

The Heavens 591

Chapter 591: Demon Immortal Cistern

“How can you have Paragon’s qualifications?!” asked Zhixiang angrily, glaring at Meng Hao as he strolled up to her through the door of swords.

As soon as she asked the question, though, she instantly felt stupid. How could she have asked such a nonsensical question...?

The fact that he really did have Paragon’s qualifications no longer left her feeling shocked, but rather, humiliated. It wasn’t just a personal humiliation, either, but a humiliation of her entire Sect.

All of the power of her Sect had been utilized, vast resources had been wasted, all to get her a third class qualification command medallion. However, in the blink of an eye, someone had appeared in front of her who had qualifications that vastly exceeded her own; Paragon’s qualifications.

Anyone who faced such a situation would go crazy and be filled with jealousy and envy. Who wouldn’t feel that the situation was frustrating and unfair? Zhixiang was now feeling exactly what everyone else had felt outside the Demon Immortal Pagoda not so long ago.

“I just asked my dad,” said Meng Hao casually.

The more he acted in this way, the more Zhixiang felt repulsed. She gritted her teeth and clenched her hands tightly into fists.

“The most annoying people I’ve ever met in my life are silkpants like you,” she said with disdain. “So what if you have Ke Jiusi’s identity? So what if you have a Paragon for a dad...?” By the time she reached this point in her tirade, even Zhixiang could sense the acrid tone in her words.

Meng Hao chuckled, but said nothing. Zhixiang watched fuming as he walked forward through the mist looking like he didn’t have a care in the world. Finally, she had no choice but to suppress her anger and follow him.

After only a few steps, though, Meng Hao suddenly stopped in place and looked at Zhixiang.

“You lead the way,” he said. “I can go anywhere I want, but your path is limited to the Demon Immortal Cistern. I’ll follow you.”

Zhixiang had just managed to suppress her indignation, only to have it explode out again. She took a deep breath, trying to console herself by looking at the bigger picture. She angrily nodded her head and walked forward.

Meng Hao followed, watching Zhixiang’s lithe figure as she made her way through the mist. There was something strange and beautiful to the scene.

As the two of them hurried forward, the mists parted ways for them, revealing a twisting path. Zhixiang took the lead position and Meng Hao followed. They proceeded onward for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. Eventually, the mists once again began to spread out, revealing an area roughly three thousand meters wide.

A mountain was visible, although it wasn’t very tall.

A waterfall fell down the side of the mountain into a pool of undulating water. Upon first laying eyes on the scene, there was no sound whatsoever. However, moments later, Meng Hao could hear the sound of rippling water.

The water poured into the pond, the sounds of birds drifted about, and the fragrance of flowers filled the air. Everything was overwhelming to the senses; there even seemed to be an aura of Immortal Spirits in the air, fragrant and sweet. Meng Hao took a deep breath, and all the Qi and blood in his body surged.

“So this is the Demon Immortal Cistern?” he asked. He glanced around, his gaze eventually coming to rest on the waters themselves. They were clear, making it possible to see all the way to the bottom. A faint, strange kind of mist rose up from the surface, making the entire scene look like a multicolored illusion.

Ancient, ornamental rock formations were scattered about, many of them carved with Demonic creatures that seemed to be imbued with Demon Spirits. The entire scene seemed like something celestial.

“If it’s not the Demon Immortal Cistern, then what is it?” said Zhixiang grumpily. “Your backyard fishing pond?” The complex jealousy and envy she felt had only dissipated by about half.

Ignoring Meng Hao, she walked forward, looking somewhat excitedly at the Demon Immortal Cistern. She raised her right hand to brush against some of the ornamental rocks, a look of piety filling her face.

“It all seems so simplistic, doesn’t it?” asked Meng Hao.

“Simplistic?!” Zhixiang shot back, spinning to glare at him angrily. She looked quite provoked. “It might be simplistic to you, but my Sect spent countless years preparing, and expended vast resources to get me here! This is the culmination of generations of hard work and persistence. All the hopes and dreams of an entire Sect all come down to this place.

“My Sect paid a steep price for this ‘simplicity,’ and many people even died!

“You say this place is simplistic, but that’s only because of your identity. Anyone else but you would be completely destroyed by the mists, even Immortals. The restrictive spells here would even cause people in the Dao Realm to frown.

“In the past, those two sword-wielding statues outside slew no less than ten Dao Realm Paragons!”

Meng Hao frowned, looking at Zhixiang with cold eyes.

“Watch your tongue,” he said. “You’re the one who invited me here.”

Zhixiang took a deep breath. After a moment of silence, she bowed to Meng Hao.

“I forgot my manners,” she said. “I’ll make it up to you.”

With that, she bowed again, then turned and pushed her hand up against one of the ancient rocks. Meng Hao watched as she sent her mind inside of it. Then, he approached the edge of the cistern, squatted down, and looked into the waters, a strange light shining in his eyes.

“So this water can alter the makeup of your body?” he thought. “If a person is qualified, it can transform their body into a Demon Immortal Body? Presumably, such qualifications are not the same as the qualifications needed to enter this place, but rather, possessing some strange body type.” Thoughtfully, he dipped his right hand into the water.

As soon as he touched it, a tremor ran through him. He felt something like a cold current surging in through his fingers into the rest of his body.

Zhixiang opened her eyes. “The both of us came to this ancient time in soul only,” she said coolly, apparently having recovered her composure. “Everything here looks real, but is in fact false. As such, there is no need to test out the waters. You can’t absorb anything. It’s useless.

“Alright, I’ve left my mark, now I need to familiarize myself with the area so that we can return here after we reach the Third Plane. You also need to leave a mark here. That way, your aura will be here in the Third Plane, and you can come back.” With that, Zhixiang began to make her way around, observing the area, studying it. It seemed as if she wanted to commit everything about the area into memory.

Meng Hao ignored her. Eyes glittering, he suddenly walked into the cistern waters.

Soon, he was floating chest-deep in the water, whereupon he closed his eyes. Around him, he could sense a pulsating coldness within the water that surged toward him and entered his body.

With a frown, he left the pond, water vapor pouring off of him.

“It really is useless,” he said coolly. “It seems this cistern is designed specifically for the fleshly body, and is useless to souls.” Following Zhixiang’s directions, he left a mark in the corner of one of the nearby stones, then turned to leave.

Zhixiang didn’t seem to have any suspicions at all about his behavior. In fact, if he hadn’t tried out the cistern, she would have found it to be odd. To test out the water personally was only natural.

The two of them didn’t speak as they made their way back and then eventually parted. Earlier, Meng Hao had never thought that the casual words he had spoken would cause Zhixiang to be so upset.

After leaving the hazy world, Meng Hao returned to the Fourth Peak where he meditated for a few days. Then one evening, he quietly returned, entering the mists with a strange look in his eyes. Retracing his steps from earlier, he hurried back.

It didn't take long for him to once again reach the Demon Immortal Cistern.

“There are definitely things about the Demon Immortal Cistern that Zhixiang is hiding from me. I can't believe that such an important cistern can be entered so simply.

“There definitely must be some mysterious aspects to the waters.

“In any case, the cistern waters can temper the fleshly body, and in a much gentler way than the Underworld Cave. This really does suit my needs as far as strengthening my fleshly body!” With that, he took a deep breath and strode directly into the cistern waters. Only his head floated above the surface as he closed his eyes and felt the massive cold current around him.

It felt as if strings of ice were boring into his body. In the blink of an eye he was shaking; his Qi and blood surged. Gradually, he began to absorb the coldness.

His fleshly body was already strong; he had experienced the tempering of the Underworld Cave, and had come to master the Mountain Consuming Incantation. However, for quite some time he had not been able to break past a certain point. No matter how hard he tried, when he was in the First Anima, the most power his fleshly body could wield was that of the Third Anima.

“Maybe this place can make me even stronger,” he thought. As his Qi and blood raced, mist began to rise up on the surface of the water. The mist formed into streams that poured into his mouth and nose until it looked almost like he was breathing smoke.

His physical body gradually began to grow stronger. Every strand of coldness that burrowed into his flesh and blood exerted stimulating power that seemed to temper his body from the inside out.

This was a completely different method than that of the Underworld Cave.

Time passed. Meng Hao wasn't sure how long it was before he opened his eyes. A rumbling sound filled his body as the bottleneck he had previously been stuck at suddenly burst. Finally, he could achieve a fleshly body strength equal to the Fourth Anima, while he was only in the First Anima!

Pulses of power filled Meng Hao. He could sense that with the terrifying, explosive power within him, he could destroy metal or stone with a single punch.

“The further down I go, the more cold it gets,” he thought, his eyes filling with determination. He had long since decided that he needed to take advantage of his time in this ancient world to strengthen his fleshly body as much as possible. In his analysis, his fleshly body was the most important thing other than Dao magic enlightenment that he could take out from this place.

Taking a deep breath, he sank down further, until he was at the midway point in the waters. His body trembled, and cracking sounds could be heard from within. Something about his body seemed irregular as the cold currents pressed down onto him.

The cold was boundless, majestic, and mad as it poured into him. He didn’t even need to make an effort to absorb it. The cold streams found him, as if they thirsted to become a part of him.

Meng Hao trembled as he caused his Qi and blood to continue to flow.

What Meng Hao didn’t know was that although the Demon Immortal Sect of this time period was not at its most flourishing point, it was in a much better state than it would be later, during its period of decline. Right now, it was filled with abundant resources, for example, this cistern. Its state of accumulation during the past tens of thousands of years had led to its current state of boundlessness.

The accumulation of coldness here... was terrifying. Similarly, the nourishing power it provided to the fleshly body was incredibly shocking.

Meng Hao’s body had reached a fearful state, and only continued to grow stronger and stronger.

“If I could keep this up, then eventually, I could have a fleshly body equivalent to the Seventh Anima while only in the First Anima! Wouldn’t that mean that... I would have... a Spirit Severing fleshly body!?!?” Within the cistern waters, Meng Hao’s eyes opened to reveal a bright, hair-raising glow.

Chapter 592: Slaying Immortals Wouldn’t Be Difficult

Meng Hao closed his eyes again as he floated there. Coldness poured into him, burrowing inside, fusing with his Qi and blood, circulating through him. He could sense his fleshly body growing stronger.

There seemed to be something strange in these waters, some Heavenly power that could use gentleness to cause the fleshly body to be remolded. There was no pain, but the coldness from the cold currents gradually caused Meng Hao's body to grow stiff. After fifteen or twenty hours, even his soul was showing signs of growing hard.

It was at that point that Meng Hao, floating there in the middle section of the pond, suddenly opened his eyes. Without hesitation he shot up, bursting out from the surface of the water to appear outside. His body quivered, and white mist floated up off of him. Cracking sounds could be heard from the ground beneath his feet as ice began to stretch out in all directions, with him at the center.

He sat down cross-legged to meditate. A few days passed before he opened his eyes. Within them could be seen a bluish glow, which came from the poisonous coldness inside him that he still hadn't dispelled.

"This place is excellent for tempering the fleshly body. However, it also contains a poisonous coldness, which takes time to dispel from within. If I don't dispel it, it would eventually cause grave danger to my life." Frowning, he sighed and then looked at his bag of holding.

"It's too bad this is an illusory world, so consuming the medicinal pills from here doesn't do any good. The only thing of value are the places here for training and cultivating the fleshly body.

"If I was able to consume the medicinal pills here, well, considering the Dao of alchemy in this age, my results would be exponentially better." After a few more moments of thought, he rose to his feet and left. He planned to return to the Fourth Peak to rest and wait for the poisonous cold to be completely expelled. Then he would return again to immerse himself in the cistern waters.

As he passed back through the mists, Meng Hao was filled with a feeling like that when you can see a great treasure right in front of you, but have no way to take it. He was a bit depressed.

Gradually, he left the hazy area. As he passed the two statues and the door of swords, he suddenly stopped in place. A brilliant glow could now be seen in his eyes.

His eyes sparkled and his mind raced as a new idea suddenly began to form.

"The medicinal pills here are illusory, and therefore useless to me.... However, there is an endless supply of medicinal plants, even types that are extinct in my time, but are common here.

“In that case... what if I concoct my own pills?” He began to pant with eagerness.

“Illusory medicinal plants can be used to create real medicinal pills. In fact... I’ve done that before!!” He took a deep breath, and his eyes seemed to shine as brightly as if they contained suns. His heart trembled from the shock of this new idea. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed like he could do it.

If he did, Meng Hao wasn’t sure if he could... actually influence the fundamental structure of this ancient, illusory world!

“Back in the Violet Fate Sect, I made something from nothing! During my Violet Furnace Lord promotion, I used an illusory item to concoct... a medicinal pill made from nothing!!

“I wonder if I can use a similar method here to concoct... a similar pill made from nothing, that conforms to the nature of this place!?” Meng Hao’s fists clenched and his body trembled. This idea seemed almost like lunacy and he wasn’t sure if he could succeed. Speaking purely in terms of the Dao of alchemy, though, it was possible!

“It is difficult to create something from nothing even just once, and even with my skill in the Dao of alchemy. A lot depends on destiny and luck!”

He closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, they shone with determination. His body flickered as he shot toward the Fourth Peak. As he sped along, those who caught sight of him felt jealously pricking at their hearts. Because of what had happened at the Demon Immortal Pagoda, Meng Hao’s reputation as a Demon Immortal Sect silkpants had grown even beyond what it was before.

After returning to the Fourth Peak, he found that Xu Qing was still sitting there meditating. Compared to Meng Hao, Xu Qing possessed a level of diligence that he could never attempt to overtake.

However, every person’s destiny and fortune is different. Techniques that suited Xu Qing might not necessarily suit Meng Hao. The opposite was also true.

Several days later, all of the disciples in the Fourth Peak knew that their young Lord had apparently gone crazy. He unexpectedly had begun concocting pills, which caused a huge stir on the Fourth Peak. Eventually, word spread to the other peaks, and soon everyone knew about it.

It didn't take long for all sorts of thoughtless gossip to begin to spread. Of course, no one dared to say anything openly; after all, the silkpants members of the Demon Entente were all very supportive of the matter.

When Meng Hao mentioned his desire for mass quantities of medicinal plants, the Demon Entente sprang into action. Once the huge amounts of medicinal plants began to roll in, Meng Hao's entire life consisted of four things.

Daoist magic enlightenment, medicinal pill concocting, body tempering in the Demon Immortal Cistern, and dispelling the poisonous coldness.

When it came to concocting medicinal pills, he used the Fourth Peak's pill concocting workshop, which belonged to Ke Yunhai. Once Meng Hao took it over, the entire Fourth Peak began to fill with the sound of exploding medicinal pills.

The sounds might echo out in the dark of night or in the middle of day. Whenever they were heard, everyone knew that the young Lord had once again failed to concoct a batch of medicinal pills.

Meng Hao was a bit ashen-faced; this was not the outcome he had hoped for. His Dao of alchemy came from a time tens of thousands of years in the future. The current Dao of alchemy was different, and he needed time to adjust before he could unleash his full potential.

Worst of all, Meng Hao found that so far, he could only concoct illusory pills, and was unable to truly create something from nothing. Perhaps it was because of the illusory nature of the world he was in.

It almost seemed as if there was some force interfering with him, making it so that the medicinal pills here were eternally categorized in a different way. Unfortunately, Meng Hao's concoctions were outside of that scope, and were thus not permitted to appear.

However, he didn't allow himself to become dejected, nor did he give up. He continued to experiment, trying to find that same feeling he had experienced back in the Violet Fate Sect. Time went by, and soon an entire month had passed.

By the end of that month, there wasn't a single person in the Seven Peaks of the Demon Immortal Sect that didn't know Meng Hao was concocting pills. The rumblings coming from the Fourth Peak became just another one of the sounds of the First Heaven of the Demon Immortal Sect.

Considering how many countless times he had failed, and the unthinkable amount of medicinal plants he had wasted, it was good that the Demon Immortal Sect had such vast resources. Such wastage would cause even most mid-sized Sects to groan in complaint.

That was especially so considering that... he was using medicinal plants which were considered precious even in this age. Every failure of his caused other disciples to secretly feel stabs of pain in their hearts.

Although he hadn't succeeded yet, Meng Hao had actually gained quite a bit. His Dao of alchemy was gradually assimilating into ancient times. Slowly, a new path appeared in the Dao of alchemy that consisted solely of Meng Hao. Furthermore, he had attempted so many concoctions that his proficiency with the process actually vastly improved.

Also during that month, he gained complete enlightenment of the first level of the Mountain Consuming Incantation. It was firmly branded in his mind, and could be taken away when he left the Second Plane.

As for the poisonous coldness within him, it was now more than half expelled from his body. If it weren't for his continued immersions within the cistern, it would have long since completely vanished.

Actually, his control over the poisonous coldness had reached the point that as long as he didn't have contact with the cistern water, it would naturally dissipate.

During the month, Meng Hao's fleshly body experienced incredible changes. Even he was shocked by the outcome. The bizarreness of the Demon Immortal Cistern was thoroughly shocking. Right now, even when in the First Anima, his fleshly body had the power of the Fifth Anima.

According to his estimation, if he could reach a level of fleshly body strength equal to the Seventh Anima while in the First Anima, then when he actually entered the Seventh Anima... his fleshly body would truly be that of Spirit Severing.

If he encountered Patriarch Huyan in such a state, Meng Hao was confident that the battle would not be as difficult as before, and he would be able to destroy the man in soul and body.

“Unfortunately, to reach the level of the Sixth anima with my fleshly body would involve sinking down to the very bottom of the cistern... after which I would need a month to recover from the poisonous coldness.

“Furthermore, if my calculations are correct, I would need to go through that process at least ten times. Essentially, that’s almost a year of time.” Meng Hao continued to think about the matter as he walked through the various districts of the Demon Immortal Sect.

As he was walking, he suddenly stopped in place. In that instant, ghost images sprang up from everything around him, the sky, the land and the world. It lasted only for the space of a few breaths, and then everything went back to normal.

“That’s the third time this month,” Meng Hao thought with a frown. He could sense that the Second Plane was reaching the point of dissipation. When it vanished, all of the people from South Heaven would leave, and their journey into the Demon Immortal Sect would reach its conclusion.

“If it comes quickly, it will be within days. At the slowest, it might last two more months.” Meng Hao felt a bit of regret. There simply wasn’t enough time for him to reach the incredible strength of the Sixth Anima.

His body flickered, and he reappeared on the outskirts of the Demon Immortal Sect. It was a relatively remote location, deserted and quiet, a place where few people ever came.

He looked down at the ground, then glanced around the area again. Finally, he slapped his bag of holding to produce a Wooden Time Sword. This particular sword was branded with multiple seals that he had used in recent days to reinforce it.

He looked at the sword, and then the ground. A gleam of decisiveness filled his eyes.

“If I don’t give it a shot, then I’ll always regret it. Although I’m eighty to ninety percent sure it won’t work, there’s always that slight possibility...” With that, he waved his right hand, causing the Wooden Time Sword to stab down into the ground. In the blink of an eye, it was buried deep down.

“Of all the magical items I possess, only the Wooden Time Swords need to be immersed within the power of Time. Even the slight chance of success would mean....

“When I return to reality, I might be able to have a sword with tens of thousands of years of Time! With the power of such a sword, a single slash could cut away tens of thousands of years! Even slaying Immortals wouldn’t be difficult!

“A treasure like that is worth a bit of a gamble!”

Chapter 593: Meeting South Heaven!

Meng Hao’s eyes flickered. He turned and made his way off into the distance. In the end, he picked three other similar places in the Demon Immortal Sect where he concealed Wooden Time Swords in the ground.

Currently, he had a total of ten Wooden Time Swords, which he could use to unleash the first form of the Lotus Sword Formation.

To bet four of the swords on a possibility that was most likely impossible was a huge gamble for him.

“Each one of these Wooden Time Swords represents a vast collection of Spirit Stones....” he thought. Enduring the pain of it, he hid one sword after another. Every time he did, he buried his dreams and hopes along with it.

Meng Hao selected the four locations very carefully. In fact, the four different locations were places that, according to his memories of the First Plane, were still relatively intact.

That way, just in case the swords really did appear in the Third Plane... then they would be easy for him to recover.

As night fell, Meng Hao hovered in mid-air, looking out across the lands. He glanced at the four places where he had buried the swords, and the anticipation in his eyes grew stronger.

“If I succeed, then my path of cultivation can continue even more smoothly. If I don’t succeed... then at least I will have no regrets.” He made one more final look to ensure that he had committed the various locations to memory. Then, he made his way to the Fourth Peak.

More time passed by. Another half month was gone. The ghost images continued to occur with increasing frequency. The interval between the occurrences was shorter, and every time they occurred, they lasted for several breaths of time.

In fact, on one occasion a few days ago, Meng Hao had been concocting pills when the ghost images sprang for a few dozen breaths of time. During that time, he almost had the feeling that he had left the illusory ancient world.

He hadn't seen Ke Yunhai recently. Even when he went to pay his respects and wish Ke Yunhai good health, it was only through the closed door of the Immortal's cave. When Ke Yunhai spoke to him from inside, his voice seemed somewhat tired.

He wasn't sure what Ke Yunhai was doing, but whenever he heard the man's voice, he felt calmer. Ke Yunhai was his father in this life, and as far as Meng Hao was concerned, the most valuable thing he had acquired in this illusory world.

Xu Qing still had not finished with her secluded meditation. However, she had clearly experienced success in her enlightenment. Every time Meng Hao looked at her, she was experiencing different transformations of the soul.

She seemed completely immersed in Daoist magic. Although she was not consummately beautiful, there was now a vague air to her that was both unforgettable and fascinating.

"It should be any moment now," murmured Meng Hao as he sat there cross-legged in the Immortal's cave. "The ghost images are growing more intense and more frequent. Everybody must be getting very antsy by now." He looked out at the evening sky and the dark clouds that were gathering up above.

Recently, he had not of his own initiative sought out any of the other South Heaven Cultivators. He had kept to himself, trying to concoct his medicinal pill from nothing, or achieve enlightenment of the Daoist magics.

Of course, all of the Cultivators from South Heaven were extraordinary individuals. Each one had inside information from their various Sects or Clans, as well as methods to evade Meng Hao. He was well aware of that. He could either mobilize the entire Sect to try to find them, or just not look for them at all. He preferred the latter.

Meng Hao was confident that they... would come looking for him.

When they did, it would be the whole group, except perhaps for Patriarch Huyan, who Meng Hao would kill at first sight.

Sheets of rain began to descend onto the Demon Immortal Sect. The entire world turned hazy, and as Meng Hao looked out at it, he had a strange feeling. He wasn't sure if the world he was in was hazy, or if the rain was hazy... or if it was both.

It was much like how he viewed the future.

The rain fell until the third night watch before it started to lighten up. The land was covered with coldness that transformed into fog. When the sun rose, the fog slowly began to grow thin and then dissipate, transforming the haziness into clarity. Everything looked like a beautiful oil painting.

At dawn, a sword came!

It was impossible to say where the sword came from, but it shot directly toward Meng Hao. None of the protective spell formations on the Fourth Mountain did anything to stop it; apparently there was something special about this sword.

The sword came to a stop a meter or two in front of Meng Hao, where it hovered in the air. A mottled glow emanated up from its surface. Just barely discernible on the sword were the traces of a mark made by a soul.

It was one character.

Fang.

Meng Hao smiled. The people he had been waiting for were finally showing their faces.

He made a grasping motion with his right hand, causing the sword to fall into his hand. He sent out his Divine Sense to sweep it over, and immediately, a message transmitted into his mind.

After hearing the message, his smile grew even wider. After a long moment, he closed his eyes.

Noon passed, and evening was approaching by the time he opened his eyes again. His body flickered, transforming into a beam of light that shot past the First Peak and out of the mountainous region toward an area near the main part of the Sect where the Outer Sect disciples resided.

When Meng Hao finally arrived, no one was out and about. Everything was quiet as he headed toward a set of three connected residence buildings. As he neared a location between the second and third residence buildings, he waved his hand, causing a door to open up. Without hesitation, he entered.

Instantly, dozens of gazes fell upon him.

The residence was large and filled with dozens of waiting people. As Meng Hao looked around, he could see that they were separated into various groups.

Even within those groups, there were various subdivisions based on whichever area the people were from. After all, even though some of them might wish to kill others, they knew that they had to look at the bigger picture, and the trouble that it would cause if something like that happened.

The largest group of all, shockingly, was the Ji Clan. They had seven people, all of whom were Inner Sect disciples. Their eyes shone brightly, and although they didn't speak, they made no effort conceal their extraordinary demeanors, nor their arrogance and pride.

Of the group of seven, three were women and four were men. There were two among them who were the most conspicuous. One was Ji Xiaoxiao, the other was a young man who had the glittering mark of a trident on his forehead. He emanated a sense of danger, and reminded Meng Hao a lot of the Ji Clan member he had killed most recently, Ji Mingfeng.

This young man was none other than Ji Clan Array member, Ji Mingkong!

However, of the seven Ji Clan members, the one that drew Meng Hao's attention the most was neither Ji Xiaoxiao nor Ji Mingkong. Instead, it was an ordinary looking youth of short stature who stood behind them, smiling.

The youth seemed ordinary, but after looking at the seven Ji Clan members, that youth was the only one who caused him to feel a sense of danger.

It was merely a sense of danger, though. Meng Hao could not detect any bone-deep hatred from any of them, the type that said they wouldn't rest until he was dead. Apparently, they did not have any idea at all that Meng Hao was connected to the death of Ji Mingfeng.

He glanced at Ji Xiaoxiao. She looked back at him silently.

In addition to the seven members of the Ji Clan, there was also the Fang Clan. Fang Yu looked at Meng Hao with a slight, enigmatic smile. Behind her were two men whose eyes glistened with displeasure as they coldly measured up Meng Hao.

Meng Hao recalled what Fang Yu had told him about three members of the Fang Clan coming to the Demon Immortal Sect. Obviously, these were the other two from the Fang Clan.

What was most intriguing to Meng Hao was that, although the right hands of these two men seemed ordinary, he could tell that they were not. He was familiar with the usage of the diaphanous Fang Clan glove. A single glance and he could tell that they were wearing just such gloves.

In addition to the Ji and Fang Clans, there were four or five others from the Eastern Lands. Most of them were grouped near the Ji or Fang Clans, but were eclipsed by those blazing suns of that part of the world. They didn't look very extraordinary at all in comparison.

However, their Cultivation bases were clearly beyond ordinary. As Meng Hao looked them over, his gaze came to rest on a tall, slender man who stood next to Fang Yu. He was smiling, but within the gentleness of his look was a viciousness buried deep down. Inside, he was obviously an ambitious and ruthless person.

As for who he was, Meng Hao wasn't quite sure. However, considering where he was standing, he could formulate some guesses.

"Don't tell me this guy is chasing after the explosive dragon?" he thought. He suddenly felt a bit of admiration for the man's bravery.

In another direction were the people from the Northern Reaches. From what Meng Hao understood, the Northern Reaches was a savage and uncivilized region. In some ways, it might be better than the Western Desert, but it was vastly different from the Southern Domain or Eastern Lands.

Actually, Meng Hao knew that the so-called Northern Reaches were actually a land of exile. The Cultivators there were mostly people that other locations couldn't tolerate, who eventually sought their fortune in the Northern Reaches.

Of course, what the Northern Reaches proclaimed to have was freedom. Complete and ultimate freedom.

Most of the Sects there were rebel Sects from other areas. The Clans were usually formed from scattered remnants of other Clans. One example was the so-called Imperial Bloodline Clan.

According to rumor, that clan had previously given rise to several Immortals. Because of that, descendants had a strong foundation and were able to expand and grow. Eventually the group split. One half perished and the other half traveled to the Northern Reaches where they became this new Clan.

There were a total of eight Cultivators from the Northern Reaches. All of them looked very bizarre, and none of them grouped together. Each one remained isolated.

The tyrannical and haughty air that they emanated was readily apparent. Of the eight of them, three were women and five were men. Each one seemed like a viper, cold and grim. There was one of them, a young man, who stuck out more than the others. He had the eyes of a phoenix, and beautiful features. He appeared to be smiling, but it was a cold smile that made one feel as if a frigid wind was blowing through you.

This was none other than the member of the Imperial Bloodline Clan.

There was another young man who had a strange birthmark that almost didn't appear to be a part of his body at all. It seemed to be slowly wriggling across his face, a shocking image that would make anyone who glanced at it look twice.

Next to that group were the people from the Southern Domain.

As he laid eyes upon them, Meng Hao's eyes softened a bit. The Southern Domain... was his home. Most accurately speaking, he was someone from the Southern Domain.

There were a total of seven people from the Southern Domain. From the way they were organized, Meng Hao could quickly see which alliances now existed between various Sects and Clans.

Wang Lihai and Han Bei were together, which meant that the Wang Clan and the Black Sieve Sect were in cooperation.

Song Yunshu was nowhere to be seen. If Meng Hao's guesses were correct, Song Yunshu had most likely met his fate at the hands of Ji Xiaoxiao. She surely had killed him to remove him as a witness.

Eventually, Meng Hao's gaze came to fall on one of the women from the Southern Domain. Although her physical features were unfamiliar, as soon as their eyes met, Meng Hao gaped.

"It's her..."

Chapter 594: Pain in the Whole Body

Meng Hao's memories of her were somewhat vague. He had actually not interacted with her much at all. In fact, if he recalled matters correctly, they hadn't even met each other.

There was only one thing connecting them, and that was the Song Clan's search for a son-in-law. In the end, although they were clearly strangers, they were still connected together.

Most accurately speaking, this was... Meng Hao's beloved from the Song Clan.

Because she was a daughter of the Song Clan, it was impossible for her to have a second beloved, not after the search for a son-in-law. Her reputation and the face of the Song Clan could not permit that.

After Meng Hao fled, the Song Clan did not speak of the matter to outsiders. However, to the young woman, the entire matter came as quite a blow.

She had always been a tender and delicate girl. Although she had outstanding latent talent, her heart was weak. That made it hard for her to be strong. She was like a flower in a greenhouse, who feared the rain of the outside world.

That was how Meng Hao remembered Song Jia. She was beautiful and had gentle eyes, with a tender weakness deep within her expression.

Now, however, a hundred years had passed. Song Jia had changed. Her eyes were filled with strength, and the weakness that she had concealed deep in her heart all those years ago had been shed. She had grown up.

She had been left with no choice other than to grow up. After the matter with Meng Hao, she had no chance to choose a new beloved. Strangely, the Song Clan Patriarch made no extra demands of her, and in fact treated her quite politely. It made her feel almost like she was an outsider.

She hadn't understood it back then, but many years later she came to realize that none of it had anything to do with her. Starting with that search for a son-in-law... everything had changed.

She had come to understand that in addition to her identity as a member of the Song Clan, she had acquired some other mysterious background. The power of that background made it so that everyone in the Song Clan trembled like cicadas in winter when they faced her. It was as if they didn't know what to do with her.

All the resources of the Clan came to be at her disposal. In fact, it came to the point where she seemed to be even more important than her older brother, Song Yunshu. All her demands were complied with, which led to increasingly intense jealousy on the part of her older brother. The more he pushed against her, the more she had backed down. However, by the time the Primordial Demon Immortal Plane arrived, Song Yunshu had only become more aggressive than before.

In fact, in the First Plane, were it not for her being completely on guard, she might very well have died at his hands. That matter had filled her heart with intense pain.

She immediately recognized Meng Hao. The complicated feelings in her heart had been knotting up there for more than a hundred years. When their gazes met, she gave him a slight nod.

Meng Hao gazed back silently for a moment and then looked away.

When he saw Li Shiqi, he instantly thought of Wang Youcai, who joined the Reliance Sect along with Meng Hao that year. He also thought of Little Tiger, who he hadn't seen after leaving the State of Zhao. Perhaps he had left along with old turtle Reliance.

Before he realized what was happening, the feeling of the passage of time appeared in Meng Hao's heart. He sighed inwardly. Sometimes, it is only when encountering old friends that such a feeling will give rise to sighing and sobbing.

Li Shiqi smiled slightly, looking very cool and collected. Meng Hao nodded, then glanced over the other Cultivators from the Southern Domain. The rest were people he didn't recognize.

However, one of them gave him a feeling that reminded him of the Li Clan Dao Child who had died at his hands, Li Daoyi.

This new man was tall and strapping, with a gaze like a blade. He stood there like a sheathed sword, ready to burst into action and split apart Heaven and Earth.

This was the current generation Dao Child of the Li Clan, Li Tiandao!

There was another Cultivator who didn't look very impressive. It was an old, gaunt man who appeared to be all smiles, but whose expression was one of envy as he looked at Meng Hao. Meng Hao didn't recognize him, but as he stood there among the other Southern Domain Cultivators, he caused a feeling of loathing to rise up within Meng Hao.

He didn't see anyone from the Violet Fate Sect, the Solitary Sword Sect, or any disciples from the other Sects. He was a bit puzzled by that, but this was not the time to make inquiries.

Finally there were Cultivators from the Western Desert, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the Black Lands.

There was Zhao Fang and Duo Lan, as well as two others that he didn't recognize. He didn't see Patriarch Huyan anywhere.

There were quite a few people he didn't know here; in contrast, everyone here seemed to know exactly who he was.

He was Ke Jiushi, son of a Paragon, the number one silkpants in the Demon Immortal Sect, one of the Masters of the Demon Entente. He was famous, which of course filled everyone here with envy.

That was especially so after the shocking events of the Demon Immortal Pagoda. The envy in some of these people was rooted deep in their hearts, and had transformed into deep jealousy.

To these people, Meng Hao was the Chosen of the illusory ancient Second Plane, brilliant and splendid.

Glancing over them all, he grinned and leaned up against the doorframe. With a smile, he said, "Hello, Fellow Daoists. What matter is it that you wished to discuss here with humble old me?"

He truly looked like a silkpants now, especially the way he leaned up against the doorframe. He seemed at ease, which caused everyone present to frown.

However, there was nothing they could do about it. They were Inner Sect disciples, and the difference between their status and Meng Hao's was like the difference between Heaven and Earth. In fact, many of them would never even dare to meet Meng Hao in person.

If it weren't for the fact that they were being forced by urgent circumstances, and faced with the potential of incredible profit that they couldn't simply abandon, then they would never be willing to allow Meng Hao to see them in such a position as they were.

Some of them had even considering trying to hide their faces, or use other methods to attend this meeting. However, as soon as they got near to Meng Hao, he would be able to sense who they were, so any attempts at concealment would be useless.

The only way to be completely safe was to stay far away from him. However, this meeting was far too important. They need to show the spirit of good faith, otherwise, there wouldn't even be the slightest chance of success.

That was why the Fang Clan and the Ji Clan had joined forces along with all the others. Their alliance had only one adversary, Meng Hao. They would combine all their power and then bring it to bear in the negotiations to come.

That was the only way they all would dare to meet with Meng Hao in person.

Such frustration was something that blazing suns like them would find difficult to accept in the outside world.

As Meng Hao's words echoed out, everyone was silent. Nobody responded. All of them began to exchange glances, until finally, the gazes began to fall onto the Ji and Fang Clans.

As for the Ji Clan, they maintained their silence and looked over at the Fang Clan.

Fang Yu cleared her throat and looked at Meng Hao.

"There's something we would like to ask you to go the trouble of helping us with," she said. "Of course there will be compensation, and a lot of it!" It wasn't clear how Fang Yu seemed to understand Meng Hao so well, but as soon as the words came out of her mouth, his interest seemed to be sparked.

"It's actually quite a simple thing," she continued. "You've surely seen the staircase floating above the pit between the Third and Fourth Peaks. All you have to do is climb that staircase to the top, and then leave this place. That's all.

"In exchange, each of us here will give you 100,000 Spirit Stones as compensation. Look... there are dozens of people here. Therefore, we're talking about millions of Spirit Stones. That's quite a bit of profit for very little work, don't you think? You really need to listen to your big sis here." She winked at him, after which he began to perform some calculations.

"Hmm. I don't think so, big sis. I've been getting a lot of headaches lately.... Also my shoulder got twisted while I was practicing cultivation. And my legs. I think it might be that I just can't acclimate myself to this place. Every day they ache constantly." He rolled his eyes, pulling a long face.

As soon as he said this, unsightly expressions appeared on the faces of the others present. Although no one spoke, they were murmuring to themselves. A Cultivator getting a headache? Who would possibly believe that?

A twisted shoulder because of cultivation? It's not like he was practicing the Spider and Toad Skill. How could he possibly twist his shoulder...?

And then there was the expression 'can't acclimate.' This made them want to curse him. None of them had experienced anything like that, and yet Meng Hao had?

Furthermore... all of them had entered here in soul only. Who had ever heard of a soul that 'couldn't acclimate.'

"Look here, at my neck. It hurts really bad, right here." Massaging the spot, he sighed and continued, "I think I need to go back to my Immortal's cave and lay down for a bit. I'll have my dad call some of the Junior Sisters over to do some massage and other blood-flow invigoration techniques. As for this favor of yours, I'm afraid I really can't help out."

Everyone else was on the verge of going crazy, but had no choice other than to suppress their fury. From their perspective, Meng Hao was brazenly showing off his own identity and the fact that he had a Paragon as a dad.

He was going to call some Junior Sisters to massage him and stimulate his blood flow...? This caused all of the male cultivators to clench their jaws tightly.

Next, Meng Hao said something that arose even more fury. "Well then, it's starting to get dark out. Dad's waiting for me to eat dinner, so I should go. See you!" Yawning, he turned to leave.

"ENOUGH!" roared Fang Yu, clenching her fists tightly. "You're constant yapping about 'my dad this' and 'my dad that.' Is Ke Yunhai really your dad?!" As soon as the words left her mouth, Fang Yu regretted speaking them.

Meng Hao stopped in place. He turned to look at her coldly. "Even though I don't actually know who my father is," he said, "that doesn't have anything to do with you."

Fang Yu truly wished to enter the Third Plane. However, she also was looking out for Meng Hao's best interests. The words she had spoken just now had only come out in the heat of anger.

"Look..." she continued quickly, "all we want you to do is climb a staircase. Then you can lead us out of the Second Plane and into the Third Plane. It's a simple thing for you! Besides, you can acquire a lot of good fortune in the Third Plane. In addition, it will put you on good terms with everyone here. When you get back to South Heaven later on, then your path..."

Meng Hao understood all of that. Furthermore, he felt no ill will at all coming from Fang Yu, and as such, also felt no hostility toward her. His expression softened a bit.

"I can take you all into the Third Plane," he said coolly.

“However, 100,000 Spirit Stones isn’t enough. I want half of what you acquire within the Third Plane!

“If all of you agree, then we can conclude this bargain now. All of you can swear an oath from your heart; if you break it, you will become one with the Dao. We Cultivators place a lot of importance on oaths, especially ones that have to do with cultivation. You don’t want to cause entanglements that will hinder progress in your Cultivation base and eventually cause you to be destroyed in body and soul.

“If you don’t agree, then I’ll consider the matter ended, and we can just wait peacefully for the Second Plane to collapse.

“Whatever choice you make, make it quickly.” With that, Meng Hao turned to leave.

“Don’t you want to go to the Third Plane?” called out Wang Lihai.

Without even looking back, Meng Hao said, “What I’ve acquired in the Second Plane is already sufficient. It doesn’t matter at all whether I go to the Third Plane or not.” With that, he made his way off into the distance.

Chapter 595: The Love of a Father is Like a Mountain!

Everyone left behind stood there silently, wrestling with their thoughts and emotions. Their fury toward Meng Hao might be raging to the Heavens, but they were also left with no other alternatives. The staircase had appeared because of Meng Hao, and he was the only one who could climb it.

They had tried, of course, all of them. But all they could do was see it, not touch it.

A few days later, they all met again. Everyone stood in front of Meng Hao and swore an oath promising that after the Third Plane ended, they would give him the share that he had demanded initially.

Oaths were made and witnessed, all based on the Dao. In the future, it didn’t matter what these South Heaven Cultivators acquired in the Third Plane, they would have no basis for complaint. If they broke their promise, the oath would still stand. Any hesitation on their part could influence their Cultivation base.

If it was just some words, or an ordinary oath, it wouldn't be anything extraordinary. However, when the time came to speak the oath, Meng Hao unexpectedly produced a seemingly simple, and yet also dangerous and vicious Daoist magic.

It was something that anyone at the Foundation Establishment stage or higher could cultivate, called Dao Certification.

A few days ago outside Ke Yunhai's Immortal's cave, Meng Hao had requested to have this very Daoist magic. It was specifically used in this ancient age to bind agreements using Daoist magic.

With it in place, if the agreement was broken, the soul would be shredded, great Daos would be unattainable, and the Cultivation base would decline.

There was nothing anyone could do. In order to get into the Third Plane, they had to cautiously swear their oaths, using the Dao Certification as a pledge, and then complete the agreement. There were some people who refused at first, but Meng Hao didn't need to do anything. All it took was some pressure from the others, and they finally gritted their teeth and accepted.

After all, nobody was willing to be the one to pay a heavy price while others paid nothing.

There was one thing nobody seemed to notice. Although everyone assumed that everyone else was present, Zhixiang and Patriarch Huyan were missing.

Meng Hao also swore an oath. According to their requirements, he would climb the mighty staircase. However, he would pick the exact time. He also promised that in the coming days here in the Second Plane, he would not use his power and influence to exert pressure on them. They would no longer need to be so cautious and do everything from within the shadows.

They had been waiting for such a promise for a long time. Many wondered if anyone from their Sect or Clan who had come here in the past had ever deal with anything as frustrating as this.

Up to now, they hadn't dared to make any public appearances, or go anywhere near the Fourth Peak. In fact, whenever they saw any silkpants flying through the air, they would duck their heads for fear of Meng Hao showing up.

Their days had passed in this manner for months now, and they had endured as long as they could. At long last they could relax a bit and enjoy sunlight of this ancient time....

After the agreements were all formalized, Meng Hao realized that the time to leave this place was fast approaching. He would depart from this ancient, illusory world, and return to reality.

In truth, none of the things here were things he couldn't part with. The silkpants lifestyle, his identity, all of it was merely a dream. When waking up from the dream, it could all be forgotten.

However, there was one thing that he wasn't willing to forget; his father from this life, Ke Yunhai.

The fatherly love that he displayed made Meng Hao want to be immersed here and never wake up. He didn't want the dream to end, and didn't want to forget Ke Yunhai. In this illusory ancient world, he had finally experienced what it felt like to have a father at his side.

That feeling made up for some of the sorrow that had lurked in his heart for so long.

He gave up on Dao magic enlightenment. Other than concocting pills, he spent most of his time sitting cross-legged outside of Ke Yunhai's Immortal's cave. Although Ke Yunhai never opened the door, Meng Hao stayed, occasionally saying one thing or another.

That was how life went on, peacefully and quietly. There were no shocking events. Everything was ordinary. Xu Qing was still in secluded meditation, never having opened her eyes even once. Meng Hao was used to such a lifestyle by now. In fact, on more than one occasion, he thought to himself that if things continued on this way forever, it wouldn't be so bad.

Half a month later, the ghost images were appearing just about every day. Meng Hao knew that he needed to leave. The unwillingness to part, and the complicated, embarrassing thoughts, all sent him into a melancholy state of mind.

He looked up at the sky. He looked out at the lands around him. He looked at the Seven Peaks of the First Heaven. He looked at the Fourth Peak. He looked at Ke Yunhai's Immortal's cave. Then he closed his eyes and thought about all the things that had occurred here.

In the very beginning, he had admitted that he was wrong. Later, he was whipped. After that, inside the Demon Immortal Pagoda, he was doted upon by Ke Yunhai, his father in this life. All of these things were unforgettable memories for Meng Hao.

He suddenly had the strong desire to offer thanks to Ke Jiushi. He wanted to thank him for sending him to this place. He wanted to help Ke Jiushi achieve his aim, and do the same for himself.

“The love of a father is like a mountain....” Perhaps this new line of thinking influenced his Dao of alchemy.

That night would be the last night he concocted pills in the Second Plane.

As for what medicinal plants he used to concoct the batch of pills, Meng Hao didn't even remember. He was submerged in his respect for Ke Yunhai, in the beauty he had experienced in the past days, and in the emotions that existed between father and son. That was what he was thinking about as he placed the ingredients into the pill furnace.

The flavor and aroma of these medicinal plants represented various shades of Meng Hao's heart. They mixed together as he began to concoct, and he completely disregarded any thoughts of success or failure. There were only memories. Memories of everything that had happened in his place. Memories of Ke Yunhai and his fatherly love. Memories of his own childhood, and the vague image of his own father.

No moon hung in the night sky.

Meng Hao concocted without even thinking about it. Soon, the pill furnace began to thrum with an indescribable sound. It sounded like a song of Immortals, like a funeral dirge, sometimes cheerful, sometimes melancholy.

The song contained reluctance to part as it slowly drifted out. It echoed about the Fourth Peak, causing everyone to suddenly lift up their heads and look toward the location atop the mountain from which the song originated.

It was like a wind that swept over the hearts of everyone present. It caused ripples to appear that nudged the memories in their hearts, making them recall their past.

Within the depths of their own memories, everyone was different.

Some were like children who had just grown up. Such ones looked at the stooped figure of their father and realized that he was already an old man, and then... they felt pain in the depths of their heart.

Others remembered how they used to be when they were young. When their father was strict, rebellious thoughts would bubble up in their hearts and they would grumble inwardly: "Would you just stop blabbering!?"

However, after many years passed, when they faced their white-haired father as he lay sick in bed, they would clasp his emaciated hand. Tears would stream down their face, and they would moan to themselves, "Father... please, just talk to me a little bit more, okay?"

There were many people who subconsciously ceased to practice cultivation. As they recalled the past, they stared up at the mountain peak and began to weep silently.

Xu Qing opened her eyes. As she looked around blankly, pain rose up within her. She thought about her home, and the vague image of her long dead parents.

"I want to go home...." she murmured.

The song echoed out from within the pill furnace to fill the entire Fourth Peak. Meng Hao didn't know it, because he was completely lost in thought. Concocting pills is like making music, or carving wood. One can take inexpressible thoughts and feelings and pour them inside the creation.

The sound of the medicinal pills being concocted had started out ordinary and mediocre. But now, it contained emotion. It contained Meng Hao's thoughts and feelings, almost as if it had a life of its own, a spirit. The music of it exceeded all the sounds that nature could produce.

After all, the most moving thing of all is love.... And although romantic love is beautiful, it pales in comparison to the selflessness of family love.

Gradually, the disciples on the Third Peak and the Fifth Peak heard the song of the pills being concocted. The song needed no explanation; as soon as they heard it, they stopped cultivating and stood there mutely. Everyone began to think of their father.

More and more disciples grew silent as the song washed over them, various images rising up from their memories to fill their minds.

Father is right there, a pipe in his mouth, his face covered with wrinkles. As he turns his head, he smiles in a way that calms me. Then he tousles my hair.

The sun is shining and I'm sitting on father's shoulders, high up in the air, laughing happily. Back then, I didn't know that my laughter was my father's happiness.

I don't want to see his strong, steady hands slowly grow thin and wrinkled....

Wang Lihai heard the song and immediately stopped meditating. He looked off into the darkness of the night, and then thought back to his own strict father.

Han Bei sat there silently, and her heart suddenly felt as if it were tearing into pieces. She lowered her head as she thought of her father, and how he had limped as they strolled together through the Black Sieve Sect all those years ago.

Soon, people in the Second and Sixth Peaks also heard the song. It was filled with the love of a father, fierce and incapable of being dispersed. Even the most evil person in Heaven and Earth would begin to reminisce when they heard this song.

I remember when you raised your hand at me, sir, and I glared back furiously. I fought back, then left and slammed the door. I never saw your trembling body, and the look of disappointment in your eyes.

One rainy evening, I was sick in bed. I opened my blurry eyes to see you, your hair white, prostrating in front of the statues of the gods, praying for me to be restored to health. You bustled about, you sold everything, all to make sure that I recovered properly.

When I saw that, my hands started to shake, and my heart tore. I wanted to open my mouth and say... father, I was wrong.

The song of the pills being concocted gradually reached the First Peak and the Seventh Peak. All of the regions of the Demon Immortal Sect's First Heaven could hear it. Everyone was listening, including Outer Sect disciples, Inner Sect disciples, Conclave disciples, Elders... everyone. Even the most powerful people in this world, the Immortals, were affected by the song, and began to reminisce.

A resonance was created, and memories floated up. In this instant, the entire Demon Immortal Sect was completely silent, except for the song.... Everyone was listening to it, and thinking of the past.

The Paragons of the First, Second, Third, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Peaks... six Paragons, all heard the song. They looked up toward the Fourth Peak, their expressions mournful. They could see Meng Hao concocting pills, and they could hear Meng Hao's voice within.

Even the Paragon who hated Ke Jiusi the most, could do nothing more than sigh.

“He's... finally grown up. Brother Yunhai... I wish you... good luck on your journey.”

It was in this moment that another sound rose up within the Demon Immortal Sect. It was the sound of bells... a death knell....

Chapter 596: The Oil was Exhausted and the Lamp was Dry

On the Second Peak, Song Jia leaned up against a pine tree, staring blankly in the direction of the Fourth Peak. At some point, perplexity had filled her eyes, and tears had begun to stream down her face.

The song of the medicinal pills echoed within her ears, giving rise to layer after layer of ripples within her heart. One scene after another rose up from her memories.

She saw images of her father, and images of herself....

Some people call a daughter a ‘pearl in the palm.’ From what Song Jia remembered, she... was the pearl in her father's palm.

The song of the medicinal pills echoed out, rising and falling, floating throughout the First Heaven. A million people heard it and were affected, even Fang Yu. She sat there silently, complex emotions filling her. She felt both agitated and reminiscent. She reminisced of her father, scholarly, seemingly gentle but also very strict. She also reminisced about her childhood, along with all the soft and sweet things that had happened.

What made her most agitated was that within the song coming from the Fourth Peak, she could clearly sense a family love coming from Meng Hao toward someone that wasn't actually his father.

“Dad,” she murmured, “did you really make the right choice back then?” At some point, her eyes had filled with tears. She thought back to when she was small, how she would often see her mother weeping, while her father stood at the window, looking off into the distance, a profound, complex look in his eyes.

Within that look was a type of love that Fang Yu didn't understand back then. After growing up, when she thought back to it, she realized that it was love. It was not love for her, but love for someone far, far away, someone who existed in some unknown place.

The love of a father and the love of a mother are completely different. The love of a father is more reserved, more silent, like a mountain. When you are a child, your father is your guardian angel. When you are a teenager, things change. He becomes an obstacle. After that, you come to view yourself as the superior, with him beneath you.

Once you reach middle age, though, you look at that mountain and you suddenly realize that he has been there all along, watching you proudly. However arrogant you were, however selfish and narrow-minded, he would forgive you. Forgive you without even saying a word.

You will feel forlorn, and will suddenly come to a realization. That... is the love of a father.

When you have it, you might not feel it deeply. However, once you lose it, you lose the Heaven of your heart!

When a child wishes to care for a parent, only to find that the parent is no longer there, well... that is a sorrow that gives rise to the most profound of weeping.

As Meng Hao concocted, the song of the medicinal pills echoed throughout the First Heaven. Throughout the seven great mountain peaks, a million disciples were immersed in silence. Even the Paragons were lost in thought.

They listened to the song and recalled images of the past....

In the past, I viewed myself as incredible. Sir, you said many things back then. You tried to involve yourself in my affairs, but at that time, I felt that you had changed from before. I felt that I was capable of flying on my own.

But then, my wings were broken, and I became very exhausted. After flying for a long time, I suddenly looked back and thought of you, sir, and about all the things you told me. By the time I looked back, however, all I could see was your tomb. I stood in front of your tomb and wept. I wanted to say: "Father... I was wrong."

In the past, I looked down at you, then turned away, leaving you to prove myself. Years later, after I conquered the world, I came back to you in all my glory to look at your shocked face. Instead, what I saw was how proud you were of me, sir. Pain filled my heart. By that time, your hair had long since become white. I embraced my aged father, and whispered:

"Father, I'm back."

Tears rolled down Ji Xiaoxiao's face as she immersed herself in her memories. She thought of many things....

Within Li Shiqi's mind floated the image of her Master. She didn't know who her father really was. When she had opened her eyes for the first time, the first person she saw wasn't her Master, but someone else.

However, at some point in her life, she had come to view her Master like a father.

She called him Master, but in her heart, she called him father.

She was adopted, having lost her parents when she was still wearing swaddling clothes. As she grew up, she became beautiful. However, from a young age, she had been cursed with a strange deformity. It was only because of her Master's efforts over the years that she was able to live a normal life.

Without her Master, there would be no Li Shiqi.

Once, long ago, he had taken her to look for clues about her hometown. After much searching, Li Shiqi finally spoke up, her voice soft. "Master, there's no need to search any more. In this life, you are my Master. I hope that in the next life, you can be my father."

The song of the pills being concocted continued to echo out. Every single person was moved emotionally; everyone was affected, influenced....

Meng Hao's expression was blank. These medicinal pills, this batch, this pill furnace and its song, were all filled with reluctance to part from Ke Yunhai, as well as Meng Hao's desire for that love of a father.

He was completely unaware that at some point, a white-robed figure had appeared behind him. The figure had long hair, and was emaciated. His entire person emanated an aura of time, and archaic ancientness.

It was none other than Ke Jiusi.

He stood behind Meng Hao, staring at the pill furnace as if he could see into eternity.

The medicinal pills were being concocted by Meng Hao. The song of the pills, though, contained the voices of both Meng Hao and Ke Jiusi.

Then, the death knell began to toll. The sound rang out again, and again, and again....

A death knell was not rung upon the passing away of every disciple. Even Conclave disciples did not qualify for something like that, nor Elite Apprentices.

Only people who had rendered incredible services to the Sect would qualify to receive the death knell of the Demon Immortal Sect, as a means of protection on the way to the underworld.

Other than such people... only when a Paragon perished would the ringing of the death knell be heard in the Sect....

When the ninth bell tolled, Meng Hao suddenly trembled. He slowly lifted up his head, as did Ke Jiusi.

"Bells..." he murmured. Fear filled his heart, and suddenly he didn't care about anything. He didn't care about the pill concocting, or the illusion, or the ancient times. He didn't even care if this batch of pills really were Celestial Pills, nor whether or not he succeeded in concocting them.

His body shook, and a realization as dark as night swept over him. Trembling, he rose to his feet.

In that instant a roaring sound could be heard from the pill furnace. The medicinal pills and the furnace itself suddenly exploded; their connection to Meng Hao was broken, and blood sprayed out of his mouth. The blood splattered down onto the exploded remnants of the medicinal pills; this was blood filled with his indescribable thoughts, thoughts that carried his unceasing love for a father.

“Dad....” Without hesitation, Meng Hao rushed outside.

He left the pill concocting workshop, completely unaware that within the shattered remnants of the pill furnace were nine destroyed pills. However, the batch had been a batch of ten. All of the medicinal strength of the nine destroyed pills had merged into the tenth pill.

That tenth medicinal pill appeared, glittering brightly as it began to transform from something illusory into something real!

The pill also absorbed Meng Hao’s blood, which contained his true feelings and emotions. Because of that, the pill... began to thoroughly transmogrify. This was creating something from nothing!

However, it didn’t matter that the medicinal pill was something from nothing, nor that it met all the qualifications that Meng Hao had dreamed of. Within his mind, there was no medicinal pill. There was only his anxiety, an anxiety so intense that he forgot who he was....

He rushed out of the pill concocting workshop, out of the Immortal’s cave, out of the entire area he was in. He transformed into a beam of light that shot with incredible speed toward Ke Yunhai’s Immortal’s cave.

The death knell sounded out throughout the seven great mountain peaks of the First Heaven.... DONG.... DONG.... When the thirteenth toll was reached, Meng Hao arrived at Ke Yunhai’s Immortal’s cave.

Seeing that the door was sealed shut tightly, tears began to pour down Meng Hao’s face. He kneeled in front of the door.

“Father!” His voice wasn’t very loud, but it filled the entire Fourth Mountain. His eyes were wet. He wasn’t sure when, but at some point, he had thoroughly immersed himself into this ancient, illusory world. Ke Yunhai had appeared to fill a void of fatherly love that had existed in his heart since he was young.

That void was something that Meng Hao usually kept carefully hidden away. He did not want anyone to touch it, not even himself.

But then, Ke Yunhai had appeared in this ancient illusion, and that void... had been filled.

Meng Hao's heart was being ripped into pieces. To him, Heaven and Earth had lost all color. An indescribable feeling surged over him; he felt like his body had been turned into a black hole that was consuming his soul and his life. His everything.

"Father..." Tears streamed down his face as he looked at the door of the Immortal's cave. The death knell continued to echo about. It had now tolled nineteen times. Every bell toll caused a green beam of light to surround the Fourth Peak. Currently, nineteen glowing rings of light surrounded the mountain.

As the tears rolled down Meng Hao's face to drop to the ground, the door to the Immortal's cave began to open silently. Ke Yunhai's exhausted voice could suddenly be heard from within.

"Don't cry."

Meng Hao's head shot up immediately, and his body began to tremble. Without any hesitation, he rushed inside. The Immortal's cave was dark, but he could still see Ke Yunhai sitting there cross-legged on his stone bed.

Ke Yunhai was even more ancient than before. He seemed to emanate an aura of complete decay. White nodes of light pulsated out from him; it seemed his body was currently in the processes of passing away into meditation.

As for the lamp next to him... the oil was exhausted and the lamp was dry. Its light was weak, as if the slightest wind could blow it out.

An enormous coffin rested off to the side, its surface carved with auspicious beasts. It seemed ordinary, but if you looked closely, you would be able to see how incredible it was.

"Jiusi, don't cry..." he said hoarsely, looked at Meng Hao with a tender expression. "You've grown up. Daddy can't stay with you forever. From now on, you'll need to rely on yourself.... However,

there is one last thing I can do for you. Before I pass away into meditation, I will give you the precious treasure of a lifetime, forged personally by me!”

The death knell outside had reached the fifty-seventh toll. When it reached ninety-nine, the soul would disperse. Along with the ninety-nine rings of light created by the bell tolls, it would return to Heaven and Earth, and enter the underworld....

Chapter 597: I'll Make You Proud, Sir

“With the Soul Divergence Incantation, you can cultivate an undying soul. Unfortunately, the difficulty level is too high for you.... However, this coffin can help you to cultivate the art. With it, even should great calamity arise, you... can continue to live!”

He only spoke a few sentences, but even that left Ke Yunhai gasping for breath. His face was pale, and the white nodes of light flying around him grew more dense. They circulated around his body, making it look almost like a glowing halo surrounded him.

He looked kindly at Meng Hao, his gaze filled with doting kindness and the reluctance to part. And love.... He feared the child he left behind might be bullied, might be lonely or taciturn.

Meng Hao bit his lip as he kneeled wordlessly in front of Ke Yunhai, tears flowing.

“There’s no need to cry,” said Ke Yunhai. “If men cry too much in our day and age, then their Dao becomes unstable. Come here, kid....” He raised a shaky hand, and Meng Hao, tears dripping, walked forward to stand in front of him.

Ke Yunhai’s hand, covered with so many wrinkles, gently patted Meng Hao’s head.

“You’ve grown up....”

“Dad....” Meng Hao looked at the pervasive death aura, and withered Ke Yunhai, and his heart felt as if it were tearing into pieces. His body trembled as his heart suddenly filled with the intense sensation that his father was about to leave him.

He... had long since taken Ke Yunhai to be his own father.

“Everyone dies eventually, that is something we can’t change. Lord Li returned life to the masses, and considering my position, I must respect his decision....”

“Why?” murmured Meng Hao, the tears pouring down. “Why do you have to respect it!? We Cultivators practice cultivation to gain eternal life, don’t we? What’s the point in abandoning eternal life?!”

Ke Yunhai was silent for a moment before raising his head. His gaze seemed to penetrate out of the Immortal’s cave to some distant place in the future. The death knell outside had reached the sixty-ninth toll. The sound of it echoed out endlessly.

“We Cultivators don’t just practice cultivation to gain eternal life. No, we pursue the Dao.... For those who strive after the Dao, life is a morning and death is an evening. For those who seek the Dao, when evening comes, of what use is longing...?” Ke Yunhai lowered his head to look at Meng Hao.

“Death and life are not important to me. Without Lord Li, your father would have long since died countless times over.... I do not fear death. The only thing I am uneasy about... is you....” Ke Yunhai tousled Meng Hao’s hair. He was already running very low on energy, but his eyes were filled with kindness, and an increasingly strong doting indulgence.

“I should have perished many years ago,” he continued. “But I was worried about you, so I put things off until today. If it were possible, I would accompany you a bit further, just like in the Demon Immortal Pagoda, me in the lead, you following... off into the distance.” He smiled, but his face was pale. More and more white nodes floated around him, making his smile seem somewhat distant.

“Dad....” said Meng Hao, pulling at Ke Yunhai’s hand.

“All of your brothers and sisters have already gone. Now that I’m leaving, you won’t have any relatives left in the world.... I hope that in the future... you will learn to be a bit more sensible.” As Ke Yunhai gazed at Meng Hao, the kindness in his eyes grew stronger, as did the reluctance to part. It was exactly as he said; what he was concerned most about in his life, was the child who kneeled in front of him now.

If there were even a little bit of hope to buy more time, he would seize it, and watch Ke Jiusi truly grow up.

Meng Hao wasn't able to give voice to what he was feeling deep in his heart. He felt stabs of pain, as if his world were falling apart. It was as if there were a vortex inside of him, sucking in all of his thoughts.

He could only clasp Ke Yunhai's hand tightly with his own. He could only cry. He opened his mouth, but no words came out, not even one.

"Don't be sad. Your brothers and sisters are waiting for me. I'm their father too. I need to spend some time with them, also.... Jiusi, daddy hopes that one day, when I'm in the underworld, you'll make me proud...."

Outside, the bells had tolled eighty-nine times. Ke Yunhai's body was now completely surrounded by spinning white nodes of light. The hand that Meng Hao held began to grow faint. The only thing that was clear now, was Ke Yunhai's kind smile.

His eyes had begun to fade. During the last ten tolls of the death knell, they would lose all of their brightness. They would transform into countless dots of light that would then vanish into the air.

Meng Hao's heart felt as if it were being torn into pieces. His body quivered as he attempted to hold tight to Ke Yunhai's disappearing hand.

"Dad....."

Suddenly, Ke Yunhai's fading eyes once again seemed to focus, as if he were using all the last bits of his life force to look at Meng Hao. He looked almost as if he were in a daze.

There in front of him, he saw a figure slowly materializing behind Meng Hao. It was a man in a white robe, whose features looked completely different than Meng Hao's. He had long hair, and looked young, but also seemed to be filled with an endless ancientness.

This was none other than... Ke Jiusi!

Ke Jiusi looked at his father with tears in his eyes. He slowly kneeled down, his body superimposing with Meng Hao's.

A smile appeared on Ke Yunhai's face. He had long since put all the pieces of the puzzle together. He nodded, and slowly reached his hand out to touch Meng Hao's forehead. Or... perhaps he was touching Ke Jiusi's forehead.

In that instant, images appeared in Ke Yunhai's mind. He saw the destruction of the Demon Immortal Sect and Ke Jiusi's shocking final battle. He saw how Ke Jiusi returned to life and watched over the Demon Immortal Sect alone for tens of thousands of years.

Ke Jiusi looked at Ke Yunhai. Tears streamed down his face as he softly said: "Dad.... I learned to be a bit more sensible.... I'm sorry for everything before.... I'm sorry. Father... everything was my fault...."

At long last, he was able to see his father again. At long last, he was able to say those words to his Father.

The words were Ke Jiusi's, and they were also Meng Hao's. Two people, one set of words. It was hard to tell if Ke Jiusi was borrowing Meng Hao's mouth, or Meng Hao was borrowing Ke Jiusi's soul.

"Dad.... I've grown up. You can stop worrying, sir. I will always make you proud...."

Ke Yunhai looked at Meng Hao and Ke Jiusi for a long moment. His face filled with a kind smile, a smile filled with admiration, and even more so, deep content.

"Thank you," said Ke Yunhai, his voice hoarse. "You, also, are my son. We are father and son in this life." He gave Meng Hao a profound look, and within that gaze could be seen doting indulgence and kindness. It was in that moment that the innumerable white nodes of light completely surrounded his body.

Meng Hao trembled as he realized that the hand which had been holding Ke Yunhai, was now holding nothing. The final lick of flame in the oil lamp, was extinguished.

"DAD!!" Tears rained down Meng Hao's face as he watched Ke Yunhai fade away. Outside, the ninety-ninth bell toll of the death knell could be heard!

One less than a hundred. Perfection was not permitted. The death knell protected the path, guarded the way. It could not have one too many, or one too less. Ninety-nine paths to the underworld.

That is the death knell which tolls when a Paragon perishes.

The sound of the death knell continued to echo about throughout the seven great mountain peaks of the First Heaven. In that moment, the million Cultivators in the Seven Peaks were kowtowing toward the Fourth Peak. Everyone, including the other Paragons, bowed deeply.

On the Fourth Peak, the sounds of weeping rose up. All of the disciples turned toward the direction of Ke Yunhai's Immortal's cave and began to kowtow on bended knees.

Ke Yunhai had perished.

As Meng Hao watched Ke Yunhai vanish completely, the sound of wailing drifted in from outside. He knelt there silently for a very long time before finally rising to his feet. Clutching his chest, he walked out of the Immortal's cave. Outside, he saw that all of the Fourth Peak disciples were present, looking in his direction. As he looked back at them, an expression of profound grief filled his face.

He looked up into the sky, and the sunlight poured into his eyes. For a moment, he thought he could see Ke Yunhai's shadow. Ninety-nine beams of light swirled around him, escorting him away. As Ke Yunhai made his way off into the distance, he turned his head slightly to glance at the lands below, and at Meng Hao.

As the sunlight poured down onto Meng Hao, he saw the image of himself when he first arrived in this illusory world. He remembered the first time he saw Ke Yunhai, and the kindness he had seen in his eyes, a kindness that could forgive anything.

After he killed Ji Mingfeng, he was whipped. He remembered hearing Ke Yunhai's voice transmitted into his ear, asking why he hadn't cried out yet. His heart had trembled.

Then, there were the magical items and talismans personally forged with Ke Yunhai's life force. In the Immortal Demon Pagoda, Meng Hao reached the point where he was sure he was defeated. It was then that a figure appeared in front of him, tousled his hair, and then kindly said, "I'll take you the rest of the way."

Meng Hao saw all of these things, and they transformed into a final image of parting....

Now, he finally realized that Ke Yunhai knew all along that he wasn't Ke Jiusi.

In the end, he had even thanked him. That proved everything. Then he had said that Meng Hao was also his son. He approved of Meng Hao....

All of it seemed like a dream. But it was a dream that Meng Hao wanted!

"The old man... is gone," he murmured. The light in his eyes turned into darkness, superseding everything else in the world. He coughed up a mouthful of blood, and then collapsed onto the ground.

Meng Hao was in a coma for two days. When he finally awakened, he saw Xu Qing watching over him anxiously. He didn't say anything. Xu Qing accompanied him to Ke Yunhai's funeral. The tomb was in a valley in the Seventh Peak, a tomb that contained no corpse, only an extinguished oil lamp.

Meng Hao was no longer an ordinary disciple. Nor was he an Elite Apprentice. He was now the Lord of the Fourth Peak, although he was a Lord who was not a Paragon.

He did not concoct any more pills, nor did he seek enlightenment of Daoist magic. He sat outside his Immortal's cave looking out into the darkness of night, and the bright sky of day. He wasn't sure what he was looking at. He just stared.

Several days later, the ghost images were appearing multiple times per day in the ancient, illusory world. Meng Hao knew that this place... was about to vanish.

"Living and dying. It can be a departure, but also a beginning." Meng Hao felt as if he had experienced a flash of insight. He closed his eyes and did not open them for a long time. When he did, he decided to head to the great staircase that led up into the sky. Before leaving, he happened to notice the medicinal pill which had been created from nothing. It brought him no joy. He gazed at it blankly for a moment, then carefully put it into his bag of holding.

As he stood before the great staircase, he looked back at the Fourth Peak one more time. In that glance he placed the image of the Fourth Peak firmly in place in his memories.

Then he turned and stepped onto that staircase which none of the other disciples of the Sect could see. He began to walk up, one step at a time. As he did, all the Cultivators from the great lands of South Heaven watched him.

They were waiting. Waiting for Meng Hao to reach the very top of the staircase. Then the Second Plane would reach its conclusion, and the Third Plane... would open.

Chapter 598: The Third Plane

Meng Hao walked slowly, higher and higher. Soon he was high up in the sky, and almost at the top. He stopped just before he reached the final stair, looking down at the mountain peaks of the Demon Immortal Plane. He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them, they were filled with resolve.

“Dad, I’m leaving now....” he said softly. Then he strode forward onto the final stair. A shocking rumbling sound filled the air, and the entire world began to shake.

Meng Hao could see and feel the shaking, but all of the Demon Immortal Sect disciples who weren’t from South Heaven had no clue at all that such things were occurring.

The South Heaven Cultivators could feel it, of course, and their faces began to fill with excitement and intense anticipation at the prospect of seeing the Third Plane with their own eyes!

When it came to the Demon Immortal Sect, the first two Planes always appeared. The Third Plane, however, had only appeared a few times throughout all history. It required great destiny or good fortune to make it open.

To be able to personally see the opening of the Third Plane made their hearts burst with passion.

Of course, the only one who could most truly witness the disappearance of the Second Plane and the opening of the Third Plane, was Meng Hao.

As of this moment, he was the only person who stood up in mid-air, looking down at all the people in the world below. When he reached the pinnacle of the great staircase, he looked down at everything, at the increasingly intense shaking, and the ghost images.

The ghost images would only appear for a moment before disappearing.

An invisible, imperceptible, illusory wind sprang up from nowhere. It did not cause anyone’s hair to lift up. Instead, it stimulated time.

Meng Hao watched all Seven Peaks of the First Heaven pass through ten thousand years in the blink of an eye. The lush vegetation on the mountain peaks withered and then bloomed again, completely changing in appearance.

He saw more extravagant buildings erected on the peaks, and he saw countless lives, people being born, growing old, dying. Ten thousand years.

Then he saw everything go pitch black. An enormous hand appeared, covering over the entire world. Within that hand, he could just make out an old man in a gold robe. He waved his sleeve, and the Heavens changed. The land was bathed in redness, and the stars tumbled about.

The ground shook. Meng Hao couldn't see much within the darkness, but he could see the two Holy Lands collapsing. The three Greater Demon Mountains shattered. The Seven Peaks of the Demon Immortal Sect's First Heaven split and cracked. Although the mountains were still in place, many parts were destroyed.

Buildings fell to pieces and disciples died. Meng Hao witnessed a great war that shook all of the Ninth Mountain and Sea. The war was fought in the pitch black, so he could not see things clearly, he could only sense them.

Soon everything faded away. After a long time, Meng Hao caught sight of a coffin on the Fourth Peak. A man emerged from within the coffin; he had long black hair and wore a white robe.

He stood silently on the Fourth Peak, as if he were watching over the lands below him, for an eternity.

All of this was tens of thousand of years of history, all passed in the blink of an eye. Meng Hao eventually closed his eyes, and when he opened them, reality had been restored to the world. There were corpses everywhere, just like before, and ruins.

Everything... was back to normal.

Meng Hao quietly closed his eyes again for a while. When he opened them, he was no longer up in the air, but rather, reclining in the coffin on the Fourth Peak, looking up at the sky.

The sky was broken, just like he remembered it had been when he first lay down into the coffin.

It was like everything had been a dream, and now... he was waking up from the dream. Quietly, he recalled the images of everything that had happened in the ancient, illusory world. Eventually, tears began to seep out of the corners of his eyes.

“Was it really all just a dream?” He wasn’t sure how to tell. He slowly sat up and then crawled out of the coffin. As he began to walk away, he suddenly looked back, his mind trembling.

The coffin was familiar to him. It was the exact same coffin that Ke Yunhai had made for him back in the illusory ancient times.... Perhaps it was more accurate to say that he made it for Ke Jiusi, the precious treasure to be able to cultivate the Soul Divergence Incantation.

Meng Hao looked a bit absent minded as he stood there. After a long time passed, he turned and looked over the Fourth Peak. As far as what the place had looked like when he first arrived, he couldn’t quite remember clearly.

Now, though, even though everything was in ruins, it was all familiar to him. Every little thing was something that existed in his memories, unforgettable.

He silently walked to the edge of the top portion of the Fourth Peak, to the place where he had first seen Ke Jiusi. He stood in the same place, his back to the First Peak, and gazed toward the Seventh Peak.

It wasn’t the first time he had stood here. Back in the First Plane, he had wondered what Ke Jiusi was looking at. Now that he stood here looking out in the same direction once again, he knew all too well.

“You were looking at Father Ke’s tomb.” In the Seventh Peak was a mountain valley where one of the most powerful experts in the history of the Demon Immortal Sect had been buried after he perished. It was none other than... Ke Yunhai.

Meng Hao looked away, and then began to walk down the Fourth Peak. All the various details weren’t exactly the same as they had been that year, but even still, Meng Hao was able to find places that he was familiar with.

As he walked, his face flickered with an expression of reminiscence. His heart felt heavy. He was like someone who had just awoken from a dream, a bit distracted, somewhat unsure of what was real and what was not.

The Fourth Peak was filled with ruins, and there were many areas that still had the restrictive spells from before. Just such a place suddenly appeared in front of Meng Hao. Gentle, warm light drifted out. It didn't look like much, but if he ignored it, or tried to enter it without using the proper method, then it wouldn't matter how powerful his fleshly body was, he would perish without a doubt.

The restrictive spell blocked Meng Hao's path. On the other side was a narrow mountain path filled with corpses. Meng Hao was very familiar with this path; it was none other than the way that led to his Immortal's cave on the Fourth Peak.

He stood outside the restrictive spell, his expression growing more complex. After a long moment, he closed his eyes. When he opened them, he lifted his right hand up and performed an ancient sealing incantation. Ghost images appeared, and he pressed out lightly up ahead of him.

There was no sound. The light of the seemingly eternal restrictive spell suddenly began to flicker rapidly. Gradually it grew thin, until finally, an opening appeared.

Meng Hao sighed, and stepped inside. A melancholy expression appeared on his face as he looked around at the corpses that littered the path. At the end of the path was the Immortal's cave in which he had lived for so many months in the Second Plane.

The door to the Immortal's cave was collapsed. The inside of the cave was empty, filled with dust. The stone soldiers that Ke Yunhai had given him in the Second Plane were nowhere to be seen.

"Perhaps they don't even exist anymore," he thought to himself as he sat there in the Immortal's cave. This was the spot he usually meditated in the Second Plane. From here he could see the sky and the lands. He sat there for a long time.

He knew that the other South Heaven Cultivators were using every method at their disposal, including methods gained in the Second Plane, to dig up treasures that remained in the Third Plane.

You could say that the Third Plane was like a Treasure Pavilion that had been broken open. Anyone who came here would be certain to have chances to acquire good fortune.

After a long time passed, Meng Hao finally stood up. He left what had once been his Immortal's cave, and began to walk toward... Ke Yunhai's Immortal's cave.

There were now no restrictive spells here. All of them had been destroyed in the great war. In fact, the door of the Immortal's cave hung in fragments. Except... the sight of the interior of the Immortal's cave left Meng Hao gaping.

The layout of the Immortal's cave looked exactly the same as he remembered it being from the Second Plane....

However, the entire place was untainted by even a speck of dust, as if someone came frequently to clean it.

Meng Hao stood there looking at the Immortal's cave for a long time, almost as if he wasn't even aware that time was passing by, and he had forgotten that this wasn't the illusory Second Plane. Three days later, he finally clasped hands and bowed deeply.

He bowed for the dream. He bowed for the father during that lifetime. He bowed for having fully awoken from the dream.

The feelings for his father during that life were ingrained in the depths of his heart, and were now a part of him. They could not be cut away, or lost.

He rose to his feet, his eyes filled with determination as he walked down the Fourth Peak.

After leaving the mountain, he took a deep breath and then flew into the air. His heart had now recovered by more than half from the experience in the illusion. His eyes glittered as he shot off into the distance.

Rumbling echoed out as he increased his speed. Then, when he was far, far off, he suddenly stopped in place. He looked down at himself, for the first time sparing a moment to examine his body.

"So, the results of the fleshly body cultivation in the ancient illusion... are still there!" His eyes flickered with a bright light. His time spent cultivating his physical body had not been wasted. As of now... even in the First Anima, he had a fleshly body that was as powerful as the Fifth Anima.

“I gained the most in the First Plane. In the Second Plane, I also exceeded everyone else, leading to my superiority and advantage.

“Well then. I think that in the Third Plane... I also need to be the biggest winner!” With that, his body flickered, and a screaming sound filled the air. Before it could emanate out very far, Meng Hao was already nowhere to be seen.

“If my fleshly body cultivation remained in place, then....” He shot forward, his gaze coming to rest at stop off in the distance. He didn’t realize it, but a bright glow had appeared in his eyes. Within his gaze could be seen anticipation, as well as a bit of nervousness.

“Well, I wonder if my plan of burying the Wooden Time Swords... has succeeded!?!?” He took a deep breath. If his plan had succeeded, then the rewards he could acquire would definitely be a defiance of Heaven.

Daoist magics and fleshly body cultivation were all good, and in fact, Meng Hao was quite content. However, what he looked forward to even more were the Wooden Time Swords. If he had succeeded, the he would be in possession of a precious treasure that could slay Immortals.

If he had succeeded with the swords, then Meng Hao would have a much deeper understanding of everything that had occurred within the ancient, illusory world. He would then be able to determine whether or not... he really could change the future.

Although he was aware that the possibility of success was small, he was still filled with expectation. His body flashed as he shot off into the distance at top speed. It didn’t take long for him to find one of the four locations where he had buried a Wooden Time Sword.

Chapter 599: Sword Tip!

The locations he had selected were all remote corners of the Demon Immortal Sect, places he had noticed in the First Plane, which he was sure would survive.

As he neared the first location, he began to grow more nervous. Moments later, he arrived. He looked over the ruins in the area, and then took a deep breath and descended downward.

After looking around for a while, he looked down at the ground beneath him. He lifted a foot up into the air and then stamped down, again and again. Booming could be heard as the surface of the

ground was destroyed. Countless bits of dirt and rock exploded up into the air as a huge crater appeared beneath Meng Hao.

Unfortunately, nothing could be seen within the crater....

Meng Hao's face was unsightly as he turned and began to search the entire area. It didn't take long before he had turned virtually everything upside down, and yet still hadn't found a single thing.

It appeared as if from the very beginning there had not been any sort of Wooden Time Sword buried here.

"I failed...?" he thought, his eyes flashing with an unyielding glint. He flew up into the air and shot toward the second location where he had buried one of the other swords.

After arriving, he searched the area thoroughly, but the result was the same. No matter how he searched, he could not find any trace of a Wooden Time Sword.

Next he went to the third area, but the result was the same.

His heart had now sunk down into his chest, and a bitter smile could be seen on his face. He was now very much certain that the idea he had come up with in the ancient illusory world, had failed.

Sighing, he headed to the last of the areas where he had buried a sword. It was an area relatively close to the Seventh Peak. Back in the illusory world, the path to this place had been easy to follow, but now things were different. Danger lurked in all directions, even for Meng Hao. It took him several days to reach the Seventh Peak and the place where he had buried the fourth Wooden Time Sword.

At one time, it had been a mountainous forest. However, the forest had long since been burned into ash. After searching the ruined remnants of the forest for some time, Meng Hao finally found the place where he had hidden the sword.

After overturning the area, he found nothing but an empty pit. He let out a long sigh, and finally gave up all hope. He knew that this time, he had thoroughly failed.

He suddenly frowned. “Well, if I failed, then where are my Wooden Time Swords?” He opened his bag of holding and, sure enough, there were only six Wooden Time Swords inside. The four swords that he had buried were definitely gone.

There was something very strange about the whole matter, something that exceeded his imagination. There were many possible explanations, but the one that made the most sense was that although he had succeeded in burying the four Wooden Time Swords, someone else had come along and taken them before him.

He shook his head and was about to leave when suddenly, his gaze was drawn to the very edge of the deep pit he had just made. He saw something there that instantly caused a tremor to run through his body. He immediately began to breathe heavily as he stared at what appeared to be an ordinary, finger-nail sized fragment of wood sticking out of the mud.

That fragment of wood appeared to be rotten from the passage of time. It looked completely ordinary, stabbed as it was into the mud....

“That’s....” Meng Hao panted as he suppressed the excitement in his heart. Exercising great caution, he picked up the wood fragment. It was irregularly shaped, but the tip was actually sharp.

It was almost like a sword tip!!

“This is a Spring and Autumn tree! This is the tip of a wooden sword!” His breathing grew more ragged, and his mind roared chaotically. Although he desired nothing more than to succeed, he wasn't even sure how to tell if he had.

Right now, his mind was spinning as he closely examined the sword tip resting there on his palm.

“Eee? No... it looks like... this isn't the wooden sword I originally buried here?” As he examined the sword tip, he realized that shockingly, it contained 30,000 years of Time power.

However, the wooden fragment was too small, making the power of Time unstable. Meng Hao could tell that if he tried to wield it, it would gradually fade away.

“If I had succeeded with my wooden swords, they would have been buried here for almost 100,000 years. However, this wooden fragment only has 30,000 years. Also, the physical appearance seems

a bit different.” Meng Hao wasn’t quite able to determine exactly what was going on. Now he suddenly wasn’t as certain that he had failed in his attempt.

Without being able to look at the entirety of the sword, there would be no way to make a final determination. However, he did know that there was absolutely no sensation of the brand he left on his own wooden swords.

He carefully put the tiny wooden fragment away. It was impossible to determine if the fragment was part of the sword he had left here to pass through the years. However, considering that there were 30,000 years of Time power collected inside the tiny fragment, it could still be regarded as a precious treasure.

“If I truly failed, then all I lost were four Wooden Time Swords. By spending a few Spirit Stones, I can make more copies. If I succeed, though, then even if someone else took the swords away before I could, they were still personally created by me. If I ever run into them again, I’ll know, no matter how many times other people try to refine them.

“The heart of the swords contains my Time power. I will always be the original master of those swords.” Meng Hao’s eyes flickered. Although he still didn’t understand exactly what had happened, he didn’t want to spend any more time thinking about it. Looking up, he saw the Seventh Peak, and a sentimental look appeared in his eyes.

“That’s where Father Ke’s tomb is.” With that, he transformed into a beam of colorful light that shot off toward the burial location of the powerful experts of the various generations of the Demon Immortal Sect.

Along the way, he heard the sounds of explosions coming from various districts within the Demon Immortal Sect, as well as the occasional din of battle.

To the South Heaven Cultivators, the Third Plane was like a storehouse of treasures. There was good fortune to be acquired everywhere. However, that good fortune was not the same for everyone. It depended on how well prepared each individual was in the Second Plane, who had the greater understanding, and who had mastered more techniques to open restrictive spells.

Those were the keys to success. However, considering treasures were involved, it would be difficult to avoid friction and fighting. Therefore, fierce battles were to be expected.

Meng Hao ignored all of that. He didn't actually need to do anything. Thanks to the oath-enforced agreement, whatever the others acquired in here, he would acquire far, far more.

As he proceeded forward, the sky gradually began to grow dark. Outside of the Seventh Peak was the Demon Immortal Sect's graveyard. As he neared, a bright beam of light shot out from the middle of the Seventh Peak. At first, it wasn't heading toward Meng Hao. However, at some point it seemed to realize who he was, then changed directions and headed toward him.

Meng Hao stopped in mid-air, his expression normal as he coldly watched on.

The beam of light moved with incredible speed, and emanated a potent aura. It screamed through the air toward him, and as it neared, a young man became visible inside. It was none other than the Cultivator from the Imperial Bloodline Clan of the Northern Reaches.

His eyes flashed like lightning, and his face was filled with an expression of ferocity and coldness. He shot toward Meng Hao and was upon him in the blink of an eye. He flashed an incantation gesture, causing six illusory black dragons to suddenly shoot forth. Their shocking roars filled the air as they intertwined with each other. A terrifying pressure emanated out, slamming down toward Meng Hao.

Each of these six black dragons exceeded the great circle of the Nascent Soul stage. When they merged together, the pressure they emanated was similar to a Cultivation base half a step into Spirit Severing. This young Imperial Bloodline Clan Cultivator clearly had an incredible Cultivation base.

In the blink of an eye, the six dragons neared, filling up the entire world in front of Meng Hao. Each of the dragons was hundreds of meters long. Rumbling filled the air as their combined power shot toward him.

He gave a cold snort, and did nothing to dodge them or retreat. Instead, he strode forward and lifted his right hand up. His fleshly body seemed ordinary, but suddenly it exploded with a power equivalent to the Fifth Anima. Such strength was also the same as being a half step into Spirit Severing.

A fist descended, and a thunderous boom filled the air. The roaring of the six black dragons suddenly ceased as the shocking explosion rolled over them. Meng Hao's fist seemed to have kicked up a tempest capable of ripping them into shreds.

In addition, within Meng Hao's fist could be seen an illusory mountain. This was none other than manifested power of the first level of the Mountain Consuming Incantation that Meng Hao had gained enlightenment of. The fist shot out, a tempest raged, and a mountain descended.

BOOOOMMMMM!

The six black dragons were ripped into pieces. The face of the Imperial Bloodline Clan Cultivator from the Northern Reaches instantly fell. His eyes glowed with astonishment. He obviously had never even considered that Meng Hao could possibly be so powerful.

His original plan had been to kill Meng Hao in one decisive attack. If he failed, at least he would be able to feel Meng Hao out. Currently, though, when he saw Meng Hao's Cultivation base, his heart sank.

He immediately fell back in retreat.

"Elder Brother Meng, this was just a misunderstanding...." he said, his eyes flickering.

"First Anima," said Meng Hao coolly. His body roared as it exploded with the fearsome power of the First Anima. His fleshly body was now similar to the Sixth Anima. In the blink of an eye, Meng Hao's battle prowess exploded by double.

He took a step forward, then transformed into a green mist, within which was a black moon. He appeared directly in front of the young man, who he then punched without hesitation.

A boom could be heard. The young man from the Northern Reaches tried to block with both hands, and a black glow appeared around him. However, the black glow immediately collapsed, and he was sent tumbling backward, blood spraying from his mouth and a look of astonishment filling his face.

"You doubled your power in an instant!?!?" This young man from the Imperial Bloodline Clan of the Northern Reaches was named Liu Zichuan. Normally, he was wildly haughty, but at the moment, he was shocked to the core. Not a scrap of arrogance could be found in him.

Coughing up more blood, he forced himself to a halt. His eyes filled with ferocity as he wiped the blood from his mouth and glared at Meng Hao.

“Whatever,” he said. “You’re most likely already at your limit. To explode with double battle power is pretty incredible. You qualify to be my opponent. Well then, allow me to introduce you to something that’s called the Imperial Body....” Before Liu Zichuan could finish his lofty speech, Meng Hao coolly interrupted him.

“Second Anima!”

BOOM!

Meng Hao’s body instantly became even more shocking. His fleshly body was now equivalent to the fearsomeness of the Seventh Anima. His explosive battle prowess caused the sky to dim, and a fierce wind to spring up.

Liu Zichuan’s eyebrows shot up, and a roaring filled his heart. His mouth went dry, his mind spun, and his eyes went wide. He looked at Meng Hao with complete disbelief, his scalp completely numb.

“Dammit, dammit, this guy’s Cultivation base is freakish! This is definitely some Daoist magic from the Second Plane. It might even be one of the top 10!” Shocked, Liu Zichuan retreated without hesitation.

He fell back quickly, but Meng Hao was even quicker. He took a step forward and then waved a finger. Instantly the image of a mountain appeared, to shoot rumbling toward Liu Zichuan.

Liu Zichuan coughed up some blood, and his body nearly exploded. A profound sense of deadly crisis filled him. He was scared witless. He pushed his hand viciously down onto his chest, causing a pearl to be vomited up. The pearl transformed into a wide net that quickly enveloped Liu Zichuan. There almost seemed to be some power of the underworld fueling the net as it wrapped around him and shot off into the distance.

Because of that, Meng Hao’s illusory mountain only grazed past, and didn’t completely smash into him. Even still, Liu Zichuan coughed up some more blood. His heart was in chaos, and filled with terror as he shot away.

Meng Hao didn’t pursue him. Instead he stood where he was and coolly said, “You now owe me eighty percent of your gains. If you disagree, I’ll kill you....”

Chapter 600: True Spirit——Night!

As Liu Zichuan fled off into the distance, he heard what Meng Hao said. If Meng Hao hadn't made a move against him just now, he surely would have laughed coldly with disdain. Right now, though, he could unquestionably sense Meng Hao's killing intent deep in his bones.

It didn't matter what type of identity he had, if Meng Hao said he was going to kill someone, he would kill them!

The words Meng Hao had spoken just now were filled with the intent to slaughter, and left Liu Zichuan's mind trembling. All of a sudden, he regretted trying to feel out Meng Hao.

"Dammit," he thought, suddenly depressed. "It's not like I'm the only person he made an agreement with. Everyone did! Why did I have to pick him to test out?" He did not dare to do anything to cause Meng Hao to question him. Here in the Demon Immortal Sect, if he dared to disrespect Meng Hao, he would be dead for sure.

"What if I could form an alliance with him...?" thought Liu Zichuan. His eyes glittered for a moment, but then grew dark. He suddenly realized, based on the short battle just now... there was no way for him to know Meng Hao's true strength.

He knew that Meng Hao was unfathomable, and had not unleashed his full potential. As for how much of it he had revealed, it was impossible to guess.

"The smartest thing to do is never provoke someone like him."

As Liu Zichuan fled into the distance, Meng Hao retracted his gaze and left the Third Anima, returning to the First. He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them; they shone with the brilliant glow of a powerful expert.

"It's difficult to judge how weak or powerful I am exactly. However, if I could achieve the fleshly body strength of the Seventh Anima while only in the First Anima, then when I entered the Seventh Anima, I would definitely have a Spirit Severing fleshly body!

"That would be a complete and thorough Spirit Severing fleshly body, compatible with my Cultivation base.... I could definitely slaughter someone of the First Severing!" His eyes flickered and he took a deep breath. With that, he continued to fly on toward the graveyard.

It didn't take much time before he arrived at a large stretch of ruins. This was the graveyard. There were corpses laying about everywhere, and the tombs of many of the past experts had been transformed into nothing but pits.

Funerary objects had long since been disturbed and taken away. There were few restrictive spells here now.

As Meng Hao looked around, his heart throbbed with pain. He continued on forward until he caught sight of a familiar location up ahead. The glow of a restrictive spell could be seen glittering, and Meng Hao's heart calmed down a bit.

It was the tomb of Ke Yunhai!

The tomb of a paragon. Inside was no corpse, only a small bronze lamp, long since extinguished.

Outside of the tomb were layer after layer of restrictive spells. They filled the entire area with flickering light, and would prevent any outsider from entering.

Meng Hao landed just outside the restrictive spells and looked at Ke Yunhai's tomb silently. An indeterminable amount of time passed. Tears rolled down his face.

After a long time, he kneeled down and gently knocked his head against the ground three times as he kowtowed to Ke Yunhai's tomb.

Then he looked up and murmured, "Thank you, sir. You're not really my father, but in that ancient illusion, you allowed me to feel the love of a father. You allowed me to be your son during that life." Finally, he stood up and turned around. He no longer felt melancholy, but rather, his face glowed with the unswerving determination of a Cultivator.

As of this moment, Meng Hao was now fully awakened from the dream!

"Come on out," he said lightly. "You've been waiting for a while now. If you don't reveal yourself, then I'll just leave."

As his voice echoed about, a completely ordinary area not too far off suddenly began to ripple and distort. A woman appeared. She was... incredibly beautiful, with bright eyes, and a way of moving that exuded feminine charm. It was none other than Zhixiang.

“I guessed that you would come here to offer your respects to Ke Yunhai,” she said with a smile. “Waiting here saved me a bit of effort in tracking you down.”

Meng Hao didn't respond, but looked toward the area behind the Seventh Peak. Past the graveyard was the area that previously had been enveloped by boundless mists. Now, though, there was no mist to be seen whatsoever.

The two enormous statues were also gone. The only thing visible was an enormous bright shield that shot up from within the ground and emanated an imperceptible glow.

This was a restrictive spell that covered a massive area. It might seem ordinary, but it was powerful enough to eradicate Immortals!

The area it protected was so important that the restrictive spell was fearsomely powerful even down to this day. In fact... throughout all the years in which the Primordial Demon Immortal Plane had been opened, no one had ever been able to enter the area beyond.

That was a truly forbidden area! No one was allowed to enter inside. Anyone who tried to do so ended up dead.

“Let's go,” said Meng Hao coolly. As he began to move forward, Zhixiang smiled and then sped off into the air with him.

As they shot forward, Zhixiang felt a bit proud of herself. Back in the Second Plane, when they traveled this same path, she had been filled with incredible excitement. Now that they were in the Third Plane, she was sure that she wasn't the only one to be feeling excited.

Thinking about this caused Zhixiang to smile. She increased her speed, passing up Meng Hao. He watched her as she passed, but didn't say anything.

The two of them proceeded on in that way, moving at top speed until they reached the glowing restrictive spell shield. This was actually the same location where the statues and the door of swords had been located previously.

Zhixiang's face was solemn. She took a deep breath as she pulled out her third class qualification command medallion from within her robe. She cautiously extended the command medallion forward until it touched the glowing shield. Suddenly, the shield in front of her began to flicker. Ripples spread out which then turned into waves that spread out across the entire restrictive spell.

A droning sound could be heard, echoing out in all directions. At the same time, a faint, low-pitched voice could be heard, filled with weakness and exhaustion.

“Third class qualifications. Where do you intend to go?” The rumbling voice sounded incredibly weak, and yet still awe-inspiring.

“The Demon Immortal Cistern!” replied Zhixiang immediately, taking in a deep breath.

“According to the regulations, you may travel thirty percent of the paths in this place, and may stay for no more than 38 hours.”

The wording was exactly the same as before. Zhixiang was nearly exploding with excitement as a wide fissure appeared in the shield in front of her. She took a deep breath and then looked over at Meng Hao with a look of complacency.

In accordance with his agreement with her, Meng Hao followed her into the fissure, his expression the same as ever. His expression was normal, but inwardly, he was on guard, unsure of whether the method being used by Zhixiang would actually work.

As soon as she reached the fissure, Zhixiang passed through effortlessly. However, as for Meng Hao, a beam of light from the restrictive spell shot toward him. It instantly enveloped him, almost like a bubble, locking his feet in place.

He was stuck inside the light, incapable of moving, but able to speak. His eyes cold, he said, “Zhixiang, what is the meaning of this!?”

Zhixiang turned back suddenly, her expression one of shock and worry.

“Impossible,” she said. “You left a mark inside, plus I have third-class qualifications. I should be able to take an extra person inside, especially one who left a mark. Could it be... that your mark was somehow erased?”

Meng Hao’s eyes glittered. It was at this exact moment that the weak voice suddenly could be heard again.

“Paragon’s qualifications. You may go anywhere you wish, and stay inside indefinitely.”

As soon as the voice could be heard, the bubble popped. His body returned to normal, and he walked forward through the restrictive spell as easily as if he were walking down a level path.

Zhixiang stared, her eyes wide with disbelief. She took a few steps back and looked blankly at Meng Hao.

“This is impossible! We’re in reality now, not the ancient illusion. In the ancient illusion, you had the identity of Ke Jiushi, but here in the Third Plane, you’re you! How could you be a Paragon?!”

Meng Hao’s expression was the same as ever, but inside, he was filled with great waves of shock and confusion. It was exactly as Zhixiang said, and yet, what had happened just now really had happened!

He was silent for a moment before slowly saying, “We were able to leave marks here. Apparently, leaving vestiges of an identity isn’t that hard either. It’s just something special that you can do in the Second Plane, right?”

“But this is different,” said Zhixiang, her eyes wide. “The ancient illusion is Night.... It’s... it’s illusory. The marks are like memories. Hmm....” Suddenly she gasped and looked at Meng Hao with a complicated expression. “I understand. It’s Night! Night remembers you!”

“Night?” asked Meng Hao, his eyes glittering. He had long since come to the conclusion that Zhixiang knew a lot more about the Demon Immortal Sect than what she had told him.

For example, Night.

Meng Hao thought back to when he had first entered the Second Plane. He had heard someone on one of the mountain peaks giving a sermon about the Dao. He had mentioned a true spirit whose name was Night!

“It’s not that I was trying to hide something from you,” she said. “According to Sect rules, we aren’t allowed to divulge such information to outsiders. However, since Night remembers you, then it doesn’t really matter if I tell you. In Heaven and Earth, there are true spirits. As to how many exactly there are, I’m not sure.

“I only know that they are very, very uncommon. In fact, there are only ten or less!

“True spirits are completely unique in all Heaven and Earth!

“There is one whose name is Night. According to the legends, when it closes its eyes, the world is a dream. When it opens its eyes, the dream is shattered, and everything returns to the void.

“There is some destiny that exists between it and the Demon Immortal Sect. Therefore, it took up residence within the Sect, and became its true Demon guardian.

Meng Hao was shaken inwardly. After a moment’s hesitation, he asked, “Where is it...?”

“It is beneath our feet, within the lands of the First Heaven. As for what it looks like, I don’t know. All I know is that according to the stories that have been passed down from ancient times, true spirits are inauspicious. Some people have even said that the reason the Demon Immortal Sect fell was because of it. When the Sect was destroyed, no one could kill it, not even Lord Ji. Although, even if he had the power to do it, killing a true spirit is an extreme taboo.

“Therefore, Night has been in the Demon Immortal Sect all this time. Occasionally, it will reminisce, and that is the origin of the ancient illusion of the Second Plane...”

Great waves of shock roared through Meng Hao. He began to breathe heavily as he looked at Zhixiang.

“You’re telling me that the ancient illusion we experienced was simply Night’s dream?”