

The Heavens 41

Chapter 41: A Sensation in the State of Zhao!

When the sign appeared in the sky above the Reliance Sect, all of the disciples in the Outer Sect stared up in awe and shock, their minds buzzing. Their eyes filled with vacant looks, unable to comprehend what they were seeing.

Looking at the golden characters filling the sky, their hearts trembled. Fatty, who was filing his teeth with the fish-scale sword, made choking sounds, narrowly avoiding stabbing himself in the tongue as he gaped at the scene.

Shangguan Xiu, who sat in secluded meditation, suddenly lifted up his head. When he saw what was happening, his body began to tremble, and his eyes shined with disbelief. His face changed, as if he had suddenly just thought of something incredibly frightening. He stood in a flash, and suddenly, a teleportation spell appeared that he had prepared years before.

As fast as possible, he stepped into the spell, then disappeared.

In the main temple hall on the East Mountain, as Meng Hao and the others appeared, He Luohua's face fell. Looking up into the sky, his face grew pale, and he staggered backwards a few paces.

Grand Elder Ouyang raced out of the main temple, looking up into the sky, his face grim.

“Did you touch anything in the Patriarch's meditation zone?” he asked, turning to look back at them. His expression was very solemn, as was his tone of voice.

“When we were just about to leave, a stone stele appeared,” said Chen Fan, sounding pained. “We were worried that if we brought it out with us, it could bring disaster to the Sect. So instead, we made copies of it.” He took out his jade slip, as did Meng Hao and Xu Qing. They handed them to Grand Elder Ouyang.

“This is...” Grand Elder Ouyang's brow furrowed, and then his eyes shone with disbelief.

“There’s no need to study it, it’s fake,” said He Luohua with a long sigh. “The stone stele as well as the sign in the sky. They’re both fake.” He looked down at the ground, then shook his head.

“Other Sects from the State of Zhao will be arriving soon. The Reliance Sect will not be able to evade this disaster. They’re here for the Patriarch.” He flicked his sleeve, and a rumbling could be heard throughout the entire Reliance Sect. A soft light arose, covering everything.

“You three are Inner Sect disciples, go wait in the main temple hall.” Just as his voice sounded out, blurs of light whizzed through the sky from all directions, nearly twenty of them, accompanied by high-pitched whistling shrieks.

The blurs approached the shield which surrounded the Reliance Sect, and as they did, heaven and earth shook. The four mountain peaks trembled as if they might collapse. Silence suddenly filled the surrounding wild mountains. The wild beasts all trembled in fear, not daring to make even a single sound.

Of the twenty or so people in the sky, there were six who formed the nucleus of the group. Four were men and two were women, and they were all elderly. They wore luxurious gowns, and the power which emanated from their Cultivation bases was petrifying.

Each of these six people had two or three Cultivators behind them, followers, each of whom had Cultivation bases on par with Grand Elder Ouyang. These nearly twenty people were the most powerful people in all the State of Zhao, and here they were at the Reliance Sect, bearing down on it like dark clouds.

“Reliance Sect!” a voice boomed out, billowing like thunder. The buildings which comprised the Outer Sect seemed as if they would collapse at any moment. Large amounts of Outer Sect disciples coughed up blood, fear covering their faces.

“The Cold Wind Sect is powerful,” said He Luohua with a harrumph. His voice rang out like a thunderclap as he stood there on the mountain’s peak, suppressing the voice which had just spoken. He raised his right hand, and a hum sounded out as an invisible wind sprang up. It shot toward the person who had just spoken, surrounding him, suddenly turning black and transforming into a massive shapeless mouth that seemed about to swallow up the Core Formation stage Cold Wind Sect eccentric. The man’s face changed, and he retreated quickly without hesitation.

“Enough, enough,” said one of the powerful Core Formation experts, looking down at He Luohua. His voice was light but filled with suppressive power. He wore a long, purple robe embroidered with images of flutes. Frowning, he raised his hand, and the shapeless black wind dissipated.

“Fellow Daoist He, the sign in the heavens came from your Reliance Sect. Please hand it over to us.”

A deathly silence filled the Outer Sect, as the disciples felt the shadow of death looming over them. Within the main temple hall, Meng Hao, Chen Fan and Xu Qing sat silently. They knew that any one of the people outside had Cultivation bases so frightening they could annihilate all of them with the wave of a hand.

Meng Hao’s heart thundered as he looked at them. It was his first time seeing people so powerful. His thoughts suddenly filled with an intense desire to become more powerful.

He Luohua stood on the peak of the East Mountain, looking up at the group of people. After some time passed, he sighed.

“What do you want me to hand over? I have no idea where that sign came from.”

“Give in without a fight,” said the man in the purple robe grimly. “Disperse the Reliance Sect’s grand protective spell. Allow us to search freely. This is what we mean by handing it over. If you don’t, then despite the fact that we are fellow Cultivators of the State of Zhao, we will destroy your grand spell and then exterminate the Reliance Sect.”

“Exterminate the Reliance Sect...” He Luohua suddenly laughed, louder and louder. It echoed out throughout the Reliance Sect. As he laughed, he saw Grand Elder Ouyang standing there next to him, looking as if he were ready to fight to the death. He also saw the three Inner Sect disciples sitting grimly in the main temple hall. Then he glanced at the crowds of Outer Sect disciples, covered in blood. He knew that they were without hope, helpless.

How could he fight back? How could he ensure that the Outer Sect disciples lived to see another day? How could he avoid this disaster...

“As long as I am the Sect Leader of the Reliance Sect, I will not allow outsiders to bully and humiliate us. But there’s really no way for me to protect everyone...” His laughter carried sorrow within it, but also a tiny shred of hope.

“Even if you don’t exterminate the Reliance Sect, I fear that it cannot continue on for very long. Therefore... as of today, the Reliance Sect is disbanded. I have no further need of these trivial mountains!” He flicked his sleeve and flew up into the air. Looking shocked, Grand Elder Ouyang

followed him. They floated in the air, looking down at the Reliance Sect, at what had been their home for so many sixty-year cycles. Their expressions were filled with grief.

“Disciples, hear my order. The Reliance Sect is hereby disbanded! As of now, you are no longer its disciples. This world no longer contains any Reliance Sect!” Veins of blood appeared in his eyes. The twenty or so experts from the State of Zhao began to laugh coldly as they listened to He Luohua’s shocking words.

“Are you satisfied?” he asked. “Any treasures or signs here have nothing to do with me, nor with these Sectless pups beneath me. If you dare to hurt anyone, I will detonate the grand protective spell, and then... we can all perish together.” His voice was resolute, and the bitterness in his words caused the State of Zhao experts’ hearts to quaver a bit.

“Fellow Daoist He, since you have made this decision, of course we will not make things difficult for you,” said an old woman from among the six most powerful of the experts. “The Reliance Sect is disbanded. If you step aside, then we will not cause problems for any of the disciples. You can rest at ease.” Her gaze was like lightning. As she looked over the Reliance Sect, she could tell that the object from which the sign had originated was located here, but was not being held by any of the people.

Meng Hao looked up into the sky, and as He Luohua’s words rang in his ears, he was reminded of the law of the jungle. Despite how powerful the Sect Leader was, he still had been forced to dissolve the Sect.

Chen Fan said nothing, but staggered back a few paces on unsteady legs. Xu Qing lowered her head.

“Hearing the words of the Fellow Daoist from Tianlao, I feel at ease.” He Luohua flicked his sleeve, and the grand protective spell dissipated. With that, he made to leave, followed by Grand Elder Ouyang.

Some among the group of people floating in the sky watched He Luohua with glittering eyes, clearly unwilling to allow him to leave. And yet their attention was captured by the prospect of being able to search the Reliance Sect.

Inside the main temple hall, Chen Fan’s face was pale. He took a few more steps back, until he was leaning up against the statue of Patriarch Reliance.

At that exact moment, a booming sound filled the sky and a multitude of lightning bolts approaching. A cold laughter rolled out, shocking all the Cultivators to the core. Even the faces of the experts from the State of Zhao appeared shaken.

“No one is permitted to leave,” the voice roared. A massive shield suddenly swept over the entire Reliance Sect, covering everything within countless kilometers in every direction. No one could leave, even if they wanted to.

He Luohua’s face changed. He looked up into the sky and caught sight of a massive Feng Shui compass, roughly three hundred meters in diameter. On top of it stood a beautiful woman wearing a luxurious, dark green robe. Her hair was bound by a phoenix hairpin. Dozens of Cultivators surrounded her, most of whom were female, and all of whom were extremely beautiful. Their expressions were arrogant and cold as they looked down.

“Correct, no one is permitted to leave.” Suddenly, the air seemed to split, and a large, armored man appeared, laughing. He carried an enormous golden sword slung over his shoulder, and was followed by dozens of people, all of them big and tall, their faces filled with killing intent.

“Zhao Shanling of the Golden Frost Sect, Dao Protector,” said the beautiful, middle-aged woman who stood in the center of the Feng Shui compass, her voice cold. “You certainly have a sensitive nose.” Her voice rippled out, filling the air.

“If the ladies of the Black Sieve Sect can come,” replied Zhao Shanjun with a laugh, “then why can’t the men of the Golden Frost Sect?”

Just then, a sigh rang out from outside the massive shield. A cold light shot down from the heavens, and as it approached, it pierced through the shining shield. In through the damaged section shot a flying sword nearly three hundred meters in length.

The primitive-looking, blue-colored sword flew in, surrounded by swirling, intense coldness which caused snowflakes to begin to fall in all the area surrounding the Reliance Sect. Standing on top of the sword was a middle-aged man.

He wore a long scholar’s robe, and held his hands clasped behind his back. He was the only person atop the massive sword, but he emanated the aura of a person who could stride among the heavens unhindered by anyone.

“The Solitary Sword Sect!” said He Luohua, his face changing. He knew the identity of this scholar from the Solitary Sword Sect, the number one Sect in the Southern Domain. Their Sect had a saying: Only a solitary sword need leave the Sect, and the Heavens shall be rattled.

Chapter 42: Who Dares to Touch Him!?

“So, it turns out it’s Fellow Daoist Zhou Yanyun,” said the beautiful, middle-aged woman, greeting him with clasped hands. Even hulking Zhao Shanling gave him a silent salute in greeting, a look of fear hidden in his face.

Seeing all these sudden developments, Meng Hao’s heart began to pound. This was the first time he had seen so many powerful people from so many Sects. He was especially impressed by the appearance of the members of the three Great Sects from the colossal Southern Domain that Chen Fan had told him about.

“The Southern Domain...” Meng Hao sucked in a deep breath. Xu Qing stood next to him looking calm. It was impossible to tell what she was thinking.

In the back of the main temple hall, Chen Fan, pale-faced, sadly lifted his right hand up and pushed down on a hidden spot on the statue.

Immediately, the entrance to Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zone closed without a sound and disappeared. Actually, no one inside or outside of the Sect caught any sense whatsoever that this was happening, not even Zhou Yanyun and the others from the Southern Domain.

“Patriarch, Disciple Chen will keep you safe and sound,” he said, his voice filled with righteousness. “I will not allow any of these people to disturb your meditation.” He was faithful and true to the Sect, willing to protect it even at the greatest risk. When his plan succeeded, he let out a sigh, feeling not even the slightest regret.

Meanwhile, in the secret chamber beneath the Reliance Sect catacombs, Patriarch Reliance watched the proceedings triumphantly, filled with excitement.

“Soon, they will find my meditation zone entrance. Then they will charge in and break open my hidden chamber. At long last, I will no longer be stuck in here.” Even as he excitedly spoke these words, his face suddenly changed.

“This... This... Dammit! You... You... What are you doing?!” He watched as Chen Fan, with utmost caution, began to move. Patriarch Reliance watched on in a daze as the entrance to the meditation zone quietly disappeared without a trace. He couldn’t believe it.

Of course, the failsafe had been set up by him years ago as a backup in case a powerful adversary arrived. He had passed on the secret to his successors, and it had been handed down through the generations, the method to prevent outsiders from entering the meditation zone.

Once it was activated, no one would be able to find the entrance, excepting for someone at the Spirit Severing stage. At the time he had set it up, he had been filled with pride, for he knew that he would be perfectly safe.

But he had never imagined that this day would arrive, years later. He had actually forgotten about the whole arrangement, but ... there were others who had not.

“Damnation! I should have left orders not to accept any people of moral character into the Sect! No righteous people, no good people. Kid, you, you, you...” He sat there in a daze, muttering to himself, wanting to weep, but having no tears to shed. He thought of the stone stele, of his carefully laid plans, of the blood he had sacrificed, and how it was all ruined by one person. Of course, this person’s intentions were good, but as he thought about his unflinching bravery and faithful demeanor, Patriarch Reliance began to tremble.

Just when he felt he was at the height of despair, Zhou Yanyun of the Solitary Sword Sect arrived. He gazed over the Sect, casting his senses across it, as did the beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect and hulking Zhao Shanling. With their powerful senses, they poured over the Reliance Sect, searching it in thorough detail.

The experts from the State of Zhao watched on in fear. And then, they too began to search about with their senses.

After some time, Zhou Yanyun of the Solitary Sword Sect frowned. He could sense the aura of the Sublime Spirit Scripture within these mountains, but also knew that it was not in the possession of any of the Reliance Sect disciples. He just couldn’t find it.

It was not just him. The beautiful woman, as well as Zhao Shanling, also frowned. They descended to the ground and began to search about in person.

The experts from the State of Zhao did the same, and soon people filled the Reliance Sect. Meng Hao and the others were kicked out of the main temple hall, whereupon it was searched to the point of being wrecked. In the sky, the strange sign began to fade, and yet, no one had found even a single clue.

People even descended into the underground areas to search, and yet, they came up empty-handed.

They watched the sign slowly disperse, transforming into a crystalline glow that eventually disappeared. The aura of the Sublime Spirit Scripture disappeared, too, as if it had come and gone with the sign.

The Reliance Sect slowly began to quiet down. No valuable treasures had been found. Even the dragon's cave in the black mountain had been searched. As for the corpse of the dragon, it had been removed some time ago by Wang Tengfei, leaving the cave empty.

As dusk fell, the search reached its conclusion. The three members of the Southern Domain's Great Sects looked somewhat embarrassed. They had expended Spirit Stones to teleport here, and yet had come up empty-handed. They were left with the feeling of loss.

"This kid isn't bad," said Zhou Yanyun, standing on his massive sword, floating in mid-air. His eyes swept across the land, falling onto Chen Fan. "If you are willing to become a disciple of the Solitary Sword Sect, then come with me to the Southern Domain." During his search for the Sublime Spirit Scripture, he had noticed Chen Fan's latent talent, and it had met with his approval. He especially took note of Chen Fan's righteous air, which fell in line with the Cultivation practices of the Solitary Sword Sect.

As he spoke, he lifted a finger, and Chen Fen floated up into the air. In front of the eyes of Meng Hao, Xu Qing, and all the Outer Sect disciples, he drifted toward Zhou Yanyun.

The experts from the State of Zhao looked on in envy, knowing how lucky the young man was. He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang looked on silently, their feelings somewhat mixed. In the end, they knew that the Reliance Sect was too small; they would be very happy if an Inner Sect disciple had the chance to walk a better path.

"Disciple Chen Fan..." began Chen Fan, his face filled with conflicting emotions. He looked down at the Reliance Sect, at He Luohua and Grand Elder as they silently nodded their approval. He looked at Meng Hao and Xu Qing. Then, determination filled his face. "I offer my thanks to the good will of the senior generation," he said, lifted his head up as he looked at Zhou Yanyun. "But disciple is a member of the Reliance Sect. In this life, I cannot join another." He knew that if he

agreed, he would have much better opportunities in the future. But there are some things that a man just cannot do. For him, there would be only one Sect in his life.

His words seemed to leave the experts from the State of Zhao quite moved. Disciples like this were a treasure to any Sect! And yet, most of them also sported looks of pity on their face. Refusing the Solitary Sword Sect in this manner was courting death.

He Luohua said nothing. He looked at Chen Fan, feeling even more conflicted. He sighed inwardly, wondering how the young man could be so stubborn. There was no need.

Zhou Yanyun's eyes glittered. He stared at Chen Fan for a while, then dryly said: "Do you know what the words 'Solitary Sword Sect' mean in the Southern Domain?"

Chen Fan was silent for a moment, then nodded. He had studied the ancient records, so of course he knew about the Solitary Sword Sect, the number one Sect in the Southern Domain.

"Then you must know my status in the sect." Zhou Yanyun's expression was grim, and his eyes radiated killing intent. Even the sky around him grew dark, as if it were being torn by the power of his aura.

"I know of the Solitary Sword Sect, as well as you, Elder Zhou," said Chen Fan in a soft voice. "Everyone knows you. You are the current generation's Dao Protector. Your Cultivation base is profound, and your name has rocked the Southern Domain."

"So, you know me. Then you know what you are giving up by passing up this opportunity." His voice grew colder, as did the temperature of the air.

"The Solitary Sword Sect has a history tens of thousands of years old. Their Cultivation shrines, their proliferation of powerful experts, the meteoric progress made by the Sect's members, Chen Fan of the junior generation is well aware of all these things." He held his head high, unwilling to back down. His glistening eyes held no sign of regret.

Zhou Yanyun looked at him, then suddenly began to laugh loudly.

"Originally I planned to make you an ordinary Outer Sect disciple. But with a temperament like this... Excellent. Excellent! You will be my personal apprentice!" Zhou Yanyun's smile was filled

with admiration. With a flick of a sleeve, he pulled Chen Fan onto the massive sword and prepared to leave.

Seeing the Solitary Sword Sect's actions, the beautiful, middle-aged woman realized that taking a qualified disciple back with her was the only way to prevent this trip from turning out to be a complete loss.

"This girl isn't bad. The Black Sieve Sect wants her."

She had long since taken notice of Xu Qing. She approved of her beauty and coldness. Without waiting for Xu Qing to speak, she bent her finger, pulling her up onto the Feng Shui compass. Everyone watched in envy as she began to transform into a diffraction of light.

Fatty stood there, filing away at his teeth. In his eyes, the Sect being disbanded meant that he was now free. He was filled with a confused happiness. He had only been gone a few years, which meant that when he got back to Yunjie County, the house and the bride that his father had prepared would still be waiting. Soon, he would be able to enjoy the life of a rich person.

"Too bad I won't be able to see Meng Hao. Oh well. We're brothers, so I'll help him pay back the money he owes to Steward Zhou. Eventually, I will absorb the wealth of all the surrounding villages, and then, the entire State of Zhao. Hahaha! I, Li Fugui, will be the richest person in the world!" The more he thought about his plans, the more happier he was. He stood there, filing at his teeth and feeling the anticipation for the future.

Right about then, hulking Zhao Shanling of the Golden Frost Sect frowned. He was a bit late in acting. After seeing two of this tiny Sect's Inner Sect disciples taken away, he glanced at Meng Hao. He was a bit taken aback as he noticed a faint trace of a Demonic aura within him. Muttering to himself, his gaze swept the rest of the Sect, whereupon he caught sight of Fatty standing in the crowd of Outer Sect disciples. He stared in astonishment as Fatty filed at his teeth with his flying sword. His eyes shone, and he completely forgot about Meng Hao and his Demonic aura.

"How exactly is this fatty practicing Cultivation? He's managed to develop a set of Spirit Teeth. In our Sect, the technique to develop Spirit Teeth has been lost for eight hundred years. With Spirit Teeth, you can crush Spirit Stones with your mouth, which is necessary to practice THAT technique. It seems this trip wasn't a waste after all. If we take this kid back with us, he will be a true treasure in our Sect." His eyes glittering fiercely, Zhao Shanling lifted his right hand and snatched up the stupefied Fatty. "Kid, from now on, you are an Inner Sect disciple of the Southern Domain's Golden Frost Sect." He tossed wide-eyed Fatty into a gray-colored sack. Fatty's shrill cries could be heard faintly as he disappeared inside.

Zhao Shanling turned. Followed by his retinue, he headed toward the immaterial fissure.

And thus, he, along with Zhou Yanyun and the beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect, all prepared to take their leave.

But then, Zhao Shanling suddenly remembered something. He turned back to look at the Reliance Sect, and his gaze came to rest on Meng Hao.

As he did, he stopped in his tracks, shocked. The beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect, as well as Zhou Yanyun, also stopped.

Meng Hao began to tremble. As the hulking man looked at him, it seemed as if he could see through him completely, as if his vision could pierce to his deepest parts, even to the Demonic Core which rested in his Core lake.

“This is...” the hulking man’s eyes narrowed, then began to shine. A moment ago, he hadn’t cared at all about this weak-looking disciple and had only thought to take Fatty. But something caught his eye about Meng Hao. He turned, and began to walk toward him.

“I want this kid too!” he said in a booming voice. Meng Hao’s face turned cold, and he felt as if his body were about to shatter into pieces. His Core lake seethed, and the Demonic Core felt as if it were about to be ripped out of his body by some invisible force.

Pain filled him, and he broke out in a cold sweat. He once again felt as if his body were being crushed, and he clenched his fists tightly. There was nothing he could do.

At that exact moment, a booming sound rang out from within the Reliance Sect. It was a voice, so powerful that it shook the heavens and earth. In the midst of moving upon Meng Hao, Zhou Yanyun and the beautiful middle-aged woman, as well as the hulking man, suddenly looked shocked. They turned their heads, their eyes filled with astonishment.

“I have one heir left in the Reliance Sect. Who dares to touch him!?”

Chapter 43: The Sole Heir

Patriarch Reliance sat in his secret chamber in the Reliance Sect catacombs, his hair disheveled, his eyes red. He looked as if he had gone mad. His plans were about to go awry; in moments, everyone would leave, and if that happened, they wouldn't come back. He watched in sorrow as the Golden Frost Sect Cultivator began to make a move towards his only remaining Inner Sect disciple. Fury rose in him, and without holding anything back from his Cultivation base, he sent his voice thundering out.

It shook the Heavens and stirred up a gale-forced wind which swept back and forth. In the wild mountains surrounding the Reliance Sect, trees were uprooted as the tempest battered the land. Many other trees were simply splintered into pieces until the tempest became a dark green color, filled with flashing lightning. The experts from the State of Zhao floated in mid-air looking on, dumb with amazement.

Even Zhou Yanyun from the Solitary Sword Sect looked confused. Carrying Chen Fan's unconscious form in his arm, he retreated. The massive sword began to hum, and then he was surrounded by multitudinous sword auras.

The beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect also looked surprised. She retreated, reaching down to slap the surface of the Feng Shui compass. It suddenly expanded to twice its original size.

As for Zhao Shanling from the Golden Frost Sect, he took a deep breath and retreated backward, his fingers moving in incantation patterns. The golden sword flew out from behind him, and his entire body glowed with a golden light, making him look like some sort of celestial general.

The three of them stared around at the Reliance Sect, as if they were facing a deadly opponent.

Meng Hao, who still stood on the East Mountain, looked at this change of events, at the dark green tempest which filled the sky with its deafening roar, filled with unparalleled might. He found it difficult to breathe. His eyes wide, he moved backwards, his clothing whipping in the frenzied wind. He grabbed onto a boulder and held on, lest he be sucked up by the wind. And yet, his eyes shined. Patriarch Reliance's words just now had reminded him of what he had read on the first page of the manual all those years ago when he had first arrived at the Reliance Sect.

He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang also looked surprised. This turn of events was too sudden, shocking them to the extent that it almost seemed as if their Cultivation bases would crumble under the might of the tempest.

"Let it be known, the Patriarch is still here!" roared Patriarch Reliance, deep in the catacombs. "No one is permitted to touch the kid surnamed Meng! He is my only Inner Sect disciple left. If he dies,

I will have no hope!!” Gritting his teeth, he slapped the top of his head, and his body shook. He spat out a mass of blood, then continued to hit himself over and over again, spitting out more and more blood. His body began to spin.

A look of hatred appeared in his eyes. After hitting himself seven or eight times, a massive amount of blood had been spat out. It congealed together, then shot toward the stone wall with a resounding boom. It banged against the wall, and nearly half of it was gone by the time it was able to punch through.

Having accomplished this, Patriarch Reliance’s head tilted to the side and he slipped into unconsciousness. He almost seemed dead, as if only the refined blood contained his awareness.

The refined blood burst out from the secret chamber and through the catacombs. Outside, in plain view of the awestruck bystanders, it spread out to cover the entire Reliance Sect into a roiling red fog. Within the mists of the fog boomed the sound of lightning as it continued to expand. In an instant, it had covered the surrounding mountainous region for countless kilometers in every direction. From the outside, it appeared as if the entire area had turned into a red sea of fog!

The fog churned and the roaring sound lifted into the skies. All of the Cultivators present were stunned, and their shock was visible on their faces, even Zhou Yanyun and the others.

Within the red fog, the Reliance Outer Sect disciples all lapsed into unconsciousness, uninjured. On the other hand, Sect Leader He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang were pushed away, out of the fog. Their faces went pale as they watched on in astonishment.

The fog roiled ceaselessly, and the thunderous roar continued on until it seemed there was nothing in the world except its resonant booming. The land was like an ocean of fog, the sky colorless. Then, the fog began to move, forming together into a gigantic face.

The size of the face left everyone filled with fear.

The face was that of an old man, calm, powerful and domineering. His eyes were closed, but as soon as He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang saw him, their heads began to spin. They recognized this as none other than... Patriarch Reliance

“Patriarch...” said Grand Elder Ouyang, his eyes wide, filled with excitement.

“He... He’s not dead after all!!” The experts from the State of Zhao cried out in alarm, their faces draining of blood. One after another, they fled, their hearts trembling.

Suddenly, Patriarch Reliance’s colossal red-fog face opened its eyes a crack. They opened just a sliver, and yet they emitted a trembling power which seemed as if it could crack open the earth.

He glanced up at the Heavens, and they seemed to be bloodshot. As his gaze swept around, the dark green tempest smashed into the red fog, seemingly transforming into Patriarch Reliance’s long, dark hair.

As he watched this, Zhou Yanyun’s face went pale and he spat out a mouthful of blood. As he retreated backwards his massive sword suddenly split in two, leaving behind only a stump of a blade. His eyes filled with dread, and his heart pounded. His Cultivation base was at the Nascent Soul stage, but caught underneath this gaze, his Nascent Soul began to wither. He retreated even faster, pulling out a blue-colored talisman, which he activated. It covered his body, as well as unconscious Chen Fan, as he sped off into the distance. A powerful voice seemed to echo in his heart, telling him that his opponent was not at the Nascent Soul stage, but rather, the almighty Spirit Severing stage.

As the beautiful woman from the Black Sieve Sect saw all of this happening, the Feng Shui compass beneath her suddenly began to emit popping sounds, and was riddled with cracks. Then it exploded into pieces. This woman had never been so afraid. Spitting out blood, she retreated with an unconscious Xu Qing. The only thing that filled her mind was: flee!

As for tall, hulking Zhao Shanling, his body seemed as if it were being attacked by a falling mountain. He retreated backwards, coughing up blood. The golden sword in front of him shattered into fragments. His face pale, he turned and dashed away, fleeing toward the immaterial crack.

The experts from the State of Zhao all spit up blood. The Foundation Establishment stage Cultivators felt the spiritual energy in their body snapping, and they knew their longevity had been damaged. Their faces grew wan.

On top of the East Mountain, the red fog curled around Meng Hao, circling around his waist. Face pale, he continued to grip the boulder. To the onlookers, however, Meng Hao’s position was exactly in the middle of Patriarch Reliance’s forehead.

“You forced my Reliance Sect to disband, and you’ve attempted to slaughter my only heir! You truly have gall!” His world-shaking voice boomed out in all directions, and as it did, three red

beams of light shot out, shooting straight toward Zhou Yanyun, the beautiful woman and the hulking man from the Golden Frost Sect.

“I, Zhou, am an Elder of the Solitary Sword Sect, a Protector of the Dao. If Patriarch Reliance kills me, the Solitary Sword Sect will destroy you!”

“Patriarch Reliance, please cease your anger. Junior is a disciple of the Black Sieve Sect, my grandfather is Ping Sandao, your good friend!”

“Junior was mistaken, Patriarch, please calm your anger.”

Words poured out of the three people as the red light pursued them; Patriarch Reliance let out a cold snort.

“Beat it, you three!” The three red beams disappeared. “Go back and ask your Sect Elders if they’ve forgotten about the Blood Pact we made all those years ago. The State of Zhao is my realm. Anyone who dares step foot here cannot blame me for annihilating them. As for those three other disciples, take them away, I don’t need them.” Their faces pale, the three Southern Domain disciples disappeared.

Seeing this, the State of Zhao Cultivators froze in place, trembling. Seeing Nascent Soul stage Cultivators act like that left them petrified. The most powerful among them was only at the Foundation Establishment stage.

The thousand-year-old legends about Patriarch Reliance had now come to being in front of their very eyes.

As the powerful, domineering voice boomed out, the fog began to roil and spin, with Meng Hao as its center. The fog congealed in front of him to form a long spear.

It was not red, but instead covered with talismanic inscribing of white, silver and gold. It appeared to be incredibly extraordinary.

“The Reliance Sect has been dissolved. So be it. But this kid is my only Inner Sect heir. If anyone dares to touch him...” His attention turned to Meng Hao. “In that case, Meng Hao, use this spear to exterminate that person! All of you, beat it!” His voice echoed out across the land. The State of Zhao experts immediately fled. What they didn’t seem to notice was that Patriarch Reliance’s voice

had grown noticeably weaker. It was barely noticeable, but if one paid careful attention, it was definitely weaker.

The unconscious Outer Sect disciples suddenly lifted up into the air and flew away in all directions. Then, a turbulent, blood-red glow enveloped the entire Reliance Sect. No onlooker would have been able to see it, but Meng Hao could.

He Luohua and Grand Elder Ouyang watched on in a daze. Finally, shame appeared on He Luohua's face. He lowered his head and saluted respectfully toward the blood-red shield. Then, he let out a light sigh, turned, and disappeared into the distance.

Grand Elder Ouyang was silent. One by one, he took the Outer Sect disciples out into the wild mountains. Then he looked at the Reliance Sect from a distance. With a sigh, he departed.

He and He Luohua both knew that with the Patriarch's acknowledgment of the dissolution of the Sect, there was no longer such thing as the Reliance Sect.

Meng Hao stood within the blood-red glow, looking excited. He looked at the spear, which emitted a white, silver and golden glow. Suddenly and inexplicably, the spear, completely of its own volition, shot forward, combining with the fog to transform into the image of an old man in a red robe. It was Patriarch Reliance.

Clasping his hands in salute, Meng Hao said, "Disciple Meng Hao pays respects to the Patriarch." Without even thinking about it, he began a flood of eloquence: "You cast awe into the hearts of the people of the State of Zhao, and your name is even known in the Southern Domain. I have revered you ever since I joined the Sect. Every day I pay homage to your words from the beginning of the manual. I have constantly reaped rewards..."

"Very well, very well. You haven't done well in your studies. Let me tell you, kid, when I was your age, my flattery sounded much more natural than yours. Don't try to pull that stuff off on me." Patriarch Reliant glared at him, yet inwardly was a bit moved.

Meng Hao looked at him with a sheepish smile.

"Even though it's useless to flatter me, well I... never mind. Listen up. I was only able to use a sliver of my consciousness, so it wasn't easy to scare off those damned Nascent Soul stage Cultivators. I don't have much time at the moment before this form disappears." As he spoke, he began to grow more and more indistinct. "I need to rest for a year. When that year is up, you must use any means

possible to attract every expert of the Foundation Establishment stage or higher from the State of Zhao to come to my meditation zone. If you can accomplish this, then I will give you an incredible reward!” He raised his hand and pointed a finger at Meng Hao.

Instantly, information entered Meng Hao’s mind, and he now knew how to open the entrance to the meditation zone.

“Kid, you are the only heir to my Reliance Sect. Don’t get yourself killed. If you get killed, I will have to find a concubine to bury with you... I... I find it annoying to have to...” The sound of his voice continued to echo about, but his body had dissipated. Not a shadow remained.

Meng Hao stared blankly for some time before recovering. It was at this point that he realized that everything which had happened had been Patriarch Reliance’s attempt to scare away the outsiders.

“So he didn’t kill those three people... But, what happened to the spear he was going to give me?”

Chapter 44: The North Sea Reveals the Dao

In the entire expansive Reliance Sect, only Meng Hao remained, standing alone on the East Mountain. He watched the red light fade away, then lowered his head. The formerly bustling Outer Sect was now empty.

Elder Sister Xu had been taken away. Elder Brother Chen had gone to the Southern Domain. Even Fatty was gone. He had no idea when he would see them again. Would it be months? Years?

His status as an Inner Sect disciple, his three years in the Reliance Sect, they all became memories. The twisting autumn wind hit his face and lifted up his hair, blowing away the dust that had settled there.

He quietly sat down on the boulder. A long time passed, and eventually the stars peeked out one by one. Then dawn came. Meng Hao sighed and lifted his head.

“They’re all gone... and here I am, still in the State of Zhao.” Suddenly, Meng Hao missed home. Even though he had gotten rid of his old ancestral house in Yunjie County, he still missed his old bed and dilapidated bowls. Even more so, he missed Mount Daqing. He missed... he missed his kind, smiling mother, and his father, who had always seemed afraid of his mother.

It was all somewhat vague. Meng Hao shook his head, and as the rays of dawn crept out, he stood up. There was no need to search the Reliance Sect. Everything worth taking was long gone, pillaged by the experts from the State of Zhao. It was all was empty.

Meng Hao patted the dust off his clothes, then changed out of his Inner Sect silver robe, back into the scholar's gown he had worn all those years ago. It was a spacious robe, but as he put it on, it felt a bit small. He stared at the rising sun and let out a sigh. Deep within him, his golden Core Lake seemed to bubble, and within it, the Demonic Core emitted spiritual power that filled and replenished his body.

"I'm not too far from the seventh level of Qi Condensation. I can feel the bottleneck." He walked forward, slapping his bag of holding. Two flying swords emerged and floated down to his feet. He glided down the mountain and left the Reliance Sect.

Using this technique with the flying swords granted him the ability of flight. But similar to Elder Sister Xu with her Wind Pennant, it was only temporary flight, nothing long term.

Meng Hao moved ever more swiftly, speeding along throughout the mountain forests. Finally, he was able to leave the Reliance Sect region, a place he hadn't left for three years. He flew throughout the seemingly endless wild mountains, eventually disappearing over the horizon.

Time passed, and maintaining his original speed, Meng Hao eventually emerged from the mountainous region after two days.

"I'm not sure how long it took Elder Sister Xu to bring me to the Sect," he muttered to himself, looking back at the mountains. "It was a few days, but I was unconscious. In any case, I think her speed at that time would have been similar to my own now."

To Cultivators, the State of Zhao is not very large. But to mortals, it is actually quite a vast region. In his studies, he had read about its geography, and though he had never personally travelled about in it, he was nevertheless somewhat familiar with the area.

"As of now I'm in the north of the State of Zhao. I shouldn't be too far from Yunjie County." Off in the distance, he could see what looked almost like a mirror laying on the flat land. That would be what was referred to as the North Sea.

"Now that I think about it, with a Wind Pennant, and being at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, Elder Sister Xu could fly temporarily, but it would drain her spiritual power relatively quickly. She

couldn't have flown very far away." Meng Hao's eyes flickered with longing. He had been away from Yunjie County for three years, and his desire to return was growing stronger. He knew that after crossing the North Sea, he would be about a half-day's walk from Mount Daqing.

Breathing in deeply, he proceeded onward, eventually arriving at the shore of the North Sea. He looked down, and on the surface of the calm lake, he could see his reflection in the water. He was no longer a youth. He looked to be about 20 years of age. His face appeared steadfast and resolute, completely different from the ignorant, immature Meng Hao of the past.

Amidst the silence, a warm, hearty laugh rang out, breaking Meng Hao's train of thought.

"Hello, young sir, do you wish to cross the sea?" A small boat slid across the water, guided toward Meng Hao by an old man wearing a woven rush raincoat. His face was covered with the evidence of a life of hardship, but he spoke with a smile.

"I do not wish to trouble you, old sir," said Meng Hao, looking surprised. He hadn't been called 'young sir' for three years now.

"It's no trouble," said the old man. "I've been ferrying people across the ocean for many years. I really admire young, talented scholars like yourself." He pushed the boat up next to Meng Hao, who leaped easily onto the deck, offering his thanks.

There was a young girl inside the boat, seven or eight years old, her hair done up in two pigtailed. She squatted in front of a little oven, tannings its flames as she boiled water. Steam wafted up.

Inside the pot of water was a bottle of alcohol.

"This is my granddaughter," said the old man as he turned the boat around. "Too bad she's a girl. If she were a boy, I would have sent her off to be a scholar. Young sir," he said with a smile, "where are you from?" The boat headed out toward the center of the lake. As the wind sprang up, the old man sat down next to the oven.

The little girl looked up at Meng Hao, her wide eyes innocent and charming.

"I am a young scholar from Yunjie County," Meng Hao said with a smile. "Below Mount Daqing." This type of mortal life caused him to think of his life from before, three years ago.

“Yunjie County, that’s a good place! Great men lend their glory to a location. Many years ago, an auspicious sign appeared there. It even arose the notice of the officials.” The old man picked up the bottle of alcohol. “This weather is turning cold and my body can’t take it. Here, have a drink.” He extended the bottle toward Meng Hao. “Can you drink?”

Meng Hao knew the auspicious sign to which he referred. It had been ten years before, the day before his parents went missing. When he thought of this, his heart grew a bit melancholy. He hesitated for a moment, looking at the bottle. He had never drunk alcohol before. Back in Yunjie County, he had lived in poverty, and there had been no alcohol in the Reliance Sect. He lifted up a glass and allowed the man to fill it, then took a drink.

A spicy warmth suddenly filled his heart, then slowly spread out through his body.

“Old sir, your conversation topics are somewhat out of the ordinary. Have you been running a ferry here for a long time?” Meng Hao gazed at the rippling green waves, then took another drink of alcohol. The alcohol burned its way down, and he thought of the Reliance Sect, of Elder Sister Xu, Elder Brother Chen and Fatty.

“Twenty years,” replied the old man with a laugh. “In my life, I’ve ferried many, many people across this North Sea. I’ve seen a lot of things, and of course, I’ve learned a lot about how people tend to have conversations. Please, don’t laugh at me. Who knows how many years this lake has been here? It’s seen a lot of people too. People remember it, and it remembers the people.” The old man lifted his glass and took a drink.

Meng Hao stared at him for a moment. This was the first time he had ever heard someone speak in such a fashion. He looked back at the lake, muttering to himself, seemingly lost in thought.

“This is obviously a lake,” he said suddenly. “Why do people call it the North Sea?”

The old man thought for a moment, then smiled. “Lakes can dry up, grow quiet, and become still. If that happened, no living things would remain. But seas last forever, and can contain the water of countless rivers and lakes. Maybe people just didn’t want the lake to ever go away, so they named it that way. When all is said and done, if you believe it’s a lake, then it’s a lake. If you believe it’s a sea, then it’s a sea.”

When he heard the old man's words, Meng Hao's mind suddenly trembled. The hand holding the glass of alcohol began to quiver, and he stared out at the lake water, almost in a trance. He seemed to lose track of time.

Time passed, and the boat reached the shore. Meng Hao pulled out some silver that he had acquired from one of the disciples back at the Reliance sect and paid the fare. He gave the old man a deep bow of respect, then watched as the boat drifted off. His eyes shined with a strange light.

He didn't leave, but instead sat down cross-legged on the lakeshore, looking out at the waters, and the lone boat disappearing into the distance. He could hear the old man laughing.

"If you believe it's a lake, then it's a lake. If you believe it's a sea, then it's a sea..." The old man's voice echoed across the distance. It seemed as if... he were not disappearing into the distance, but rather... merging into it....

Meng Hao sat there in a trance, taking it all in. He sat for three days straight.

He didn't move at all during that time, instead staring silently at the lake, the old man's words echoing in his mind.

"Lakes can dry up, grow quiet, become still. If that happened, no living things would remain. But seas last forever, and can contain the water of countless rivers and lakes..." Meng Hao's eyes suddenly lit up. The golden Core Lake within him seemed boundless, but in his eyes it was still a lake.

"If I believe it's a lake, then it's a lake. If I believe it's a sea, then from now on... let it be a sea!" A thunderous sound filled him, and the Core Lake began to seethe and churn. Without the aid of any medicinal pills whatsoever, it suddenly expanded.

Meng Hao wasn't aware of any of this. His eyes were closed tightly; he had entered a strange state. The old man's words filled his mind. He didn't notice it, but around him, the boundless Spiritual Energy of heaven and earth had begun to gurgle up, surrounding his body and then entering it. Waves broke out across the North Sea, and within its churning arose a massive amount of Spiritual Energy, which rushed forth and surrounded Meng Hao.

The North Sea was revealing the Dao!

If, at this moment, a Core Formation Cultivator could see what was happening, he would be thoroughly shocked. This type of Dao enlightenment was only possible for someone at the Spirit Severing stage. In addition, it required a huge amount of fortune and luck. Yet here was Meng Hao, already reaching out to the threshold!

The reason he could succeed in this was in large part due to the Demonic Core within him. It was the Core of a Flying Rain-Dragon, an ancient beast whose tail could transform into a Demon. Actually, that year in which he had dreamed of the Flying Rain-Dragon, Meng Hao had already reached Dao enlightenment.

Three days passed, and finally Meng Hao opened his eyes. They glowed with a golden light. Within him, his Core Lake had increased by a shocking double. As he examined it, Meng Hao realized that this was no lake. This was a Core sea!

He believed it to be a sea, therefore... it was a sea!

The seawater roared, and waves whipped about. The Demonic Core, as stable as ever in the depths, emitted Spiritual Energy which filled Meng Hao's entire body. Using the techniques he had learned from the Sublime Spirit Scripture, he circulated the energy. His body began to glow with a golden light, as if something had suddenly broken out within him. The golden light emanated around him for nine meters in every direction.

Amidst the roaring, Meng Hao's Cultivation base suddenly climbed upwards, breaking through the sixth level bottleneck directly into the seventh level of Qi Condensation.

Even though he had just broken through to the seventh level, his power was the same as if he had already reached its peak. This was because in his dantian region was not a Core Lake, but a Core sea!

Earlier, the Spiritual Energy which had built up in the North Sea for countless years had suddenly surged forth as if to help Meng Hao make his breakthrough.

Gradually, the Spiritual Energy of heaven and earth which surrounded him began to dissipate, as did the North Sea's Spiritual Energy. Slowly, the golden glow which emanated from Meng Hao also began to fade, and slowly he returned to his usual appearance. He sat there cross-legged. The golden light eventually left his eyes, although they continued to sparkle brightly.

He slowly stood up and looked out at the North Sea. With clasped hands, he saluted the sea deeply. His mind was filled with descriptions he had read about in the Reliance Sect's Magic Pavilion, of the various Demonic creatures in the lands of South Heaven. Wherever demons existed, there would be demons that appeared as mountains, demons that appeared as rivers, and demons that appeared as plants and animals.

"Today, the North Sea revealed the Dao. One day when my Cultivation base is high enough, I will return here and help you become a sea!" He gazed out at the North Sea. He wasn't sure whether or not this lake, which desired to be a sea, might be like the descriptions he had read about, something with life, a demonic life.

Regardless, it had helped him make a breakthrough in his Cultivation base, helped him turn his Core Lake into a Core sea. He must repay the kindness. There was only one way: to help this lake become a sea!

After some time passed, Meng Hao turned and strode toward Mount Daqing.

Chapter 45: A Look Back at the Mortal World after Three Years

Autumn wind curled around Mount Daqing in the north of the State of Zhao. Most of the rattan vines had dried and withered, and leaves floated down from the mountain into the river below. Perhaps they, like that gourd bottle from years ago, would eventually reach the Milky Way Sea and then float on to the Great Tang in the Eastern Lands.

Beneath Mount Daqing lay three counties. Yunjie County was the most flourishing of the three. It wasn't very large, but it bustled with people. When market day came, people from the whole mountain region gathered there, and a hubbub of voices would fill the air.

On this day, a young man wearing a clean, blue scholar's robe walked into Yunjie, seemingly restless with emotion. Though he was a stranger, his face looked familiar. It was, of course, Meng Hao.

He walked down the familiar streets, passing houses and shops. As he strolled through the mortal world, he recalled many things from the past. This place contained his memories from childhood, the lonely bitterness of his youth, and his stubborn attachment to his studies. So many unforgettable events.

Passing a large courtyard, he said, "That would be where Miss Sun lives...." The walls which had seemed so tall in the past, now looked somewhat short. Past the walls were Miss Sun's bedchambers, a place that had been the subject of many fantasies in the past.

He had often imagined that Steward Sun would take a liking to him, and then offer him Lady Sun's hand in marriage. She was rumored to be as beautiful as a goddess.

Three years had passed, not a very long time, but to Meng Hao, it seemed as if an entire generation had come and gone.

Shaking his head emotionally, he was about to move on, when suddenly the main doors of the Sun mansion opened and a sedan chair emerged. Meng Hao stopped. How often in the past had he looked into the courtyard, hoping to catch a glimpse into Lady Sun's bedchamber? His eyes flickered as he gazed at the sedan chair. The wind suddenly lifted the screen curtain of the sedan, and he saw an extremely fat girl inside, her face covered with dark spots. She was young. Meng Hao's jaw dropped.

If he hadn't recognized the serving girl next to her, he would never have believed that the young woman was actually Miss Sun.

The sedan chair disappeared into the distance, and Meng Hao continued walking, feeling a bit regretful.

"I just destroyed the image of my dream lover..." he said, shaking his head. "Well, the sages were right: avert the gaze from inappropriateness. I shouldn't have looked, shouldn't have looked." A look of pity appeared on his face as he walked away.

Around noon, Meng Hao found himself staring blankly at a large house off in the distance. It was worn-out and dilapidated and there were clearly people living inside. He could hear noise drifting out from inside. It sounded like the occupants were arguing.

This was Meng Hao's ancestral residence. Years ago, he had been destitute, and was forced to sell it. Inside that house were many beautiful and happy memories from the past, as well as the bitter, yet empowering memories from the time after his parents went missing.

Image after image appeared in Meng Hao's mind. He stood there until dusk began to fall.

Silently, he approached the door, raised his hand, and knocked.

The knock silenced the din of argument that had continued unceasingly throughout the afternoon. After a moment the door opened. A middle-aged man stood there, frowning. His face was covered with lines from a lifetime of hardships.

“Who are you? What do you want?”

“Uncle Li...?” said Meng Hao quietly, looking at the man in front of him.

“You...” the middle-aged man stared in surprise. He looked closely at Meng Hao, and then a look of disbelief filled his eyes. “Meng Hao? You... Where have you been? Come in!” With a look of pleasant surprise, the man dragged Meng Hao into the house.

“Wife, come see who it is!”

A middle-aged woman sat inside, tears in her eyes. When she heard her husband’s words, and saw Meng Hao, she gaped for a moment, then rose to her feet, her eyes beaming with joy.

“It really is Meng Hao...” said the man.

“Child, everyone said you just up and left that year. Let Auntie have a look at you.” She stood in front of him, looking him up and down, her eyes filled with happiness. She seemed to have forgotten the afternoon spent arguing. “I haven’t seen you for years. You’ve grown taller, but, ai, you’re so skinny. You must have endured a lot over the years.

“Here, have a seat. Auntie will cook a few dishes for you. You just got back, stay a while. You may have sold this place to your Uncle Li, but it’s still your home.” She gave a kind, happy smile to Meng Hao, then glared at the man and went into the kitchen.

Soon, the table was filled with food. Looking at the couple in front of him, and the kindness in their eyes, it reminded him of the times after his parents had gone missing. Without the help of Uncle and Aunt Li, things would have been much more difficult for him.

“The harvests haven’t been good these years,” said Aunt Li, serving some food to Meng Hao. “We gave our house to our son so that he could get married. Since this place was empty, we moved

here.” She gave him a kind look. “Where have you been all these years? We looked all over for you, but were never able to find you.”

Meng Hao listened to them talk and felt their kindness in his heart. He told them a somewhat vague story of traveling to a different part of the nation to study. After the meal was finished, he gave the couple a deep bow.

“Uncle Li, Aunt Li, I would like to repurchase my ancestral home. After all, my mother and father left it for me. Here are some pieces of silver. You two can continue living here and help take care of the place.” He pulled out some pieces of silver from within his robe and put them down.

“This...” Uncle Li hesitated, looking at his wife. Aunt Li said nothing, but after a moment passed, nodded.

“You’re right,” she said resolutely. “This house is yours, left to you by your father and mother. Your Uncle Li and I are getting old, so as you suggest, we will stay here. But we don’t need the silver. We looked after you as you grew up. You’re like our own child! How could we take your money?” She put the silver pieces back into Meng Hao’s hand.

Meng Hao didn’t say anything, instead clasping his hands and bowing deeply to them once again.

He didn’t stay for the night. Instead, he gathered together some things from the house that contained memories, then made his farewells and slipped off into the darkness of the night. He didn’t take the silver with him. He left it on the bed.

Later, he sat cross-legged on a bed in an inn, looking out at the night sky. He sighed.

“I’m no longer part of the mortal world, and yet, it’s hard to sever all the ties.” He closed his eyes. “Well, if they can’t be severed, then I shall just let them remain.”

At dawn the next morning, Meng Hao found the Wang Family carpenter shop. There, he saw an aged Uncle Wang, his face full of wrinkles, sitting in the shop staring at nothing. In front of him was a wood carving that looked just like Wang Youcai. Uncle Wang’s face seemed to be filled with an indelible sorrow.

Meng Hao thought for a moment. He wasn’t sure whether or not Wang Youcai was dead. After being promoted to the Inner Sect, he had sought out Little Tiger, then gone to inspect the area where

Wang Youcai had fallen off the cliff. He hadn't been able to find any clues regarding what had happened.

With a sigh, Meng Hao walked into the carpenter shop.

Sensing that someone had arrived, Uncle Wang lifted his head. When he saw Meng Hao, he stared in surprise. Rubbing his eyes, he stood up, trembling.

"You... You're... Meng Hao?"

"Uncle Wang, it's me." Meng Hao reached out to support the old man.

"Where is Youcai?" he asked. It seemed he hadn't forgotten the details about what happened that year. Looking at Meng Hao, he suddenly seemed excited. "You both went missing at the same time that year. Where is he...?"

"Youcai wasn't able to return, so he asked me to send a message for him," said Meng Hao with a smile. "He'll be back in a few years. You can rest at ease, sir. Youcai is living very well." He helped Uncle Wang into his chair, then sat with him for a while chatting. He told him that they had gone off to study, and Youcai was so talented that he wanted to continue studying for some time before returning.

Tears of excitement rolled down Uncle Wang's face. He listened to Meng Hao's story, nodding, and it seemed as if some of the wrinkles on his face disappeared. Meng Hao continued to tell some interesting anecdotes, and the old man smiled.

"That kid was always smart. He never wanted to study carpentry from me. He would spend all day thinking about other things. Good, good. If he can go out to study, it's a good thing." Uncle Wang's smile widened. Around noon, Meng Hao left, escorted to the door personally by Uncle Wang.

Little Tiger and Fatty weren't from Yunjie County, but rather the other two surrounding counties. Meng Hao wasn't very familiar with Little Tiger, but felt confident that he could take care of himself. On the other hand, he definitely had to go pay a visit to Fatty's family to let them know he was doing well.

Fatty was most likely in the Southern Domain. Meng Hao sighed inwardly.

That afternoon, he went looking for Steward Zhou, but couldn't find him. After asking around, he learned that Steward Zhou had moved his household away about half a year ago. People said he'd moved to the capital city of the State of Zhao. Learning this, Meng Hao made no further inquiries, and left Yunjie County.

There were many memories here, but Meng Hao knew that as soon as he had entered the Reliance Sect, his path lay in the direction of the State of Zhao, and the Southern Domain.

He left in silence, taking with him only a few items which he stored in his bag of holding: some pots and bowls, and some bed quilts. The pots and bowls had been given to him by his father as a gift, and the bed quilts had been quilted by his mother. To Meng Hao, these things were priceless.

There were three counties below Mount Daqing. In addition to Yunjie County, there was Yunhai County and Yunkai County. Fatty's home was in Yunkai.

It was smaller than Yunjie, and although it was not as bustling, it was surrounded by vast tracts of land and was therefore quite a wealthy place. This was especially true of the handful of great families, who controlled sizeable properties and wealth.

Fatty's father was the famous Moneybags Li of Yunkai County. From what Fatty had told him in the past, his family employed several hundred workers, and you could spend an entire day walking through the family compound, which was filled with menservants and maidservants.

He had said his chamberpot was made of silver, his quilts purchased from the capital city of the State of Zhao, and that from childhood, maidservants would heat his bed for him before he slept. That arrangement had continued as he grew up, and he said he couldn't even remember how many maidservants he'd touched in his life. In any case, he had never lacked for want of anything, all the way down until the time his marriage had been arranged. His fiancée was an extremely beautiful young woman from a family of famous scholars in Yunkai. His father had put a lot of thought, and money, into successfully arranging the matter.

As he thought back to Fatty's expression when he talked about it, Meng Hao smiled. He walked into Yunkai County.

Chapter 46: Three Long Spears

Meng Hao had been to Yunkai County a few times before. Usually it was when he needed to buy pens, ink, paper and inkstones. Perhaps because the excess of wealth in the village prompted a demand for scholarly embellishments, the price of writing supplies was cheaper than average.

Even though three years had passed, the place looked just like before. As Meng Hao walked down the streets, he couldn't help but notice that outside of many of the shops hung lanterns, upon which the character "Li" was written in sweeping calligraphy.

From what Fatty had said, his father was the richest person in Yunkai, and actually owned about half of the county. And it wasn't just land they owned, but business, all of which were marked with the character "Li."

After asking around, he determined the location of Fatty's house and headed in that direction. The sun was beginning to sink over the horizon, turning the sky dark and covering the land with a soft glow.

It didn't take long for him to reach the east end of Yunkai County, where he saw a massive estate, filled with a veritable forest of grand buildings. Above the main door, which was guarded by retainers, was a board inscribed with the words "Li Mansion." The lively sound of singing and dancing could be heard from within.

Meng Hao's body flashed, and he was inside.

The mansion was a large, surrounding an inner courtyard where singers and dancers were currently putting on a show. Meng Hao caught sight of an extremely fat, middle-aged man wearing a luxurious robe. He closely resembled Fatty; this was obviously his father. Sitting next to him was a young man whose face was covered with a prudent expression.

He seemed wildly arrogant, and wore expensive garments, yet his body looked a bit frail, as if he had worn himself out with too much wine and women. He held a wine cup in his hand, and a somewhat indecent expression shone in his eyes as he looked over the singers and dancers.

"Still not here yet?" said the young man, frowning. His tone of voice was both cold and bored.

"Any moment, any moment," said Fatty's father, looking extremely embarrassed, but forcing an obsequious smile onto his face. "Young Lord Zhao, please just wait a bit longer. My daughter-in-law tends to take things slowly." Even as the words came out of his mouth, several maidservants appeared in the distance. Walking behind them was a young woman. She wore a long, gauzy

garment, and her hair was put up with phoenix hairpins. Her appearance was pure and beautiful, and yet there was a look of fear on her face; as she approached she seemed to shiver as if she were cold.

“Father...” she said as she approached. She bowed in greeting.

“Xiang’er, this is the young Lord from the house of Zhao in Yunhai County,” said Fatty’s father softly. “Why don’t you toast him?” He looked at his daughter-in-law apologetically. Even though his son had been missing for years, she continued to wait for him to return, never complaining. She treated her father-in-law with utmost filial piety.

“Greetings, young Lord Zhao,” said the girl softly, lowering her head. She was afraid, but she knew that the family was not in a good position at the moment. She lifted up the wine pot and poured some wine into a cup, which she extended to him with both hands.

He looked at her, his eyes shining brightly. He swallowed hard. The girl was shockingly beautiful, and in his heart, he was already prepared to make some trouble. A lecherous smile appeared on his face. He accepted the wine up and then tried to grab her hand. The girl stepped back, frightened, causing the cup to tumble to the floor.

“How dare you!” shouted young Lord Zhao, his eyes blazing. He kicked over the table, sending wine and food scattering about. He pointed at Fatty’s father. “You listen to me, Li Dafu. My younger brother is back, and he’s an Immortal now. He wants your property, not your lives! I felt pity for you and spoke kindly of you to him, but then you humiliate me like this!?”

“Young Lord Zhao, this...” Fatty’s father hastily tried to speak.

“Shut the hell up! Let me tell you, this matter isn’t finished! If you know what’s good for you, you’ll have your daughter-in-law spend the night with me. If she pleases me, then I’ll say some more nice things about you to my younger brother...” He laughed coldly, his eyes fixed on the girl, whose face had grown pale white. A dirty look once again appeared on his face.

Fatty’s father’s face grew ashen. At first, the young man had only mentioned toasting, which he had agreed to. But this was excessive. He gritted his teeth. His son was missing, and he couldn’t even protect his own daughter-in-law. What was the point of living?

“Beat it!” he roared. “Get the hell out of here! Men, kick this man out! Even if the Li family goes bankrupt, I won’t tolerate insults from the house of Zhao!”

“How impressive,” laughed young Lord Zhao. He spun and left, his eyes filled with murder.

Watching the feast being cleared away, the young girl bit her lip, tears streaming down her face. She lowered her head and looked as if she were about to say something.

“Don’t worry about this matter,” said Fatty’s father calmly. “Law still exists in this world. Please, take the young miss back.” Servants appeared to escort the young woman away. Everything was quiet. Fatty’s father began to tremble. He staggered, suddenly seeming to grow older.

Then he shook his head and began to walk. Before long, he reached a building. He pushed the door open and walked in. It was a luxurious room, but seemed as if it would look better if everything weren’t covered with bite marks.

“Fugui, where are you?” murmured Fatty’s father as he sat down into a chair. “Why haven’t you returned...?” He looked even older than before. He gently rubbed at a bite mark on the table.

“He’s doing well,” said a voice, breaking the silence. Fatty’s father lifted his head, and his eyes filled with fear as he realized that somehow another person was standing in the room, next to the window. He had no idea when or how he had come to be standing there.

He wore a long blue robe, and looked like a scholar. It was none other than Meng Hao.

“You...” Li Dafu stood up, looking alarmed. He took a few steps back.

“I’m Li Fugui’s friend from the Sect, Meng Hao, from Yunjie County.” Meng Hao turned. His eyes moved from some bite marks on the windowsill to rest on Li Dafu.

“Meng Hao!” said Li Dafu, shocked. He recognized the name. When he had checked into the disappearance of his son all those years ago, he’d learned that three other boys had gone missing at the same time. One of them was named Meng Hao.

“Fugui, he...” Li Dafu’s body began to tremble. Inside, he felt hesitation.

“He’s not in the State of Zhao at the moment, but I think he’ll be able to return before too long.” Meng Hao walked forward and sat down in a chair. “I saw what happened in the courtyard just now,” he said coolly. “I’ll stay here for a few days to take care of the matter.” He took a piece of paper out and placed it down onto the table. “Please forge me three spears according to these specifications. One iron, one silver, and one gold spear.” With that, he closed his eyes.

Li Dafu hesitated, but then nodded his head. Regardless of how unbelievable the situation might seem, he would rather believe what Meng Hao had just said. Without a word, he picked up the paper and hurried off.

As for young Lord Zhao, he left the Li household, and Yunkai County, his face grim. Accompanied by his retainers, he made his way back to Yunhai County in the darkness of night, gnashing his teeth. As he walked, he slapped himself hard in the face, leaving behind a clear palm print. Soon, he arrived at a large courtyard, and the expression on his face suddenly turned to one of respect, even awe. His voice low, he spoke.

“Little brother, are you awake?”

“What’s the matter!?” said a cold voice. The voice was a bit shrill, as if its owner was a boy just beginning to go through puberty.

“Not only does the house of Li refuse to listen to your suggestions, they also humiliated me. They even slapped me.” Young Lord Zhao tried to put on his most humiliated expression.

The door slowly opened, and a young man walked out. He appeared to be about twelve or thirteen, and wore a richly embroidered gown. He had finely chiseled features and looked almost beautiful. Were Meng Hao here, this young man would instantly begin to act like a toady. He was one of the disciples saved by Grand Elder Ouyang the day the Reliance Sect was disbanded. He was Meng Hao’s servant, Zhao Hai.

He had the same idea as Fatty, to become a great landowner. With Fatty gone, he had returned to this area and began plundering the properties of the local rich families. He had actually begun to plan how to deal with Li Dafu back when he was still in the Reliance Sect. Unfortunately, after returning, he’d learned that the Li family forbade its members from revealing information about family assets.

“You good-for-nothing fool,” said Zhao Hai with a cold snort. “Do you really think I’m as stupid as you? The angle of that palm print is all wrong. You obviously hit yourself.” An expression of disgust appeared on his face. But, this person was his older brother. He frowned. “Never mind. I’m

about to make a breakthrough in my Cultivation base. In seven days, I'll go with you to the house of Li." He turned and went back into the room, slamming the door behind him. Young Lord Zhao looked pleased. His heart burned as he imagined the young girl's plaintive cries coming from underneath him, seven days from now.

Seven days passed. Zhao Hai walked out of the house of Li in Yunhai County, his hands clasped behind his back, followed by young Lord Zhao. They brought a group of family retainers with them. Their eyes filled with killing intent as they headed straight for Yunkai County.

In Yunkai County, Meng Hao sat cross-legged in Fatty's room, meditating in silence. Around noon-time, a light knock could be heard on the door. Meng Hao slowly opened his eyes to see Li Dafu entering the room. Behind him were ten family retainers. Three groups of three men each carried a spear, one iron, one silver, and one gold.

Networks of fine lines were carved onto their surfaces, making them appear both primitive and luxurious at the same time. Meng Hao raised his hand, and the iron spear flew through the air toward him. Li Dafu and his servants gaped in astonishment and shock.

The iron spear was extremely heavy; to see Meng Hao snatch it from such a distance frightened them.

Li Dafu's body shook, and his eyes shone. Before, he had surmised that Meng Hao was not an ordinary person. Despite only half trusting him, he had still complied with the request to craft the three spears. But now, he thoroughly believed his previous words. This person was clearly not ordinary.

Meng Hao nodded, retrieving the silver and gold spears. He tested them out, then deposited them into his bag of holding with the flick of a sleeve. When this happened, flopping sounds sounded out as the servants dropped to their knees and bowed to him, their expressions filled with shock.

Chapter 47: Another Encounter with Shangguan Xiu

"An Immortal!"

Li Dafu seemed to be frozen in place, trembling violently. He looked as if he, too, might drop to his knees. Before, he had assumed this person was extraordinary in some way, but had never imagined that he could be an immortal. Then he suddenly became even more excited as he remembered the man had said that his son was a friend from his Sect.

“Don’t tell me... Don’t tell me that useless kid is now an Immortal!?”

He was about to ask when Meng Hao lifted his head and looked out the window. The sound of a commotion drifted in from outside, then a series of cracks as the main gate was broken open.

“Li Dafu, get the hell out here! My younger brother is an Immortal, and he’s here to visit you. Come out here and bow to him!”

Li Dafu looked up. Meng Hao stood and walked toward the door. Li Dafu followed hurriedly, and they soon arrived in the outer courtyard of the mansion. Pieces of the door lay scattered about everywhere, along with a multitude of moaning family retainers. The cocky young Lord stood there, and behind him, a young man, one hand held behind his back, the other held up in front of him. Encircling his hand was a finger-sized Flame Serpent.

The young man looked proud and unyielding, and his Flame Serpent caused the surrounding onlookers to slowly move away from him, gasping with fear and astonishment.

“Kid brother, this is Li Dafu,” said the young Lord Zhao, ignoring Meng Hao, who stood behind him.

“So you are... huh?” Zhao Hai lifted his chin as he started to speak, then suddenly caught sight of Meng Hao. His body immediately began to shake, and his eyes filled with disbelief. The Flame Serpent instantly disappeared, and the blood drained from his horrified face. Unconsciously, as by instinct, an ingratiating look appeared on his face.

“Li Dafu,” shouted the swaggering young Lord Zhao, clearly unaware of Zhao Hai’s change in expression, “you dare to not kneel before my brother? Let me tell you, he’s an Immortal! Do you understand what that means? He could exterminate your whole family with a wave of his hand!

“You still haven’t brought the girl out? Prepare a good room immediately. If she takes care of me well, and I’m happy, then maybe if you beg, I can provide you with an heir. Otherwise, your name will die out!” The more he spoke, the more excited he became. Behind him, however, Zhao Hai’s face was deathly pale. He trembled as he looked at Meng Hao, his head spinning. And then his brother’s words hit his ears, and his heart filled with dread.

“If you don’t,” continued the young Lord, “then, heh heh, you’re dead, along with that scholar standing next to you... Hey, who’s he? Your adopted son? You dare to stare at me? Are you looking to die? My brother is an Immortal...” Before he even finished speaking, his words reached Zhao

Hai's ears like a thunderclap, causing him to leap into the air. Fury filling his eyes, he slapped his older brother across the face.

"Shut the hell up!!" he screamed, sounding as if he was about to weep. He knew Meng Hao too well. He remembered his status when he was in the Inner Sect, his victory over Wang Tengfei. Nobody in the Outer Sect was ignorant of Meng Hao, nor his sixth-level Cultivation base. Meng Hao was like a lofty mountain that could crush Zhao Hai to death with little effort.

Even as his brother cried out in pain, Zhao Hai dropped to his knees, body quivering. "Servant Zhao Hai extends greetings... greetings to Elder Brother Meng..."

His brother stood next to him, gaping in surprise. Covering his face with a hand, he blurted, "Brother, what did you call him? Elder Brother Meng? Hahaha! So he's family! Ah, the girl must have caught his fancy too. Well, just give Meng..."

"Shut up!!" screamed Zhao Hai. He looked as if he were so scared he would drop dead. His body shook violently as his mind replayed all the things he'd heard about Meng Hao from the Outer Sect disciples. Utterly discomfited, he leaped to his feet and slapped his brother in the face again.

Li Dafu watched on in amazement. He sucked in a breath, then looked numbly at Meng Hao. He had guessed that Meng Hao was an Immortal, but he'd never imagined that upon seeing him, the powerful Immortal from the house of Zhao would be so terrified that he would break out trembling.

It wasn't just him. The surrounding servants all watched on in a daze, their eyes filling with veneration as they looked at Meng Hao.

"Elder Brother Meng..." said Zhao Hai, kneeling again, his eyes filled with intense fear.

His face somber, Meng Hao looked at Zhao Hai coldly, wordlessly.

Zhao Hai's heart thumped, and he clenched his jaw. He caught sight of his older brother standing next to him, and his eyes filled with rage. He didn't dare to complain to Meng Hao, so he decided to vent his anger on his brother.

He waved his right hand, and once again the finger-sized Flame Serpent appeared. It slammed into the young Lord Zhao, who immediately began to scream shrilly. He fell to the ground, rolling back and forth. Within moments, he had turned into a twitching, charred corpse.

“I beg Elder Brother Meng to spare my life,” said Zhao Hai, ignoring his brother, kneeling before Meng Hao and kowtowing over and over again.

“It seems you are reluctant to leave the mortal world behind,” said Meng Hao coolly. “Therefore, from today on, you can set your mind at rest, and live as a mortal. He lifted a finger, and instantly, Zhao Hai’s face went pale and he spat out a mouthful of blood. His dantian shattered, and his second-level Cultivation base was destroyed. He was no longer a Cultivator, but a mortal.

He staggered up, saluting Meng Hao with clasped hands. Then he turned and left in anguish, supported by his men. He gradually disappeared into the distance.

“I didn’t discipline him well enough,” said Meng Hao, not watching as Zhao Hai left. “He was my servant who ran away from the Sect. He caused trouble for you, Uncle Li.” He bowed to Li Dafu with cupped fists.

“No harm was done, all is well,” said Li Dafu, shaking his head. “My thanks to you, Immortal.” He bent at the waist in a bow. His head was still spinning as he thought about the Immortal of the house of Zhao being Meng Hao’s servant.

“No need for that, Uncle Li,” smiled Meng Hao. “Fatty... Li Fugui is my closest friend in the Sect. I came here in his place to visit, so of course I would not turn a blind eye to a situation such as this.” He took a step back, cupping his fists again in salute. “I shall take my leave.” He departed in a flash. Within a few steps, he was gone, leaving Li Dafu looking a bit melancholy. He was thinking of his son. Then, he broke out in another smile, his eyes filling with pride and anticipation.

“My son has done well. He’s an Immortal! I will go burn some incense in the ancestral hall. This matter has brought glory to our family and ancestors.”

Meng Hao left Yunkai County. It was afternoon now, and his robe rippled in the autumn wind. The mountain wind grew stronger and stronger as he approached Mount Daqing.

He stood on the same place on the mountaintop where he had stood in a daze three years before. Emotion filled his face. Three years had passed so quickly. His face was no longer young and naive. He had matured, but Mount Daqing was the same as always. It would never change, nor would the great river which flowed ceaselessly beneath it.

Looking down at the river, Meng Hao thought of the gourd bottle he had thrown into it that year. He thought about how he had encountered Elder Sister Xu, Fatty, Wang Youcai and Little Tiger.

Silently, he leaped into the air and onto a flying sword. He flew down the mountain to the fissure in the cliff. He entered.

It was exactly the same as it had been before. Meng Hao stood inside, looking around. That year, Elder Sister Xu had been at the seventh level of Qi Condensation. And now, he was a Cultivator of the seventh level. It was as if the three years had been a giant circle, with this as the starting point, and the ending point.

“But if the three years really were a circle, then perhaps returning here means that I’ve reached a new starting point.... It’s like the sages said, if you don’t take a first step, you will never know which direction the road leads.” He closed his eyes for a while, then opened them.

“I’ve already taken my first new steps. That year, I lacked money, and now I lack Spirit Stones. It doesn’t seem much has changed.” Meng Hao shook his head, thinking about the scant amount of Spirit Stones in his bag of holding. He couldn’t help but feel a bit of pain as he turned and left the cave. Atop his flying sword, he shot down in the direction of the river.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed, and he lifted up his head. Up on Mount Daqing, in the same position he had just been standing in, was a man wearing a golden-colored robe. He gazed down coldly at Meng Hao.

“So, you did come back here,” he said in a sinister voice which seemed to make the setting sun grow even darker, leaving behind only his eyes, filled with murder and greed.

It was Shangguan Xiu!

The day the Sect had been dissolved, he was the first person to flee. After a few days had passed, he reappeared. After some asking around, he learned about the dissolution of the Sect, as well as how Patriarch Reliance had cast terror into the hearts of the entire Cultivation world of the State of Zhao. So, covering his tracks, he left, deciding that it was time to go harvest some medicinal plants that he had planted in secret some time ago.

On the way, however, he had passed Mount Daqing, which caused him to think about the time he had investigated Meng Hao. He knew that this was where Xu Qing had found him, so he decided to stick around for a few days in the hopes of encountering him.

Killing intent shone in Meng Hao's eyes. He was currently at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, so he was able to detect the levels of other Cultivators. Shangguan Xiu was at the ninth level. Although his Cultivation base was not complete, it was close. With luck, he would soon be able to successfully reach Foundation Establishment, which would make him one of the most powerful experts in the State of Zhao.

Meng Hao knew that he was no match for him, even if he had a lot of magical items on hand. Right now, though, his bag of holding had not been replenished, and he had almost no Spirit Stones. It was not a good time to fight.

Without a word, he shot off into the distance, his body turning into a blur. As he sped off, Shangguan Xiu gave off a cold laugh. Within the Sect, he had feared Grand Elder Ouyang, and hadn't dared to make a move against an Inner Sect disciple. But that was in the past. His desire to kill Meng Hao and take his treasures burned brightly. His body flashed, and a talisman appeared in front of him. It picked him up, and he shot in pursuit of Meng Hao.

"This time, there's no special promotion training! How can you escape my hands?!" A sinister smile covered Shangguan Xiu's face. He was determined to succeed!

Chapter 48: Eccentric Song and Wu Dingqiu [1. Eccentric Song's surname in Chinese is 宋 Sòng. It has no real meaning. It is the same "Song" as the Song Dynasty. Wu Dingqiu's name in Chinese is 吴丁秋 wú dīng qiū. Wu is a common family name. Ding is the fourth heavenly stem. Qiu means Autumn]

Thunder rolled out in the evening sky. Rosy clouds drifted about, and the autumn wind rustled, picking up the fallen leaves and sending them floating. It should have been a beautiful, rainy autumn evening, but the peacefulness was interrupted by two figures who occasionally dropped to the ground, but then immediately shot back up into the air. They soared along, engaged in a life-and-death pursuit.

Meng Hao was in front, his eyes glistening. After reaching the seventh level of Qi Condensation, he could maintain top speed on his flying sword for the time it takes half an incense stick to burn. At that rate, he could not shake off Shangguan Xiu.

After some time passed, he was forced to drop to the ground, run as fast as possible for a while, and then resume gliding.

Shangguan Xiu pursued him doggedly. He knew that he couldn't let him escape; if he did, Meng Hao could easily hide somewhere in the massive State of Zhao, and that would be very troublesome.

At the moment, he was extremely confident. A critical juncture had arrived. He knew that Meng Hao possessed some treasured item. He wasn't exactly sure what it did, but he was determined to acquire it.

"Meng Hao, you can't escape me! My aim has always been the Southern Domain. The only reason I haven't ascended to the Foundation Establishment stage yet is because I didn't want to. You're like an ant to me! You will be my stepping stone into Foundation Establishment!" Shangguan Xiu was of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Even though he was very close to breaking through to the Foundation Establishment stage, his level of power was still far from that level. That having been said, even though Meng Hao was in the same stage as him, their Cultivation bases were still two levels apart. This meant that not only was Shangguan Xiu faster, but because of his status as an Elder in the Reliance Sect, he'd had access to higher level magical items.

The talisman whistled through the air, propelling him forward with extraordinary power. He flicked his wide sleeve, snapping a jade slip. A green mist shot out, which coagulated into a green bottle, about half the height of an average person. It shot toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao's eyes flickered and he slapped his bag of holding. Ten flying swords appeared, shooting toward the magical bottle. As soon as they collided, the ten flying swords exploded into pieces, which mushroomed out in all directions. The bottle shattered, but Shangguan Xiu simply increased his speed and leaped over the cloud, intent on decreasing the distance between him and Meng Hao.

At that moment, Meng Hao suddenly turned, his hands flickering in incantation patterns. Wind Blades appeared, three of them. However, they didn't shoot toward Shangguan Xiu, but instead flew in circular patterns, faster and faster, creating a gravitational force which pulled in the shattered remnants of his flying swords. Soon, they had formed a spinning vortex.

A booming sound rang out, but Meng Hao didn't look back. The vortex behind Shangguan Xiu suddenly exploded, sending shrapnel shooting out. Shangguan Xiu was knocked forward, shredding much of his clothing. His eyes burned with fury.

"So you've reached the seventh level of Qi Condensation!" Shangguan Xiu glared as Meng Hao sped off into the distance. He continued his pursuit, albeit more cautiously. He knew that Meng Hao was incredibly crafty, and could not be underestimated. He must use all his power.

When he thought about the technique Meng Hao had just used, gathering the fragmented pieces of the swords together, Shangguan Xiu was a bit taken aback. If Meng Hao's Cultivation base were higher, then the attack just now, while it might not have killed him, would have seriously injured him.

"He's so young, yet so sinister. Exploding the swords was just a diversion. Dammit!" He increased his speed, turning into a ray of light as he pursued Meng Hao.

Two people shot through the evening as the sky grew dark. The bright moon looked down, its gaze illuminating them.

Meng Hao's face was grim. He consumed some Demonic Cores. Even though the North Sea had shown him the Dao, and he had broken through to the next level, his current situation did not bode well. He was at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, but had no way to lose his pursuer. He was in somewhat of a crisis.

"There will come a day when I will slay this man!" thought Meng Hao. As he considered the inexplicable enmity between them, he came to the realisation that it was all because of his opponent's greed. Over and over again. It was extremely annoying.

Looking back at Shangguan Xiu, Meng Hao gritted his teeth. As his flying sword sputtered out of power, he leaped to the ground, racing toward the wild mountains. He was heading, not toward the Reliance Sect, but rather the east of Mount Daqing, where a chain of mountains rose and fell off toward the flatlands and the capital city of the State of Zhao.

The mountains here were numerous, even more so than the regions around the Reliance Sect. This mountain chain was the largest in the State of Zhao, and had come to be known as the State Shield Mountain range. From a distance, you couldn't see past them, and in the night, they rose up like the undulating spine of a slumbering dragon, emanating a lofty air.

Meng Hao lowered his head, speeding deep into the State Shield Mountains. This was not the first time he had fled for his life in the past three years. From his experience that year on the black mountain, Meng Hao knew how to seize opportunities. He flew as fast as he could, heading deeper and deeper into the mountains.

Shangguan Xiu did not slow in his pursuit. No matter where Meng Hao went, he would follow. His mind was set; he would kill Meng Hao and take his treasures. And yet he knew he didn't have much time. The medicinal plant that he had been growing was ripe and ready to be harvested. If he was too slow, it would wither, which would wreck his future plans.

In his estimation, it should take more than one or two days to take care of Meng Hao. That much of a delay was acceptable. So without hesitation, he continued into the barren mountains in pursuit.

About five hundred kilometers away from the point where Meng Hao and Shangguan Xiu entered the State of Zhao's State Shield Mountains, there arose a lofty mountain.

The mountain's peak pierced the clouds, and was visible from a vast distance away. Everything from half-way up the mountain all the way to its peak was covered with white snow. It was huge, much bigger than any of the surrounding mountains, and its very top seemed to emanate rays of light that covered the mountain like flowing water.

Next to this mountain was another mountain, whose top appeared to have been sliced off, forming a round, plateau-like platform. Assembled on the platform were nearly a hundred Cultivators wearing long, white robes.

They were young, the youngest of the group being eleven or twelve years old, the oldest, seventeen or eighteen. There were boys and girls, and all of them wore expressions of keen anticipation. Some of them seemed to be keeping their Cultivation base concealed, and their faces looked proud and unyielding.

Some of the group were at the seventh or eighth level of Qi Condensation, and a few were even at the ninth. The weakest were at the fifth or sixth levels. There was no Sect in the State of Zhao who had disciples like this. Clearly, whoever had gathered this group of youths was a major Sect from the Southern Domain.

Their clothing was all uniform, and they radiated an imposing air, as if they had the power to affect everything around them. Some of them had outstanding latent talent, and all of them were filled with vigor. Clearly, they belonged in the Cultivation world.

"These are some of my Outer Sect disciples," said a voice with a complacent laugh. "What do you think, Eccentric Song?" At the front of the group, near the edge of the platform, two old men sat cross-legged, a Go board spread out between them. The person who had laughed was one of these old men. He had white hair, wore a white robe, and had the demeanor of a transcendent being.

His eyes flashed like lightning and were filled with pride. He continued to laugh.

Sitting across from him was Eccentric Song, wearing a long black robe that seemed to shimmer with iridescence. His long gray hair hung in disarray, and he wore an enigmatic smile on his face.

“Excellent, excellent. Your Violet Fate Sect is definitely worthy to be called one of the five Great Sects of the Southern Domain. There are clearly some promising subjects among your Outer Sect Disciples, Wu Dingqiu.” Eccentric Song smiled, and a cold wind seemed to spring up. The onlooking disciples’ minds seemed to shiver.

“Very well, let us carry out our wager,” said the white-robed man with a smile, his eyes flashing. His hand made a snatching motion, and suddenly a large stone appeared, about the size of a human head. It slammed down onto the ground next to him.

It was dark and opaque, and yet a black glow could be seen flickering inside it. A multitude of flickering twinkles could be seen within, as if it were composed of a vast number of gems.

“This is what I’m putting up, a Heaven Crystal!” The white-robed man’s eyes sparkled as he looked at Eccentric Song.

“No problem,” said Eccentric Song, flicking his sleeve. “This is the Star Fragment you’ve had your eye on.” A large lump of iron appeared, about the size of a fist. It emanated a black glow, as if it could swallow up everything in sight. It was clearly anything but ordinary. “See the flag on the peak of the mountain? If your disciples can topple that flag, then you win. But, if your Violet Fate Sect disciples aren’t skilled enough to ascend the mountain, then your Heaven Crystal is mine.” He laughed contentedly.

“Fear not,” said the white-robed man with a confident sneer. “My disciples can definitely snap your paltry flagpole. They will also clear the mountain of all its treasures and slay all the Demonic beasts you’ve raised. Don’t go back on your word when that happens!”

“I have roamed heaven and earth for four hundred years and have never gone back on my word. Yes, I have filled this mountain with many treasures and Spirit Stones, as well as numerous unique Spirit beasts that I have carefully raised. But mark my words, once the mountain is opened, anyone under the Foundation Establishment stage can enter, for seven days. This includes your Violet Fate Sect disciples, as well as disciples of any other Sect. Anyone!

“Anyone with skill can acquire the treasures. Even if someone comes along who can clear them all out, I won’t even so much as frown, let alone go back on my word. If I do, then I’m not surnamed Song!” Eccentric Song spoke all these words with head held high, looking unyielding, his voice decisive.

“However, anyone without skill who does not acquire treasures, and cannot ascend to the top of the mountain, will become food for my Spirit beasts. This is simply their destiny.” Having said this, his smile grew even colder, and his eyes filled with a sneer.

“All of my Violet Fate Sect disciples are outstanding among their peers,” said Wu Dingqiu with a glare, his voice booming out. “Clearing out your mountain will be as easy for them as turning over a hand.”

“For a hundred kilometres surrounding my treasure mountain, Spirit Beasts roam freely. I’ve fertilized the land with soil from the bottom of the Eastern Sea, which hasn’t seen the light of day for ten thousand years. I even transported the top of Mount Tian Shan from the Southern Domain to be this mountain’s highest peak, spending an entire sixty-year cycle refining it and assimilating it into mountain. There is nothing like it in the world. Each Spirit beast here is an exquisite specimen personally acquired by myself. They are fiendish and unusual, Mutated beasts that I painstakingly collected from everywhere under heaven! I think the hundred or so disciples you have brought are not enough food for my Spirit beasts!” Eccentric Song glared, slowly rubbing his beard.

Chapter 49: Mountain of Trial by Fire

“My Violet Fate Sect is one of the great sects of the Southern Domain. These may be just Outer Sect disciples, but even to enter the Sect, each and every one of them passed nine difficult tests. Every month, they immerse their bodies in a Spirit Spring. They possess inexhaustible amounts of precious materials. All of them have extraordinary latent talent, rarely seen in any Sect.

“These disciples could flatten your crappy mountain with the wave of a hand. As for your Demonic creatures, they aren’t even fit to be eaten by my disciples. They’re not Mutated beasts they’re Mutt beasts!” Wu Dingqiu glared with wide eyes. The disciples behind him lowered their heads in embarrassment, glancing at Eccentric Song.

Eccentric Song stared for a moment, surprised. He flicked his sleeve and was about to say something when Wu Dingqiu suddenly leaped up and turned to face his disciples.

“Violet Fate Sect Disciples!” he roared. “This might be your first time to venture outside of the Sect, but this mountain, where life and death is predestined, is a promotion training ground for the Inner Sect. Anyone who steps onto the mountain and reaches the half-way point shall be remembered. Anyone who reaches the mountain top, even more so. And whoever manages to snap that crappy flagpole will be my personal apprentice, and receive immediate promotion into the Violet Fate Inner Sect! What are you gaping for?! Get moving!”

Upon hearing this, the faces of the white-robed disciples filled with inspiration and their eyes shined. This was their first time outside of the Sect. Some thirsted to become a member of the Inner Sect, others desired to acquire treasures. According to the rumors they had heard in the Sect, vast amounts of Spirit Stones, medicinal pills, and magical items were hidden in this State of Zhao treasure mountain.

Nearly a hundred bodies flashed toward the mountain, a shocking sight.

The peak of the mountain was extremely high, and the mountain itself was surrounded by forest.

Almost immediately, thunderous noises arose from within the trees. The roars of the wild beasts shattered the quietness of the still night.

Two hours passed in which miserable shrieks continuously rang out from Demon Beast Forest, especially the border regions. Suddenly, seven or eight Violet Fate Sect disciples fled out from the forest, their faces filled with fear. They were being pursued by three mighty beasts who had the heads of dragons and the bodies of tigers. The ground shook beneath their feet as they charged forth.

The life force of these three beasts seemed boundless, their might extraordinary. Their fur was long and thick, causing them to look completely different from the average Demonic beast, savage and fierce to the extreme. When they breathed, their auras transformed into Mist Serpents which coiled around their bodies, leaving the inexperienced, novice disciples frightened to death. Their faces paled, and they ran away at top speed.

Once they stepped foot outside the trees, the Demonic beasts ceased their pursuit. They glared viciously at the seven or eight disciples, then turned and disappeared back into the forest.

On the flat plateau, Eccentric Song laughed heartily. “Look, Wu Dingqiu, these are the Spirit beasts I have raised. What do you think? Even if your disciples grew up inside a Spirit Spring, it wouldn’t do any good. Forget about the even more powerful Spirit Beasts on the treasure mountain, your Violet Fate Sect disciples can’t even get past the Spirit Beast Forest!”

Wu Dingqiu sat there in his white robe, an unpleasant look on his face. He stared angrily at the seven or eight Cultivators. And yet, his tone of voice was as arrogant as always as he calmly said: “Those disciples are merely at the fifth or sixth level of Qi Condensation. The truly Chosen in my Sect are all still in the forest. It won’t be long before they step foot onto your crappy mountain, then they will clear out all the junk you have hidden there!”

Time passed by, another two hours...

So far, no one had been able to get past the Demonic Beast Forest to step foot onto the mountain itself. Currently, miserable shrieks and wails drifted out from the trees, and before long, a commotion broke out at the edge of the forest as ten or more Violet Fate Sect disciples fled out in terror. Dread filled their faces, and some of them were injured. This was their first time outside of the Sect, and they were like flowers grown indoors who had never faced wind and rain. They were being pursued by a group of five howling Demonic beasts; one was a fierce, pitch-black tiger. Another was a giant peacock, nearly six meters tall. The rest were hard to identify, but were clearly out of the ordinary.

On the plateau, Eccentric Song once again let out a complacent laugh. He appeared to be in very high spirits. He grew even happier when he saw Wu Dingqiu's increasingly somber face.

“Wu Dingqiu, are these really the most outstanding disciples in your Violet Fate Sect? It seems that being raised inside a Spirit Spring really doesn't cut it. I'm afraid that even if they ate meals made from precious materials, it still wouldn't do them any good. My treasure mountain is filled with unusual items rarely seen in the Southern Domain. I've spent all my energy in the past years on this project. After years of allowing my creatures to grow in strength, my mountain is ready. I've been waiting for quite some time for your Violet Fate Sect to come for this trial by fire.”

Wu Dingqiu's face grew so grim that it seemed it might explode at any moment, like a volcano. In a stiff voice, he said, “It's just a crappy mountain, nothing worth bragging about. I could level the whole thing with the wave of a hand. All the disciples that have come back out are useless. The true Chosen ones are...” Even as the words came out of his mouth, his eyes suddenly widened. A handful of disciples had just come running out of the edge of the Demonic Forest. He leaped to his feet. With a roar, he said, “Get back in there! If anyone dares to run away, I shall expel you from the Sect!”

His roar reverberated across the land, but not very far. He limited it to a radius of about fifty kilometers. When they heard it, the disciples who had just fled out of the forest grew pale and began to tremble. They didn't dare to flee. Gritting their teeth, they turned and headed back. The Demonic beasts that had been pursuing them were also frightened, and dared not attack.

As for the twenty or more disciples who had already fled the Demonic Forest, their faces grew even paler, and they hesitated. They weren't sure if they should go back in or not.

“Be it the Violet Fate Sect’s disciples, or another Sect’s disciple, during these seven days, anyone can enter my Spirit Beast Forest,” said Eccentric Song with a hearty laugh. “Anyone with the skill to step foot on my treasure mountain can have the chance to take away the treasures. I will neither stop them, nor even frown. Even the flag on the mountain peak is fair game. There I have placed a bag of the Cosmos, which can hold mountains and rivers inside.

Upon hearing his laughter, Wu Dingqiu’s face grew more unsightly. He was beginning to feel that this Eccentric Song was too spiteful. He had filled the mountain with treasures, and seemed to have complete confidence that they wouldn’t be touched. Wu Dingqiu flicked his sleeve and made to leave. He had already suffered too much humiliation, and would not stand for any more. But before he could go, Eccentric Song stood and blocked his way.

“Fellow Daoist Wu, we had an arrangement. Before we finish our game of Go, neither of us may leave. You’re an Elder from one of the Great Sects of the Southern Domain. You’re not going to go back on your word, are you?” As he laughed, his beard floated up a bit. His face was filled with utter pride, and it seemed he had no intention of letting Wu Dingqiu leave.

At that moment, Meng Hao was several thousand kilometres away, flying quickly through the mountain forest. Around him, autumn leaves floated in the air, and behind him, Shangguan Xiu was in hot pursuit, killing intent radiating out from him.

“This State Shield Mountain range goes on forever, Meng Hao,” said Shangguan Xiu, his voice sinister. “Its depths are filled with miasma! Going in this direction is the same as picking the road to death!”

“Pipe down,” said Meng Hao coldly. He frowned. It was the first thing he had said this entire time. He was really getting annoyed with Shangguan Xiu. As far as he was concerned, it was fine if he wanted to chase him, but the ceaseless chatter was unnecessary.

Shangguan Xiu’s eyes glittered and he lifted up his hands in front of him, then slapped them together.

Meng Hao suddenly felt a stab of pain in his chest that coincided with the slapping sound. It felt as if a sharp sword were slicing through into his heart. His face filled with pain and he coughed up a spray of blood.

“You finally speak, whelp! You fell for my trick! That was a special magic from my family that is designed to damage the heart and blood vessels.” With a sinister smile, he increased his speed. He lifted his right hand, and a five-colored pearl appeared. He flung it forward, and it shot toward

Meng Hao. Before it reached him, it suddenly exploded, transforming into several five-colored streams of mist which then merged into the shape of a hideous evil spirit. It howled as it pounced toward Meng Hao.

Meng Hao looked back with a grim expression. Having no time even to spit the blood from his mouth, his hands flickered in incantation gestures, and his body sped forward with increased speed. As the five-colored Mist Spirit approached, a head-sized Water Globe formed in his left hand. From his right had emerged a roaring Flame Python thirty meters in length. The Water Globe shot forth first, exploding to form a rain of Water Arrows.

The Flame Python flew forward, then exploded in mid-air, sending scorching heat roiling out into the night air. This caused the water droplets to transform into a mist. Guided by the aura from Meng Hao's Cultivation base, it surrounded the area, sending the five-colored Mist Spirit into confusion. It no longer could identify Meng Hao's position.

Even Shangguan Xiu's vision was obscured, leaving him shocked. As soon as the mist appeared, before he had a chance to recover from his surprise, two cold, noiseless beams shot toward him.

A booming sound rang out, and Meng Hao let out a light sigh. Without hesitation, he changed his direction and kept moving forward, swallowing a Demonic Core to replenish himself. Behind him, a furious roar could be heard, and the fog was instantly dispersed by a sweeping whirlwind. Shangguan Xiu moved forward, an angry look on his face, blood dripping from a wound on his right hand. The Mist Spirit was nowhere in sight.

As he thought back to what had just happened, his eyes narrowed. Were it not for his quick reaction in detonating the Mist Spirit to block the two wooden swords, he would have lost his right hand. Even still, his hand had been cut open. Even more alarming, he felt the spiritual energy within his body slowly leaking out through the wound. Furthermore, the wound was not healing as fast as normal. He could stop the flow of blood, but not the leakage of spiritual energy.

"This swine is just too crafty. He has some low-level techniques, but he uses them in a multitude of tricky ways. It's really difficult to deal with!" Shangguan Xiu frowned, but he continued on with his dogged pursuit.

The two of them moved on, and time passed. Before long, dawn had arrived. After a night of chasing and fleeing, both of them were exhausted. As for Meng Hao, he had it a bit better off. Even though he did not have any chance to rest, he had experienced this sort of pursuit in the black mountain. The only difference was that sadly, these wild mountains didn't seem to contain any Demonic beasts. If they did, then it would have been a bit easier to deal with Shangguan Xiu.

As for Shangguan Xiu, this was his first time dealing with a Cultivator like Meng Hao, who released an endless stream of tricky methods. The two wooden swords were especially astonishing; he had originally planned to chase Meng Hao until his spiritual energy ran out. Instead, he seemed to be as lively and full of energy as a dragon or tiger. Did he have an infinite supply of medicinal pills?

“If he’s this difficult to deal with at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, how terrible would he be at a higher level?” Shangguan Xiu clenched his jaw, swallowed a medicinal pill, then continued in his pursuit. He was of the ninth level of the Qi Condensation stage, the same stage as Meng Hao. Despite his slightly superior speed, he could still do little more than chase.

Of course, he didn’t know that even though Meng Hao was at the seventh level, his Cultivation method was not the ordinary method used in the Reliance Sect, but rather that of the Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture. Even though Meng Hao had not studied any special texts related to attack techniques, in matters related to spiritual energy, he could persist for much longer periods of time than the average Cultivator.

With the added help of some Demonic Cores, then there was no way that Shangguan Xiu could catch him in any short period of time.

By the time dawn broke, the two of them had travelled a very long distance. In front of Meng Hao appeared an incredibly high mountain, its peak stretching up into the skies, its top half wreathed in snow. At a single glance, one could tell that this was not an ordinary place.

Chapter 50: Iron Spear

As soon as he caught sight of the mountain ahead of him, Meng Hao’s eyes began to shine. It was clearly beyond the ordinary, and perhaps even contained some Demonic beasts. In any case, he didn’t have much time to think about it. His body flashed as he shot directly toward the mountainous forest which lay at its foot.

Behind him, Shangguan Xiu’s expression changed. His Cultivation base was higher than Meng Hao’s; he had tread the Cultivation world for many years, and had seen many things. He could tell that something was fishy about this mountain. But as he saw Meng Hao charge forward, he put aside his doubts, gritted his teeth, and followed.

Meanwhile on the plateau, white-robed Wu Dingqiu and Eccentric Song sat, seemingly playing Go, but in reality focused on the fighting going on below them. From their vantage point, it was clear

that the Violet Fate Sect disciples were stuck in the mountain forest, and after an entire night, could not step foot onto the mountain. One by one, they were rebuffed by the Demonic beasts.

“The Violet Fate Sect disciples truly are beyond ordinary,” said Eccentric Song, laughing. “To be able to stay in the Spirit Beast forest for an entire night is excellent. Wu Dingqiu, you really should be proud.” He looked extremely complacent, and even happier when he saw the dark look on Wu Dingqiu’s face.

Wu Dingqiu’s face sank even deeper as he saw the sorry state of his disciples within the forest. He let out a cold harrumph.

“Wu Dingqiu, you should really be proud. Last time the Golden Frost Sect came to me to engage in trial by fire, they were all defeated by my Spirit beasts. Not a single one could make it to my treasure mountain to see the truly powerful Spirit beasts. I felt really sad about that. I really hope that your Violet Fate Sect disciples can make a good showing. This Spirit forest is filled with Spirit beasts that I meticulously selected. For example, that one.” He proudly pointed a finger toward a white-colored ape.

Its entire body, even its eyes, were as white as snow, and its appearance was incredibly fierce. With a single swipe of its claws, it slashed the arm of one of the Violet Fate Sect disciples, sending blood spraying everywhere. It moved with incredible speed, like a white wind. It had already injured about seven or eight surrounding Violet Fate Sect disciples.

“That is a Snow Peak Mutated beast, rarely seen in the world. I got my hands on it about ten years ago. It’s extremely rare. Look at its fur, as pure white as snow and as smooth as silk. I should be able to sell it for a hefty price one day.” Eccentric Song laughed, pleased with himself. White-robed Wu Dingqiu looked even more grim. He’d never imagined that after all these years, Eccentric Song’s treasure mountain would have so many powerful Demonic beasts.

Even as Eccentric Song spoke, a figure appeared near the edge of the forest near the white ape. It was Meng Hao, with Shangguan Xiu hot on his tail. Eccentric Song laughed.

“So, some outsiders have decided to intrude. Wu Dingqiu, please observe what it means to keep one’s promise. I will not prevent any Cultivator of the Qi Condensation stage from entering this area. Anyone can enter. Although they will surely die, I will not block them.”

Wu Dingqiu let out a cold snort, not paying the least bit of attention to Meng Hao and Shangguan Xiu. Instead, he stared at the white ape, which had just encountered another Violet Fate Sect disciple. He appeared to be about seventeen or eighteen years old. His hands flickered in incantation

patterns, and suddenly the image of an ancient scroll unfurled behind him. An aura billowed out, pushing down onto the white ape. It shrieked.

“A fine Mutated ape,” said Wu Dingqiu “Eccentric Song, no matter how incredible that beast is, it’s going to become my disciple’s pet! His name is Shi Yan. Upon entering the Sect, he acquired that ancient scroll, which at the seventh level of Qi Condensation, can capture Demonic beasts.” Inside, Wu Dingqiu’s heart pounded, but his expression was cool and indifferent, somewhat proud. Considering his status and Cultivation base, he shouldn’t allow such an expression onto his face. But Eccentric Song made it impossible for him to hold back, especially after the humiliation of the previous night.

However, as soon as the words were out of his mouth, a piteous wail could be heard. Blood showered from Shi Yan’s chest, and his ancient scroll collapsed into pieces. He retreated backwards, fear in his eyes. The white ape’s body began to expand, until it was nearly eighteen meters tall. It beat its chest, seeming to brim with power.

Eccentric Song laughed loudly. Wu Dingqiu stared at the white ape, his face twisted, fighting the impulse to charge forward and crush the thing to death.

It was at that moment that Meng Hao shot out of the forest. As soon as he caught sight of the roaring ape, his eyes glittered brightly. He also saw the frightened young man off in the distance, but didn’t have time to consider the situation.

With people present, Meng Hao wouldn’t reveal the copper mirror. His eyes flashed as the white ape took notice of him. The beast charged him, howling ferociously. Meng Hao lifted his right hand, and suddenly an iron spear appeared, the one Fatty’s father had created according to his specifications. The young Cultivator named Shi Yan watched as the spear appeared.

Of course, in addition to the long spear, the copper mirror also emerged, concealed within Meng Hao’s sleeve. The sleeve was so wide that any observers would not be able to see it, especially considering how their eyes would be drawn to the long spear.

The spear was made of common iron, but its surface was covered with various complicated designs, all of which Meng Hao had designed. At a glance, it appeared to be extraordinary in nature. Brandishing the spear, he moved forward, pointing it toward the charging ape.

Suddenly, the white ape’s large mouth exploded violently, blood and flesh flying around. Wretched screams immediately sounded out. The ape fell down onto the ground, looking at Meng Hao in astonishment.

“Perhaps when the mirror shines onto a beast with lots of fur, it causes some kind of disorder in the Qi within its body, making it swell. Demonic beasts are even bigger and stronger, so it will attempt to escape from any weak point in the body, not just the rear end, thus leading to these explosive injuries.” Of course, all of this was just speculation, but Meng Hao seemed to understand the mirror a bit better after seeing what happened to the white ape. After having the copper mirror for three years, he felt this was pretty close to the truth.

Now was not the time for contemplation, however. Not giving the miserable white ape another glance, he shot off with the iron spear in hand. He was gone in an instant. Just then, Shangguan Xiu arrived. He looked at the white ape in shock.

The white ape was also surprised. And then it noticed that Shangguan Xiu also happened to be carrying a spear, and its fury exploded. It pounced toward Shangguan Xiu.

Back on the plateau, Eccentric Song’s laughter had ceased. Next to him, Wu Dingqiu also watched on in surprise. They stared at Meng Hao and his iron spear, their eyes filled with amazement.

Meng Hao sped through the Demonic Beast forest, listening to the howls of the white ape and the roars of Shangguan Xiu. His eyes flickered, and he harrumphed coldly. Not too much time passed before he heard another commotion coming from up ahead. Soon, he saw four or five Cultivators wearing white robes, engaged in vicious combat with three Demonic beasts, each of them six meters tall.

One was a large black tiger, the other was a peacock whose body emanated a glowing, violet light. The last was an enormous giant rat, fierce and cruel in appearance, seemingly unable to be killed.

As soon as Meng Hao appeared in the midst of the fight, a vicious light appeared in the peacock’s eyes, and it charged like an insane gale, straight toward Meng Hao.

Looking as calm as ever, Meng Hao kept moving forward, pointing the iron spear forward. Suddenly, the giant peacock’s body trembled, and it shrieked miserably. Then, its head exploded, and it fell to the ground, dead, surrounded by blood and gore. The black tiger and the giant rat were shocked. As they stared dumbly, Meng Hao’s body turned into a streak of light, and he shot off into the distance.

As for the Violet Fate Sect disciples, they watched, dumbfounded, as Meng Hao disappeared. His iron spear had left them awestruck.

Not pausing for even a moment, Meng Hao continued on. At this moment, Shangguan Xiu had resumed his furious pursuit.

A grim smile appeared on Meng Hao's face. He increased his speed, charging forward. Every time he encountered a Demonic beast, he would wave his spear at it, and it would retreat, crying out miserably. Not a single beast could block his path. In contrast, Shangguan Xiu was blocked at every turn. His enraged roars sounded further and further away from Meng Hao.

Meng Hao also encountered more and more young, white-robed Cultivators along his way, all of them locked in deadly battles with Demonic beasts. As he passed, he would cause these seemingly unmatchable, fierce creatures to flinch back with blood-curdling screams. The Cultivators would look at Meng Hao's retreating figure with awe.

"Who was that?"

"That long spear is some kind of magical item! It's so powerful!"

"How vicious! Dammit, if I had a spear like that, I could run amok through this Demonic Beast Forest."

Conversation buzzed among the Violet Fate Sect disciples, caused by Meng Hao's shocking passage. On top of the plateau, Wu Dingqiu's eyes glittered, and a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. His laughter rang out, filled with joy as well as a pleased anger.

"So these are Mutated beasts," he said. "Excellent, excellent. They are all amazing beasts. Let me have a look. Hmm, some are missing eyes, others have had their heads ripped off. There are some whose entire bodies are covered with blood. One even had its butt exploded. Eccentric Song, didn't you say that this Demonic Beast Forest was fertilized with soil from the East Sea? And didn't you say that these Mutated beasts were all amazing? It seems they are having a bit of a rough time today."

An unsightly expression filled Eccentric Song's face as he watched Meng Hao make his way through the Demonic Creature Forest. He watched all his precious Demonic beasts retreating with blood-curdling cries, covered with blood. When he saw the death of the peacock, his heart felt as if it had been stabbed with a knife. This type of peacock was called a Snow Phoenix and was extremely rare. He had paid quite an exorbitant price for it several years ago, and had cared for it like a treasured jewel. And yet the iron spear had exploded its head in an instant. Even though it was

dead, its powerful life force caused the corpse to twitch and writhe. Eccentric Song felt extreme regret, but his eyes shone forth with an air of indifference.

“Who cares?” he said. “There are a multitude of Spirit beasts in my Spirit Beast Forest. There’s no harm in it. In any case, this kid isn’t one of your Violet Fate Sect disciples, so what are you looking so happy for?!” He spoke in a light tone, but inside, his heart was beginning to pound.