zong, laughing. “Even if he is a Grandmaster, you, Grandmaster Zhou, are the very person I have been waiting for!” Holding Zhou Dekun in hand, he flew up into the air.

The Western Desert Nascent Soul Cultivator gave Meng Hao a final cold glance, then turned and flew up into the sky. It was at this point that suddenly, a voice filled all of Holy Snow City.

“Screw off!” The words caused Heaven and Earth to shake. The protective spell formations outside of the city fell to pieces as if a massive wind had blown across them. Up in the sky, ripples could clearly be seen that were emanating out from the ground beneath Holy Snow City. As they passed the city walls, they turned into a cyclone that instantly shredded into pieces all of the beasts and

Cultivators who were waiting there. In the blink of an eye, everything in the area thousands of kilometers around Holy Snow City was gone.

As the ground quaked, the minds of all of the Cultivators in the city reeled, and their faces filled with shock.

Hanxue Zong's face fell. The Nascent Soul Cultivator's body trembled as he coughed up a mouthful of blood. His face filled with astonishment. Yan Song also coughed up some blood before he hastily shot up into the air.

"Let's get out of here!" said Hanxue Zong, his eyes flickering grimly and keeping a firm grip on Zhou Dekun, whose face was stained with tears. Then, glowing light surrounded the four of them, and their bodies began to grow blurry as a teleportation spell activated.

"This is really a mistake, okay? I was really faking, I'm really not a Grandmaster! He is! He..." Zhou Dekun's plaintive cries echoed out in the air. Down below, the hundreds of Cultivators watched on with looks of fury and helplessness.

"Grandmaster Zhou!!"

"Dammit, they came for Grandmaster Zhou!"

The faces of the four Elders were unsightly, but they could do nothing but watch as Hanxue Zong and the others disappeared.

Zhou Dekun's cries fell upon the ears of all the onlookers, causing their hearts to fill with sorrow.

"Who would ever have thought that at the critical Moment, Grandmaster Zhou would try to put on such an act," they thought. "If we didn't know him, we might have thought his words to be true."

As for Meng Hao, he stared with wide eyes. Everything that had happened was completely beyond his powers of prediction.

"This time, I wasn't trying to scam anyone," he thought reflectively. "How could things have worked out this way? Maybe I've just scammed so many people, that I ended up scamming myself?"

Chapter 366: The Path of Five Colors

Gradually the land stopped shaking. The voice which had emanated from down below faded away, and silence fell upon Holy Snow City.

The crowds of people were gazing up into the sky at the spot where Zhou Dekun had disappeared. Everyone was taciturn, their moods low.

Grandmaster Zhou, the number one alchemist in the Black Lands, had been taken away as simply as that.

He would never return to the Holy Snow City that he loved so much. Perhaps he would end up in a new location, and would continue to build on his reputation as a Grandmaster...

This sudden event was something that no one present could ever have predicted.

Meng Hao looked thoughtfully up into the sky, contemplating what would have happened if he had prevailed in the alchemy duel with Zhou Dekun, or if Zhou Dekun had not acted so superior just now. Perhaps it wouldn't have been Zhou Dekun who was taken away but...

Meng Hao himself.

He stood there thoughtfully.

Around him, the hundreds of other Cultivators were similarly thoughtful. Too much had occurred here today, and everyone seemed incapable of absorbing it all.

Surrounded by quietness, Meng Hao slowly shook his head and glanced at Hanxue Shan, who had a blank expression on her face, and then the old woman, Third Elder. He clasped hands and bowed to her, then turned and slowly made to leave this world of silence.

As he was about to walk off, the surrounding Cultivators seemed to come to their senses. One by one, they turned to look at him.

The four Grand Elders also turned to look at him. Second Elder held his tongue, but Fourth Elder took a hesitant step forward. The old woman said nothing.

First Elder, the midget, put a smile onto his face and strode forward. In a loud voice, he addressed Meng Hao: “Grandmaster, where are you going?”

Meng Hao stopped and looked back. “I’m surnamed Meng,” he said. “Earlier, someone said that I wasn’t welcome in Holy Snow City. Naturally, that means I need to leave.” He sighed, shook his head, and turned to leave.

The words immediately caused the surrounding hundreds of Cultivators to feel shock in their hearts. How could they not react to such words? Before, when Zhou Dekun was present, they all looked down on Meng Hao. But Zhou Dekun was nothing but history now. Suddenly, Meng Hao’s position was infinitely higher than before.

Without Zhou Dekun, there was no Grandmaster here. To Holy Snow City, such a loss was too vast!

First Elder glared angrily at Second Elder, then strode forward laughing to block Meng Hao’s way.

Immediately, the surrounding Cultivators began to cry out to Meng Hao.

“Grandmaster Meng, what happened earlier was a misunderstanding. The Frigid Snow Clan was inconsiderate in its treatments of you as a guest. There’s no need to bring it up again. Grandmaster, please in no way allow the misunderstanding to remain upon your heart.”

“Yeah! Grandmaster Meng, you are at the pinnacle of the Dao of alchemy. There’s no need for you to lower yourself to our level. This place is your home, Grandmaster Meng!”

“Grandmaster Meng, why not just stay? If you leave, your talent will never be noticed in the outside world. If you stay here, you can become even more famous!”

“Grandmaster Meng, we beg of you to stay!”

The voices of hundreds of Cultivators rose into the air, filled with sincerity and cordiality. Meng Hao immediately appeared moved. He stopped walking, looked around at the surrounding Cultivators, and then clasped hands and bowed deeply.

“I am indebted to your kindness, Fellow Daoists. Generally, I, Meng, could never refuse. However... there are people here who don’t like little old me. I’m afraid I have no choice but to leave.” His words caused Second Elder’s face to immediately fall; he looked around to find quite a few people staring at him. Gritting his teeth, he strode forward a few paces and then clasped hands and bowed deeply to Meng Hao.

“Grandmaster Meng, please forgive me. I was wrong earlier, and I beg for you to not take offense. In my heart, you are truly at the pinnacle of the Dao of alchemy, Grandmaster. When the Frigid Snow Clan was in dire straits, you thought nothing of the hardships and ignored the danger, immediately coming to our aid. I will never forget your kindness, even when my teeth fall out from old age!

“First Elder,” he continued solemnly. “I suggest that we give Grandmaster Meng a Frigid Snow Larva. That is the only way to properly express the depth of the gratitude of the Frigid Snow Clan.”

“One is not enough!” said Fourth Elder. He was a grim-faced man, but he wore a smile now as he took a few steps forward and bowed deeply to Meng Hao with clasped hands. “One is definitely not enough. We currently have two on the verge of completion. We should give both of them to Grandmaster Meng, that would be the best. First Elder, I hope that you can agree. This is the only way to express the gratitude of the Clan. As for the larvae, as long as the Clan exists, and time is sufficient, we can always raise more.”

First Elder felt a bit anxious as he looked at Meng Hao. With Zhou Dekun gone, the only person they had left was this Grandmaster Meng. He gritted his teeth and said, “You are absolutely correct! Grandmaster Meng, please, fear not. The Frigid Snow Larva will be delivered into your hands within a year’s time!”

Meng Hao was inwardly rejoicing, but on the outside he appeared to hesitate. This was something he had just learned to do from Zhou Dekun.

His hesitation caused the surrounding Cultivators to all call out, urging him to stay. Meng Hao continued to hesitate, and then started to shake his head. A second round of crying out then began, and finally he appeared to be vacillating.

“It’s not that I don’t want to stay,” he said with a sigh. “But this place is very dangerous. My Cultivation base is low, and I’m afraid I won’t be powerful enough to protect myself... Furthermore, I can only stay here for about half a year. There’s simply no way I can stay an entire year.”

First Elder and the others exchanged glances. Finally, the old woman spoke up, looking at Meng Hao with a strange expression. "If the four of us work together, we can reduce the time by more than half. We can produce the Frigid Snow Larva in less than half a year."

"After you have the Frigid Snow Larva, Grandmaster Meng, you can simply leave," said First Elder. "We won't do anything to stop you."

Many of the Cultivators in the audience were continuing to call out to Meng Hao, urging him to stay. Considering that there were so many solemn requests, Meng Hao finally reluctantly agreed. This caused vast amounts of respectful words of thanks to ring out.

It was in this manner that Meng Hao ended up staying in Holy Snow City. It was also how he became famous there. Regardless of outside Cultivators or Frigid Snow Clan members, the name of Grandmaster Meng resounded in their ears like thunder.

Were it not for Zhou Dekun's presence in the city earlier, it would not have been so easy for them to accept him, nor to view him with such importance.

Thankfully, Zhou Dekun had laid a strong foundation, and had caused everyone in the city to develop a healthy respect for the Dao of alchemy. The fanaticism with which the locals viewed alchemists made the Frigid Snow Clan members accept Meng Hao with complete courtesy.

It was only logical under such circumstances for Meng Hao to take the foundation Zhou Dekun had built up and make it completely his own.

If poor Zhou Dekun knew what was happening, he would surely cough up several mouthfuls of blood and be filled with endless regret. He would certainly sigh and think about how it's impossible to constantly put on an act. Sadly, what he had worked so painstakingly to create, now belonged to Meng Hao.

However, Meng Hao also felt somewhat wronged. After all, he hadn't set out to achieve this situation; it was the result of a series of lucky coincidences. Everything had landed directly in front of him, and there had been no way to avoid it. It had just smacked right into him.

In the following days, almost all the Cultivators in the city were talking about Grandmaster Zhou. Meng Hao's residence was under special guard by Frigid Snow Clan members.

During this time, quite a few powerful Cultivators came to pay him a formal visit. They were all extremely polite. The way that Meng Hao dealt with them was very different than the mysterious vagueness that had been the hallmark of Zhou Dekun. Meng Hao would smile and give them actual pointers regarding the Dao of alchemy. With only a few words, he was able to cause the local Cultivators to instantly be lost in thought.

Half a month later, Meng Hao had thoroughly cemented his place within Holy Snow City. His name was even beginning to spread throughout the world outside the city walls.

As for the ninety meter tall Wild Giant, people already viewed it as Meng Hao's personal mount. The Western Desert Dragoneer was viewed as Meng Hao's footman.

Many of the Cultivators who planned to request pill concoction services from Meng Hao found out that he liked lotus flowers. As such, they spared no cost in searching a variety of locations to find lotuses for him. Soon, Meng Hao's courtyard was thoroughly festooned with snow lotuses, the aroma of which covered everything.

Regarding the Black Lands Palace invasion, as Hanxue Zong had promised, they truly would not make any military incursions for three months. This gave the Frigid Snow Clan a bit of a buffer period. As the time slipped by, more protective spell formations were erected. All of the Cultivators in the city were mobilized by the Frigid Snow Clan as they strengthened the various districts of the city.

Only Meng Hao was relatively idle. Most of the time, he sat in meditation by the lotus plants. Occasionally he would take out some Celestial soil, and the magical symbols within, to study. Other times he would call Gu La over to examine his totem tattoos.

As far as the lightning which would occasionally fall down from the sky, Meng Hao was completely used to it. He now had a fearsome instinct when it came to sensing its approach. Of course, the Li Clan Patriarch was constantly shrieking and cursing. However, as time passed, his soul embodiment was gradually becoming more resistant to the lightning.

According to Meng Hao's analysis, the Li Clan Patriarch was already transforming into a Soul of Lightning.

In terms of everything, Meng Hao's greatest gain had to do with the Celestial soil symbols. He had been studying them from the moment he arrived in the Black Lands. It was finally at this point that he started to pick out some of the clues.

"These Celestial soil symbols are very similar to totems. I can determine with eighty percent certainty, that the so-called Celestial talisman... was actually a primordial totem!" Breathing heavily, he stared down at the Celestial talismanic paper in his hand, and his eyes began to glow.

"All of my research down to this moment points toward totems!" he thought, his eyes flickering. He closed his eyes for a long moment and then opened them. "The reason I'm so incredibly interested in totems is because after the Heavenly Tribulation, the main conundrum I will face is how to achieve the Perfect Nascent Soul!

"Nascent Souls are divided into the five elements and colors. Four equates to Flawless, five is Perfect... If I could acquire the Gold Core manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture, then I would be able to see how to successfully step from a Four Color Nascent Soul into a Perfect Nascent Soul. Unfortunately, the Gold Core manual has long since been lost..." The glow in his eyes grew stronger.

"Other stages can't even compare to the Nascent Soul stage. If you want to get Four Colors... it's very difficult. Even I don't know how to do so. However, the totems of the Western Desert, as well as the five elements pill concocting technique of Yan Song from the Eastern lands, have given me a new direction to explore.

"Whether or not I can succeed will be determined by further study and research. I need more Western Desert Cultivators so that I can study their totem tattoos. That's the only way to reach a certain conclusion!" Meng Hao took a deep breath, and his eyes glittered with a cold aura.

Chapter 367: Meng, You Twerp, Do You Dare To Fight Me Or Not?!

Three months passed in a flash. During that time, Holy Snow City was a buzz of activity as everyone was mobilized in various preparations. Meanwhile, various momentous events occurred in the Black Lands. The name of the United Nine remained, but in reality, it no longer existed. Other than Holy Snow City, only one other remained: the City of Nets.

The City of Nets still survived because of its Spirit Severing Patriarch, as well as the favorable position they occupied. Furthermore, the city contained nearly ten thousand Cultivators. Because of its significant size, the Black Lands Palace focused most of its efforts there, leaving Holy Snow City alone for the time being.

Of course, Holy Snow City's geographical position had a lot to do with that as well, considering its remoteness, and the snow that covered the area year-round.

The once illustrious United Nine now consisted only of Holy Snow City and the City of Nets. All others had either been destroyed or evacuated. The greater part of the Black Lands now belonged to the Black Lands Palace.

There was actually a third area in the Black Lands that offered hindrance to the Black Lands Palace. That was the location formerly known as Dongluo City, but was now the Church of the Golden Light.

The Church of the Golden Light had risen to fame in all of the Black Lands during these three months. It had five thousand members, along with a shocking spell formation. For the moment, the Black Lands Palace had no choice but to retreat and allow the Church of the Golden Light to stay there.

As for the mysterious, enigmatic Patriarch Golden Light, he was even more famous in the Black Lands, and the legends about him multiplied.

By the end of the three months, the situation in the Black Lands was volatile. It was at this time that the Black Lands Palace's army of Cultivators once again appeared outside of Holy Snow City, along with Western Desert Cultivators. The whole force consisted of several thousand Cultivators and over thirty thousand beasts.

This was no mere probe; it was full-scale war. The land was dotted with utilitarian war chariots which rumbled across the earth, propelled by the power of magic. The chariots bristled with sharp spikes, and emanated a bizarre light, seeming to indicate that they could burst out with shocking magical powers.

As for the more than thirty thousand ferocious beasts, they covered the land and sky in all directions.

Among the Cultivators, the weakest Cultivation base to be seen was Foundation Establishment. As for Core Formation, there were roughly five hundred in the force.

Such an enormous power was enough to shock the entire Black Lands. However, even more shocking was the fact that there wasn't one Nascent Soul Cultivator in the army, but four!

Obviously, the four Nascent Soul Cultivators were there to deal with the four Grand Elders of the Frigid Snow Clan. Two were from the Black Lands Palace, and wore silver masks, whereas two were from the Western Desert.

Spell shields surrounded Holy Snow City, formations that looked like screaming sheets of snow. There were also ten enormous star-shaped objects rotating in the sky high above the city, emanating countless strands of power.

Within the city, there were slightly more than a thousand Cultivators, including the members of the Frigid Snow Clan, a vast difference when compared to the outside forces. The Holy Snow City forces were split into four battle groups, tasked with guarding the city walls.

The faces of the Cultivators in the city were taut with anxiety. They felt nervous, but none of them fled. The four Grand Elders took charge of different areas of the cities. Their faces were also filled with anxiety.

Meng Hao left his courtyard and made his way to one of the city walls. He looked out at the dark mass that was the enemy force. He had observed large scale battles before, but this would be his first time seeing one from this position.

When it came to a grand war of Cultivators such as this, Meng Hao's power, though it might be great, was not enough to assure victory or defeat. Only someone of the Spirit Severing stage could do so.

The battle was set to erupt at any moment!

Suddenly, the wails of war bugles could be heard echoing out in the air. As soon as they did, the mass of beasts flying in the air, as well as the neo-demons on the ground, howled and charged.

They were joined by the thousands of Cultivators and their war chariots as they launched their assault on Holy Snow City.

“Lightning Sea Pill!” cried Frigid Snow Clan's First Elder. A booming sound filled the air, and everything went dim. The defensive tempest which surrounded Holy Snow City seemed as if it were splitting apart.

As soon as his words echoed out, four medicinal pills were tossed out from the city. One of them was instantly snapped up by a flying Flood Dragon; suddenly, its body began to tremble, and a boom filled the air as it exploded into pieces. From within the blood and gore, multiple lightning bolts shot out.

They spread out in all directions to form an enormous Lightning Sea, roughly three hundred meters wide.

Any flying beasts who were caught up in the Lightning Sea immediately began to let out shrill shrieks as they were torn into pieces!

The three Lightning Sea Pills which landed onto the ground caused the earth to tremble. Suddenly, three hundred meter wide Lightning Seas erupted up. Beasts and Cultivators alike let out miserable screams as they were shredded apart by the lightning.

At the same time, black clouds appeared in the sky overhead. Even more blazing lightning crackled down, slamming into the ground.

The shocking effects of these four Lightning Sea Pills were actually beyond what Meng Hao had anticipated. He had concocted them three months before and given them to the Frigid Snow Clan.

In his estimation, the pills should have produced Lightning Seas only several dozen meters wide, not hundreds. It only took him a moment to understand what had happened, though. This area was constantly swathed with snowstorms and tempests. The frozen ground and the howling wind were actually special spell formations of Holy Snow City. They amplified the effects of the Lightning Sea Pills, causing their power to increase exponentially.

“The amplification has limits,” thought Meng Hao. “Using it too much in this capacity will cause the spell formations to break on their own.”

Sounds of rejoicing could be heard throughout the city.

“Grandmaster Meng is amazing!!”

“That was a magic pill concocted by Grandmaster Meng. Such power is unprecedented! It shook Heaven and Earth!”

“Grandmaster Meng!!”

The cries drifted outside of the city walls, followed by groups of Cultivators. As they flew out, one of the star shapes above the city also flew out, slashing into the Black Lands Palace Cultivators and shredding them into pieces.

The ground quaked as death filled the battlefield. Explosions reverberated out, along with bloodcurdling shrieks. Blood showered down like rain. From his position on the city wall, Meng Hao watched all of this happening, his heart trembling.

Magical light emanated out from the war chariots, slamming into the city defenses. The ice on the ground began to crack, and the sky itself seemed about to be ripped apart.

It was at this time that a Western Desert Cultivator flew up into the air. He was in the late Core Formation stage and had three totem tattoos on his body. One was a Flood Dragon, another was a Mountain Spirit, and the third was a mighty river. As he flew up to hover in the air, he held a severed head in his hand, dripping blood. He looked up toward the city and laughed heartily.

“Grandmaster Meng, you dogfart, do you dare to come out and fight me!?!?” Behind the man, a Flood Dragon appeared, roaring as it flew up into the sky. Next to the Flood Dragon was an enormous Mountain Spirit, grinning viciously toward the city. Beneath the feet of the strapping Cultivator, an enormous, world-shaking river appeared.

“I am Ta Luo, three-totem Cultivator of the Thorn Tribe of the Western Desert. I challenge Grandmaster Meng of Holy Snow City to a duel! Do you dare to fight me? Don’t tell me the only thing you can do is concoct pills!?” Meng, you twerp, do you dare to fight me or not?! You numbskull alchemist! All you can do is concoct pills in some dark room somewhere. Do you dare to come fight me in the open!?”

As his words echoed out, Meng Hao stood on the city wall, his expression the same as ever as he looked out at the hollering Cultivator and his totems.

“A Mountain Spirit totem,” thought Meng Hao. “It looks like both a mountain and a spirit. I definitely need to study it.” Suddenly, his eyes flickered as he looked up into the sky.

Next to him was Third Elder, the old woman. She frowned.

“He’s just trying to provoke you,” she said. “It’s obviously a trick, Grandmaster Meng, you....” Before she could finish speaking, Meng Hao’s body flickered and he shot off the city wall.

The old woman’s face flickered, and she shot into the air to follow him. Even as she did, however, one of the silver-masked Nascent Soul Cultivators from the Black Lands Palace laughed viciously, and then disappeared. When he reappeared, he was directly in front of the old woman, blocking her path.

The Western Desert Cultivator with the severed head hovered there watching Meng Hao approach. Laughing uproariously, he clenched his right hand, causing the severed head to explode and splatter his body with blood and gore. With a vicious smile, he shot toward Meng Hao.

They closed in on each other at top speed, which of course drew the attention of Cultivators from both sides of the battle. Those from Holy Snow City were all very nervous, and the other three Grand Elders tried to fly over to help, but were obstructed by the other Black Lands Palace and Western Desert Nascent Soul Cultivators.

“Meng, you twerp, I’m gonna help you understand how Western Desert Cultivators kill people!” The power of the huge man’s late Core Formation Cultivation base exploded out to shocking effect. The Flood Dragon behind him roared, the Mountain Spirit radiated ferocity, and the mighty river screamed through the air. All of it was very imposing.

This man had complete confidence that he would be able to kill this opponent. Once this Grandmaster Meng tangled with him, it would only take a moment or two to ensure that he died.

“Once he emerged from the city walls, his fate was sealed!” thought the Western Desert Cultivator, grinning viciously. In the blink of an eye, they were roughly thirty meters from each other. Meng Hao’s expression was the same as always; however, a bloody glow suddenly emanated out from his body. Suddenly, he disappeared. It was a Bloodburst Flash which suddenly placed him directly in front of the grinning Western Desert Cultivator.

The man’s eyes went wide, and without even thinking about it, he moved to retreat backward. However, Meng Hao’s hand shot out like lightning, grabbed his clothing and then lifted him up above his head. He pulled off this move smoothly, as if he had practiced it many times.

It was a bizarre move, and everyone who saw it gaped.

The moment in which Meng Hao grabbed the shocked Western Desert Cultivator and lifted him up, a lightning bolt suddenly appeared in the sky. This particular lightning bolt looked different from normal lightning.

That was because it was not ordinary lightning; this was Tribulation Lightning!

None of the onlookers even had an opportunity to react. The Heavenly Tribulation descended onto the body of the Western Desert Cultivator. The Flood Dragon shrieked as it shattered into pieces. The Mountain Spirit collapsed, and the river exploded. The Western Desert Cultivator didn't even have time to shriek. The Heavenly Tribulation smashed into his body, turning it... completely black.

He was absolutely dead!!

He wasn't Meng Hao, who was able to resist such lightning for various reasons. Obviously, this man was not equipped with any of those methods, and was killed.

"Too bad about that Mountain Spirit totem," said Meng Hao, shaking his head. He loosened his grip, dropping the corpse. Everyone looked on, stunned, as Meng Hao Bloodburst Flashed away, returning to the city wall at incredible speed.

Chapter 368: Secret Dragoneer Technique

The battlefield was suddenly filled with silence....

There couldn't be anything but silence. This was the first time that these people had ever seen a Cultivator exterminated by lightning. Lightning was powerful, but Cultivators were not weak. Being killed by lightning was something that was usually mentioned when insulting others, but something that few people actually saw happen....

In fact, few people were ever actually killed by lightning, much less legendary Heavenly Tribulation.

Not many people had ever even seen Heavenly Tribulation. The only time anyone did was because of the appearance of certain medicinal pills, or other precious materials, and that was a Heavenly Tribulation that didn't target people....

"Exterminated by lightning...."

“How could that be possible? What lightning was that?! It was terrifying!”

“What was terrifying wasn’t the lightning, but that Grandmaster Meng. Dammit, even lighting from the Heavens helps him? Or, was it some magical technique?”

The Black Lands Palace Cultivators were shocked. This extermination by lightning was incredibly terrifying to them.

Cultivators existed beneath the Heavens, whereas lightning was something of the Heavens. Therefore, it seemed to them that lightning was something that... could not be evaded!

Even the Nascent Soul Cultivators stared with shining eyes. Meng Hao’s actions just now were completely beyond their powers of prediction. If it was a magical technique he had used, well that was shocking in and of itself. However... the way Meng Hao had lifted the man up into the air with seemingly practiced ease made it seem like it was something he frequently did.

In contrast with the Cultivators from the Black Lands Palace and the Western Desert, those in Holy Snow City had long since become accustomed to the fact that lightning would descend upon their Grandmaster Meng every few days.

Everybody knew about it. In fact, occasionally, when people went to request pill concocting services, they would even see the lightning.

Seeing the Western Desert Cultivator exterminated by the lightning caused complex thoughts to fill the minds of the people in Holy Snow City.... Their reverence for Meng Hao grew even stronger.

“Just what shocking things has Grandmaster Meng done to anger the Heavens? Over the past months, that lightning has constantly been trying to exterminate him.”

“That Western Desert Cultivator was really unlucky. Of all the people to piss off, he pissed off Grandmaster Meng.... You know, over the past couple months, I happened on a few occasions to see a miserable soul embodiment lifted up by Grandmaster Meng....”

Meng Hao cleared his throat as he stood there on the city wall. He ignored the gazes that were all fixed upon him. He had long since become accustomed to the lightning, and by now had reached the point where he could predict it.

After a long moment passed, the fighting on the battlefield resumed. The slaughtering continued, but as it did, the Cultivators would occasionally look up into the sky. The booms were usually the result of magical techniques, but many of the Cultivators would dodge to the side nonetheless, clearly fearful that lightning would fall to exterminate them.

It took about three days before such behavior died out. During those three days, the Black Lands Palace Cultivators launched continuous assaults, which caused booms to fill the air, and shook the very ground. On the night of the third day, a huge explosion shook everything as one of Holy Snow City's tempest spell formations collapsed.

As the formation collapsed, vast quantities of Black Lands Palace Cultivators charged in, along with countless ferocious beasts. Western Desert Cultivators also joined them.

A rumbling filled the air as glowing strands shot out from the star-shaped objects in the sky. Although the night was dark, the battlefield was as brightly lit as if it were daytime.

Finally, a critical moment in the battle arrived. The four Grand Elders were there, battling fiercely in mid-air with the Black Lands Palace and Western Desert Cultivators.

Meng Hao's face was unsightly as he stood atop the city wall. Suddenly, he raised up his right hand. A flash of blood could be seen as a flying creature that had been charging toward him fell to the ground, dead.

"Three months," he thought. "If the city falls, then they will never finish with the Frigid Snow Larva." Whether or not Holy Snow City fell in the end had little to do with him. However, before the six month time period was up, it must not.

It was at this moment that the ground began to tremble as two Wild Giants appeared off in the distance. Following them were several thousand Cultivators from the Black Lands Palace and the Western Desert. Of course, a black mass of howling, beastly neo-demons accompanied them.

"Why hasn't the Spirit Severing Patriarch made an appearance?" thought Meng Hao. The day Zhou Dekun had been taken, Meng Hao heard the howl echoing up from underground. That simple howl had caused the deaths of countless beasts and Cultivators outside the city wall.

Now, even when the tempest spell formation had been broken, the Frigid Snow Clan's Spirit Severing Patriarch still hadn't come out.

"It seems Hanxue Zong was right, as were the rumors floating about outside. The Spirit Severing Patriarch is obviously dying. However, the Black Lands Palace is still scared of him. They seem ferocious in their attacks, but they are still probing to get information about the Spirit Severing Patriarch." Meng Hao's gaze flickered as he looked off into the distance at two Western Desert Cultivators who were shooting toward Hanxue Shan, their totems shining. The guards who surrounded Hanxue Shan coughed up blood, incapable of fighting back.

Meng Hao let out a cold snort as he shot forward with a Bloodburst Flash. In the blink of an eye, he was next to Hanxue Shan. He waved a finger, and the Eighth Demon Sealing Hex appeared, instantly suppressing the Cultivation base and life force of the Western Desert Cultivators. A sword aura appeared as a flying sword shot out from Meng Hao's bag of holding. It instantly decapitated the two men, then came back to circulate around Meng Hao.

Hanxue Shan's face was pale as she looked over at Meng Hao and smiled.

"You saved me again," she said.

Snow began to fall, and a whimpering sound filled the air as the snowflakes danced about in the wind. It sounded like a funeral song. Booms could be heard, along with the sound of intense fighting. The city shook as, one after another, the star-shaped objects up in the sky collapsed. The Western Desert and Black Lands Cultivators fought fiercely. The sky was filled with snow, but the ground was covered in blood.

Meng Hao didn't respond to Hanxue Shan. He stamped his foot onto the ground, causing countless strands of Demonic Qi to rise up, visible only to him. They congealed together behind him to form into an obscure mass that blocked a glowing beam of light that had just shot out from a nearby war chariot.

Rumbling filled the air. The Demonic Qi had blocked the incoming beam, but the power of the attack was still there, spreading out into the area. Meng Hao wrapped his arm around Hanxue Shan's waist, then shot away toward the city wall to avoid the attack.

Hanxue Shan looked up at the star-shaped objects collapsing, the Western Desert Cultivators who were appearing on various sections of the city wall, and the glow of magical techniques that filled

the sky. Her voice bitter, she said, “You should leave. They want to kill the Frigid Snow Clan, not you. With your Cultivation base, it would be easy for you to get out of here right now.”

Off in the distance, the old woman, Third Elder, coughed up a mouthful of blood, then gritted her teeth and continued to fight.

“It’s useless,” said Hanxue Shan, despair filling her eyes. “Even if I went all out and used the Frigid Snow Thorn Rampart, the Patriarch is withering away and barely conscious. There’s no way to use the secret Dragoner technique to catalyze the thorns....” A rumbling sound filled the air as an entire section of the city wall collapsed, and a fierce-looking Western Desert Cultivator shot into the city.

“What Thorn Rampart?” asked Meng Hao, frowning.

“The Frigid Snow Thorn Rampart is indestructible, and could protect the city for an entire month,” she said softly, her voice filled with bitterness. “It’s a sacred relic that the Frigid Snow Clan brought with us many years ago when we moved here from the Western Desert. After all the years, it’s mostly withered. Only a special secret technique can be used to revive it.

“That technique is only known to Elders and certain others with the right bloodline to master it. Right now, no one can catalyze the thorns. Only the Patriarch has a Cultivation base sufficient enough to do so.” She slapped her bag of holding to produce a dried up seed.

“This is one of eight seeds. The Elders all have one, and the rest are with the Patriarch. None of us were ever able to succeed.”

“Catalyze?” said Meng Hao, his eyes glittering. He was about to continue when suddenly a boom filled the air, and the city wall shook. Meng Hao’s face flickered. He grabbed Hanxue Shan, retreating again. Off in the distance, a huge group of Black Lands Cultivators was approaching.

As the city wall crumbled, miserable screams filled the air. Meng Hao continued to retreat with Hanxue Shan in tow. His voice urgent, he said, “Tell me that catalysis technique. I’m an alchemist, and I already have my own catalysis techniques; perhaps because of that, I will be able to understand yours.”

Hanxue Shan gaped at him for a moment. Under normal circumstances, she would never reveal a secret Clan technique. Even Soulsearch would be useless; the technique was a legacy magic that was branded into her very blood. However, after thinking for the space of a few breaths, she made her decision. When the Frigid Snow Clan had existed in the Western Desert, at the height of their

power, this was the secret technique used by generations of their Grand Dragoners! Her voice soft, she began to explain it to Meng Hao.

The secret technique was not very long, only about a thousand characters in length. As the words entered Meng Hao's ears, his heart began to shake. It was as if all of the sights and sounds of the battle around him vanished. The only thing left were the thousand characters that made up the secret technique!

"...cause Time to sink, the ebb and flow of the moon, grasp the will of the shining sun, all living things contain the will of eternal life...." Hanxue Shan softly spoke the words that could cause a frenzied commotion if they were revealed in the Western Desert. In fact, when the rebel clan member Hanxue Zong was spared by his father, all memories of this secret technique were erased from his mind. That was one of his reasons for coming back to settle his old score and eradicate the Frigid Snow Clan. There was no way for him to reacquire the technique other than to have a Clan member personally tell him!

Meng Hao's mind reeled. He closed his eyes, allowing the various passages of the technique to resonate in his head. He suddenly thought of the Violet Fate Sect's catalysis arts, as well as the Time refining jade page from which he had been able to figure out the Time magic.

Of those two different mnemonics, the catalysis technique was the first layer. The secret Time magic was the second layer. And now... Meng Hao's mind spun. After hearing the secret technique of the Frigid Snow Clan, he realized that it was the third layer!

Secret Dragoner technique!

Any of the techniques alone could provide moderate success. But if anyone was able to acquire all three, then the knowledge could be used to mutually increase the effectiveness and power of the others by a vast amount.

Because he knew the secret catalysis method and also understood the secret Time magic, when he heard the Dragoner technique, he understood it instantly, and it was branded onto his mind.

Chapter 369: Thorn Rampart

Meng Hao's eyes snapped open. "Give me the Thorn Rampart seed!"

A strange light gleamed in his eyes, as if Time itself were buried within. Gradually, it turned into an indescribable power, like some sort of magical technique that made it so a single glance from him could cause a person to never be able to forget him.

Hanxue Shan's heart shook. She had seen a gaze like this before, back when the Spirit Severing Patriarch had awoken once. His eyes had contained deep abstruseness, as if they contained Time. A single glance from him was something she wouldn't be able to forget for countless years.

As her mind reeled, she seemed to lose any ability to resist him. Without thinking about it, she reached her hand out and handed over her Clan's sacred relic, the Thorn Rampart seed.

The instant the seed touched his hand, Meng Hao gasped. His Cultivation base rotated rapidly, and a golden light instantly spread out. His secret catalysis art, the magic of Time, and the newly acquired secret Dragoner technique were all unleashed inside of him.

The ability to catalyze all plants. The magic to unleash the power of Time. The Dragoner ability to control all the beasts under Heaven. These three mysterious arts melded together inside Meng Hao, and as his Cultivation base rotated, the Thorn Rampart seed in his hand suddenly began to expand. It was no longer withered, and in fact, within moments, a sprout appeared, which turned into vegetation. Within the blink of an eye, it had grown to cover Meng Hao's entire arm.

Meng Hao's body was no longer shining with a golden light. Shockingly, a thick plant-like aura emanated out from him. This aura instantly caught the attention of the attacking Western Desert Cultivators. When they laid eyes on Meng Hao, they weren't sure why, but their hearts began to tremble. Immediately, they shot toward him.

The only person near Meng Hao was Hanxue Shan. Everyone else had long since fled. The city wall was falling, and up above, the four Grand Elders had looks of despair written on their faces.

How could they have imagined that after the three month period, the Black Lands Palace and the Western Desert would launch a full-scale assault? There was no way that Holy Snow City could stand up to it.

Hanxue Shan smiled sadly as she watched the eight Western Desert Cultivators closing in on Meng Hao. There was nothing she could do to fight back against them. In a moment, they were thirty meters away from Meng Hao.

Meng Hao sat there cross-legged, clutching the Thorn Rampart seed. Green vegetation and leaves covered his right arm, and continued to grow, covering the rest of his body.

Thirty meters. Twenty-five meters. Fifteen meters!

When they were fifteen meters away, Meng Hao's closed eyes suddenly snapped open. They glowed brightly as he reached his right hand out and pushed it down onto the ground.

As he did, the plant material on his body burrowed down into the soil. Suddenly, shocking rumbling sounds could be heard as a three meter long thorn stabbed out from the ground next to the city wall. The speed with which it moved was hard to describe, and made it impossible for anyone to evade it. In the blink of an eye, it stabbed through one of the Western Desert Cultivators.

Next, more thorns burst up around Meng Hao. Miserable screams filled the air as the rest of the seven Western Desert Cultivators were stabbed through with long thorns and lifted up into the air.

Even more shocking was that after stabbing through the Cultivators, the thorns twitched and trembled, as if they were absorbing the Cultivators' blood and Cultivation base. The eight men rapidly began to wither. Bloodcurdling shrieks filled the air that didn't even sound human, echoing out, causing all of the other surrounding Cultivators to feel extreme shock.

"What is that?" they thought, panting.

Before they had time to react, masses of small thorns exploded out from the shriveled bodies of the eight Cultivators to shoot out in all directions.

Some stabbed into the ground and disappeared. They reappeared moments later, in locations not too distant, where they stabbed into the bodies of more Cultivators.

Others directly shot into nearby Cultivators. Even as they screamed out, their bodies withered, whereupon more thorns would explode out.

Meng Hao was the center of it all as thorns began to stab out from the city walls themselves. This, of course, caused a great commotion. The thorns actually didn't distinguish between Holy Snow City Cultivators or those from the Black Lands Palace. They stabbed through all of them, absorbing their flesh, blood and life force, and then expanding. Within the space of a few breaths, the area surrounding Meng Hao for three thousand meters was a world filled with thorns.

This, of course, instantly affected the course of the battle. Vast numbers of Black Lands Palace Cultivators retreated backward in shock. Unfortunately, they were too slow and were still stabbed through by the thorns. Soon, the entire city was bristling with thorns, sharp, fierce and bright red. By this time, the thorns were already expanding outside the city as well.

Back inside the city, all of the Holy Snow City Cultivators stood with pale faces, not daring to move. Everything around them was surrounded by countless thorns. They looked out at the Black Lands Palace Cultivators and their beasts outside of the city. Howling in anguish, they retreated at top speed as thorns burst out from the ground around them.

The sky wasn't safe either. The thorns shot up into the air, stabbing into any living thing that flew about up above.

By now, everything seemed to be covered with thorns. Outside the city, only a few hundred of the Black Lands Palace and Western Desert Cultivators managed to flee without being affected. They stared back at the scene behind them with shock and astonishment.

Up above, the four Grand Elders and the Nascent Soul Cultivators from the Black Lands Palace and the Western Desert were no longer capable of fighting. They had split apart, and were constantly blocking the shooting thorns.

As of now, all eyes on the battlefield were fixed on Meng Hao. In front of him was a ferocious, gigantic thorn, rising straight up into the sky. It emanated a Blood Qi, and was covered by countless smaller thorns. It was thoroughly sinister.

Meng Hao seemed to be the very center of it all, and the only place that didn't have any thorns. He seemed to be the source of all the thorns, and as he slowly rose to his feet, countless gasps filled the air.

Around his right hand swirled innumerable leaves, each one of which was covered with thorns. Not a single person would disbelieve that Meng Hao was the source of all the thorns everywhere.

He took a deep breath. He'd never imagined that the Thorn Rampart seed would be so astonishing. The fact that it couldn't tell the difference between friend and foe was something he couldn't do anything about. It required his power of catalysis to grow, but when it came to sucking the life and blood out of Cultivators, Meng Hao could do nothing to control it, although he could sense it.

“Grandmaster Meng....” said a nearby Holy Snow City Cultivator. His left leg had been stabbed by a thorn. As soon as the word left his mouth, a thorn suddenly flew over, and he closed his mouth. The thorn stopped only an inch from his forehead, where it hovered like a snake for a moment before moving away.

Everything was quiet. All of the Cultivators in the area who had been stabbed by thorns, be they from the Western Desert or the Black Lands, stood stock still, not daring to utter a peep.

Up in mid-air, the faces of the Nascent Soul Cultivators flickered, and they also stopped moving, not daring to fly or speak. The reason for this was that they were surrounded by tens of thousands of thorns. From the looks of things, if they made even the slightest move, the thorns would instantly stab through them and kill them.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, and his eyes shone brightly.

On the city wall, and outside the city, were countless Cultivators and beasts who had been stabbed by thorns. Their faces were pale and filled with dread as they gazed over at Meng Hao.

The few hundred people who had managed to escape the danger looked at Meng Hao, as quiet as cicadas during the winter. At the moment, everyone on the battlefield suddenly realized that the outcome of the entire battle now lay in one person’s hand.

That person was none other than Meng Hao.

Meng Hao was the only person among them who knew that the decision actually wasn’t his to make. This Thorn Rampart was actually not responding to any of his commands....

He thought silently as he looked around. The thorns were still stabbed through the surrounding Cultivators, who could only stand there with looks of despair on their faces.

It was at this moment that suddenly, a voice entered Meng Hao’s ears that no one else could hear. It was an ancient voice, as weak as if it came from the mouth of someone about to die.

“The destructive Thorn Rampart can exterminate anything under the Spirit Severing stage. Once it takes root, it can’t be moved, and will live for one month.... It doesn’t matter how you woke it. Right now, you need to still your mind and extract a drop of blood from yourself that contains some of your will. Place it onto the Thorn Rampart trunk in front of you. Remember... The drop of blood

must contain your will. That will allow you to issue an order to the thorns.” The voice seemed to have come out from nowhere, but as soon as Meng Hao heard it, he suddenly recalled the voice he had heard three months ago when Zhou Dekun was taken.

The voice was one and the same.

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered as he thought. According to the method just described to him, he sliced a cut onto his forehead. A drop of blood appeared, which contained some of Meng Hao’s Cultivation base and will. As it flew forward, Meng Hao felt a wave of weakness flow through him. He knew that in his entire life, he could produce no more than five such drops of blood!

Anything more than five would be far too much of a loss.

Surrounded by silence, Meng Hao clenched his jaw. The blood was extremely precious, but, for the sake of the Frigid Snow Larva... he caused the drop to fly forward and enter into the Thorn Rampart trunk. His eyes flashed.

Nothing obstructed its way; it merged into the Thorn Rampart trunk, which then began to tremble.

Instantly, the thorns stabbed into the Holy Snow City Cultivators faded from sight, and their wounds closed up. The thorns actually remained in their bodies, fuel with which to heal their wounds.

As the thorns disappeared, the Black Lands Palace and Western Desert Cultivators outside of the city let out bloodcurdling screams. Their bodies instantly began to wither completely. The sounds of explosions filled the air as some of the dying Cultivators chose to self-detonate.

The explosions caused Meng Hao’s mind to feel as if it were shattering. It seemed as if he had become one with the Thorn Rampart trunk, and that all of the thorns spread about were extensions of his will.

With a mere thought, he could kill everyone.

At the same time, his Spiritual Sense felt as if it were wasting away. Meng Hao’s Spiritual Sense was second only to that of a Nascent Soul Cultivator, far above that of anyone in the same stage as him. Were it not, then the strain would have completely dried it up.

Suddenly, Meng Hao's will sensed something new. Outside of the city, in a location stabbed through with a handful of thorns, someone spoke in a low voice.

“Grandmaster Meng, is that you?”

Chapter 370: Spirit Severing Pill

A voice transmitted into Meng Hao's will. “Grandmaster Meng, this is Yan Song.... Fellow Daoist Meng, after we parted that day, I continued to think about everything that happened, and couldn't help but feel that something was fishy about Zhou Dekun.... He's already been sent to the Western Desert, though, so there's nothing I can do to corroborate my theory. Fellow Daoist Meng, I actually came here today to look for you. This isn't my actual body, it's just a sliver of my will.

“Fellow Daoist, I very much admire your Dao of alchemy and, well... this is not the time for a long discussion. I'll just say two more things. With your skill in the Dao of alchemy, we can talk about the Spirit Severing Pill! If you're interested, then meet with me three days from now in the east of the city, and we can discuss it at length.”

Meng Hao's eyes glittered as the voice suddenly disappeared. Outside the city, the miserable cries slowly began to fade away. Only a few Cultivators had managed to escape from the effects of the secret technique; most had been transformed into withered corpses.

Meng Hao slowly removed his will from the Thorn Rampart trunk, leaving behind only a tiny connection. He caused the rest of the thorns that filled the city to gradually shrink back. Now, the main trunk was even more prominently visible.

The wail of war bugles could be heard in the air; this particular Western Desert and Black Lands Palace attack group had no choice but to retreat. The war was not over. The forces of the Black Lands Palace and the Western Desert were reduced, however, off in the distance, the sky was filled with prismatic beams of light.

It was no longer night; morning was approaching. Everyone in the city was exhausted. Amidst the rare silence, Meng Hao rose to his feet as the four Grand Elders approached.

They looked haggard, and Third and Fourth Elders were injured. They stood in front of Meng Hao, looking him over with complex expressions.

After a long moment, First Elder slowly said, “The Thorn Rampart will live for one month. We should be safe during that time. The four of us will do the best we can to finish the Frigid Snow Larva.” He gave Meng Hao a deep look, then turned and left.

The other Elders looked at him without speaking and then walked off. The old woman looked back at Meng Hao as she departed, but held her tongue.

The surviving members of the Frigid Snow Clan dispersed to make repairs to the city and spell formations. They had a month of time in which there would be relative safety, but there were many things that needed to be repaired.

Everyone was exhausted. After injuries were tended to, there were still mental scars. Most of the Cultivators sat cross-legged in meditation, making the city very quiet.

The newly arrived force from the Western Desert bolstered the enemy forces into the thousands. However, they did not attack, but rather spread out, forming a complete blockade around Holy Snow City.

Meng Hao was also exhausted. As he walked through the city, the Cultivators he encountered all looked at him with expressions of awe. They would bow to him with lowered eyes, not even daring to meet his gaze.

The appearance of the Thorn Rampart caused everyone to view Meng Hao as a representation of terror. Despite his status as a Grandmaster, this fear was incapable of being dispelled.

The Frigid Snow Clan members also looked at him with looks of intense veneration. Essentially, Meng Hao had single-handedly secured victory in the battle. Without him there, Holy Snow City would be nothing but smoldering wreckage now.

Based on the various battle achievements secured in the fight against the Black Lands Palace, the Frigid Snow Clan distributed magical treasures to the forces within the city. Large amounts of Cultivators converged on a palace near the city center, where the records of battle achievements were kept and rewards distributed.

Meng Hao was tired, but seeing the palace on his way back to his courtyard, he changed course and headed over.

The area was quite bustling, with Cultivators coming in and out. The hundred or so people that Meng Hao saw made this place seem a lot more packed than the empty areas in the rest of the city.

As soon as Meng Hao entered, people spotted him, and soon everyone was looking at him, hearts trembling. Without even thinking about it, they bowed their heads and clasped hands, unable to cover up the awe on their faces.

“Grandmaster Meng....”

“Greetings, Grandmaster Meng!”

Meng Hao nodded, walking past the groups of people until he stood before a pillar of light in the middle of the main hall. The pillar was illusory, and inside could be seen lists of names. Next to each name was a number.

These were the battle achievements accrued during the defense of the city. The rewards one could receive depended on how many enemies they had slain.

Next to the pillar of light sat two members of the Frigid Snow Clan. When they saw Meng Hao, they immediately rose to their feet, clasped hands, and bowed deeply.

Everyone in the area grew very quiet.

Meng Hao said nothing. He simply examined the pillar of light and the list of names.

“Grandmaster Meng. Battle achievement of 97,542!”

The battle achievement of the person in second place didn't even exceed two thousand. Muttering to himself, Meng Hao glanced over the reward list.

There were technique manuals, magical items, medicinal elixirs and special materials for concocting medicinal pills and forging weapons. There were some items which caused Meng Hao's heart to begin to thump after he saw them.

Most importantly, the battle achievements required to acquire these items were almost nothing compared to what Meng Hao had accrued.

Just when Meng Hao was trying to decide whether or not take them all, four new items suddenly popped up on the rewards list.

These four items caused the surrounding Cultivators to break into an uproar.

“Thorn Rampart seed. 100,000 battle achievements!”

“Frigid Snow Clan Secret Dragoner technique. 20,000 battle achievements!”

“Five Planets Snow Formation. 50,000 battle achievements!”

“Demon Nurturing Pill formula. 100,000 battle achievements!”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered, and the surrounding Cultivators were breathing heavily. They had no idea what the secret Dragoner technique was, but they did recognize the Thorn Rampart seed. The fearsomeness of the Thorn Rampart in the previous battle was something they could never forget.

“And then there’s the Five Planets Snow Formation. That’s a special spell formation of the Frigid Snow Clan. You can create a Five Planets Magical Shield....”

As the Cultivators discussed the new items, Meng Hao stood there thoughtfully. The Thorn Rampart seed was an expendable item, but was incredibly powerful. The seed he had used before had been given to him by Hanxue Shan. If he wanted to use another one in the future, it most likely would not be very easy to acquire.

Even more eye-catching, though, was the Five Planets Snow Formation.

“Is that what those flying Five Planets items above the city were?” he thought. Then he glanced at the Demon Nurturing Pill formula.

“What pill is that?” Meng Hao smiled. It was obvious that these items had been intentionally put up by the Frigid Snow Clan to attract his attention. “It seems the Frigid Snow Clan really values me

because of that battle,” he thought. Instead of taking any of the items, he looked at one of the Frigid Snow Clan members standing next to the pillar of light.

“Is it possible to acquire items on credit?” he asked, smiling. The surrounding Cultivators stared in shock at Meng Hao. They had never thought of doing such a thing.

The very concept of it seemed to cross the bottom line, especially considering the danger that Holy Snow City was in now. The surrounding Cultivators’ eyes began to gleam with a strange light.

The Frigid Snow Clan member who Meng Hao had directed his question to was a middle-aged woman. She gaped at him, somewhat at a loss. It was at this exact moment that suddenly, the battle achievement number next to Meng Hao’s name suddenly increased by one hundred thousand. Now his total was roughly 190,000.

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered as he pointed out the items he wanted. The pillar of light sparkled, and two jade slips flew out. One was the Five Planets spell formation method and the other was the formula for the Demon Nurturing Pill.

After this, Meng Hao’s name was no longer in the first place position in the pillar of light, but rather, last. In fact, now his number was in the negative, to the amount of nearly 50,000.

Jade slips in hand, Meng Hao left the palace, under the envious gazes of the surrounding Cultivators. He walked back through the city to his courtyard.

He sat down cross-legged amidst the lotuses, then looked down at the jade slips. Time passed by. It was evening when he looked up again, and his eyes were gleaming.

“This spell formation seems pretty amazing. Too bad I don’t understand spell formations very well. If I meet someone who does, though, perhaps I can get some help in using it.

“This Demon Nurturing Pill is really interesting. It’s not for consumption by Cultivators, but rather, neo-demons and beasts.” Meng Hao put the jade slips away and then closed his eyes in meditation to restore energy.

A few days later, the late night was still and the moon shone brightly up above. The Thorn Rampart had become the final line of defense for the city. On multiple occasions, Black Lands Palace

Cultivators had tried to break through but were thoroughly obstructed. Not many were killed or injured, but the effectiveness of the thorns was clear.

In his courtyard, Meng Hao sat cross-legged, meditating. Suddenly, his eyes opened and he pointed his right index finger toward the ground. Immediately, Demonic Qi began to congeal. It only took a moment for a figure to appear in front of him that resembled him in every aspect. After it turned into Meng Hao, it flickered and flew into the air.

In the east section of the city, there was a relatively remote street. It was completely deserted at the moment, until a figure appeared. It was of course none other than Meng Hao.

He strode down the winding street for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, until he reached an even more remote corner, where he stopped. He looked over his shoulder and said, "You've been following me for a while. How much longer?"

A grating voice could be heard. "Fellow Daoist Meng, you're not only a Grandmaster of the Dao of alchemy, I think your Spiritual Sense is the most powerful I've seen in any Core Formation Cultivator. It's almost comparable to my own." One of the shadows behind Meng Hao twisted, turning into Yan Song. He looked at Meng Hao with a smile.

"I'll give you three sentences to explain yourself," said Meng Hao lightly. As he spoke, thorns suddenly emerged from the ground.

Without hesitation, Yan Song replied, "I happened upon a manual once that contained information regarding the method to concoct an ancient medicinal pill called the Spirit Severing Pill, which, if consumed when breaking through to the Spirit Severing Stage, can ensure success. After years of searching, I was able to discover the resting place of this legacy of the Dao of alchemy; it is located in the Western Desert, in a place I visited once. I can't acquire the pill alone; however, with your skill in the Dao of alchemy, Fellow Daoist Meng, I'm sure we can succeed, whereupon we can share the pill formula."

"Considering the level of my Cultivation base, such a pill doesn't interest me very much," replied Meng Hao lightly.

"Fellow Daoist Meng, please reconsider. Considering your skill in the Dao of alchemy, it won't be difficult for you to break into the Nascent Soul stage. If you don't begin to make preparations for the Spirit Severing stage now, the First of your Severings will be difficult. You can't rely on simple enlightenment alone. Besides, the place I intend to go to contains not only the formula, but also a completed Spirit Severing Pill!" Yan Song waved his right hand, causing a wood slip to fly out.

“This wood slip is one of the sections of the manual. Fellow Daoist Meng, feel free to confirm for yourself whether I’m telling the truth or not. If you change your mind, you can use the wood slip to contact me. The location in the Western Desert is located close to several Tribes. Without my help, you won’t be able to conceal your Cultivator’s Qi, and will be unable to enter the area.” With that, Yan Song gave Meng Hao a final look, then gradually faded and disappeared.