

The Heavens 71

Chapter 71: Dong Hu

In the remote wilderness not too far from Mount Daqing, Meng Hao sat in the Immortal's Cave, his body shaking. Sweat poured off of him, soaking him as he emanated an intense heat. This in turn produced a thick mist that circulated around the cave, filling it with the aroma of sweat.

Meng Hao's entire body was bright red, and it felt as if an immense fire were raging inside of him that would soon wither up his flesh and blood and turn him into a pile of ash. At the moment, his body was completely stiff, incapable of the slightest movement.

Actually, this is one of the detriments of consuming a Foundation Establishment Pill. After swallowing it, the body becomes immovable. Until the power of the pill is disseminated, it wouldn't matter if there was a flood or a storm, or if a person stood in front of you with a sword, ready to stab you through, you wouldn't be able to move a muscle. This is why Cultivators are incredibly careful when selecting the area where they will consume a Foundation Establishment Pill.

After all, if one encountered an enemy while suffering from the side-effect of the astounding pill, death would be the result.

Meng Hao was the first person to ever consume a Foundation Establishment Pill while in the eighth level of Qi Condensation. Furthermore, this pill had been concocted by a Grandmaster.

But, he had no other choice. It was just too difficult to break through the bottleneck of the eighth level of Qi condensation without the aid of either some stroke of good fortune, or special medicinal pills.

The Plateau Charging Pills had not been effective, so now the only thing he had left were the Foundation Establishment pills. Of course, he didn't dare use too many at once. They were incredibly powerful, and his body was not. Consuming them was actually gambling with his own life.

By now, Meng Hao felt quite certain he knew why this eighth level bottleneck was so difficult to break through. It definitely had something to do with his years of consuming so many Demonic Cores. Despite his rebirth in the North Sea, the Demonic power within his bones could not be dispelled easily.

Because of this reason, the blockage caused by the bottleneck was thicker than that experienced by the average person. Of course, there were also advantages to this situation. Once he broke through the bottleneck, he would explode into the middle of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. Furthermore, his body, although it seemed weak, was now much tougher than it had been during his scholar days. The change was slow, but sure.

This change had not been brought about by his Cultivation, but rather because of the Demonic power within his body, as well as the Demonic Core in his Core sea.

Days and days passed. Soon two months had gone by, during which time Meng Hao had continued to consume his scant supply of Foundation Establishment Pills. Just now, he had fully absorbed the power of a pill. Suddenly, he opened his eyes. He could move again! He felt a roaring within himself, along with a severe pain, as if various parts of his body were being ripped apart. He spit out a mouthful of black blood.

As he spit out the blood, his eyes grew dim, as if he were about to lose consciousness. Instead he bit his tongue, forcing himself to stay awake. He rotated his Cultivation base as it shot toward the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

A look of determination filled his eyes. Gathering together the explosive spiritual power within him, he pushed forward.

In an instant, the spiritual energy charged ahead, filling his head with a roaring like thunder. He felt as if his body were about to explode. Then suddenly, it felt as if the spiritual energy had opened up a new realm inside him. Instantly, he felt a wonderful sensation, difficult to describe. It was a tingling feeling, as if someone were caressing him with countless feathers.

He immersed himself in the feeling, and a long time passed before he opened his eyes. They glowed dazzlingly. It was as if the darkness of the cave were being split by brilliant lightning bolts.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, and the spiritual energy of the cave seemed to be sucked into him strand by strand. Then it left him, and massive amounts of filth extruded from his pores. His body grew lighter, his eyes brighter.

The boundless Core sea inside him was twice its previous size, as if you couldn't see from one side to the other. The golden water billowed and roared. Deep within, the Demonic Core rested, unmoving, sending out massive amounts of spiritual energy, making the golden light even more

dazzling, filling Meng Hao's body. He almost felt like lifting his head up and letting out a long, loud cry.

“The ninth level of Qi Condensation! I, Meng Hao, have finally reached the ninth level! My next step will be Foundation Establishment!” His eyes filled with exuberance, he took several deep breaths.

“With the Sublime Spirit Scripture, I can establish a Flawless Foundation, far superior to a Cracked or Fractured Foundation.” He stood up, filled with confidence and hope regarding the future.

He looked forward to traveling to the Southern Domain and seeing the lands there. He looked forward even more so to the day when he could reach Foundation Establishment. He wondered what it would be like to have a Flawless Foundation. What would other Cultivators think when they ran into him then?

Of course, having not reached Foundation Establishment, he didn't understand how rare a Flawless Foundation was. Despite his ignorance, he still looked forward with eager anticipation.

He flicked his sleeve, and a fist-sized Water Globe appeared. It stretched out, forming a sheet of water the size of his body. He walked forward, through the water. When he came out on the other side, the filth that covered him was gone, and instead, a fragrant aroma drifted off of him.

The door of the Immortal's Cave shattered. It was midday outside, and the season had long since changed. Meng Hao walked out to feel a hot, dry wind on his face. His entire body felt relaxed and fresh.

“When I reach Foundation Establishment, I will finally be able to achieve true flight.” He looked up at the blue sky and his smile grew wider and wider. He walked forward a bit, then hopped onto his treasured fan and sped along.

He was flying along some distance away from Mount Daqing when he suddenly caught sight of someone racing in his direction. This person was moving as fast as possible, and was being chased by a large, vicious looking man.

The person being chased was pale-faced, but had hard eyes. He wasn't very tall, and rather skinny, appearing to be about thirteen or fourteen years old. Despite this, his Cultivation base was at the fifth level of Qi Condensation.

He was being chased by a cultivator of the sixth level of Qi Condensation. The man wore a tattered aqua-blue robe and it seemed as if he had been wounded. Murder roiled within his furious eyes.

“It doesn’t matter where you try to run, Dong Hu. If you give me the pearl, considering my status in the Upright Evening Sect, I can leave you with your life. Otherwise, you’re dead!” The big man raised his right hand, and a frigid glow appeared which solidified into a Full Moon Scimitar. He tossed it spinning toward the youth.

The youth was none other than one of Meng Hao’s group who Elder Sister Xu had taken to the Reliance Sect, Little Tiger. [1. Check back to chapter 19 for an interested tidbit about Little Tiger. The character "Hu" in the name "Dong Hu" means "tiger"]

After the dissolution of the Sect, he had been swept away and then disappeared. Meng Hao floated above, looking down at Little Tiger.

Little Tiger’s face was pale, but killing intent flickered within his hard eyes. He waved his sleeves, whereupon several beams of cold light shot out, glittering arrows. Based on their gleam they seemed to be coated with poison. The arrows shot toward the big man.

He laughed, waving his sleeve, which caused a wind to spring up and brush the arrows away. His hand flickered in incantation patterns, causing his scimitar to shoot toward Little Tiger. It was upon him in the blink of an eye. Little Tiger’s bloodshot eyes spun. Suddenly, an aqua-blue pearl appeared in his hand. It was partly transparent, and was filled with layers of curling clouds. A stream of clouds erupted from within the pearl, coalescing into a vague figure, which shot toward the scimitar.

When they collided, a bang rang out, and the scimitar collapsed into pieces, as did the vague figure.

The big man coughed up some blood, and the greed in his eyes grew stronger. He continued his pursuit.

The blood drained from Little Tiger’s face. It seemed the attack just now had been quite difficult to pull off. He staggered forward, running a few paces before tumbling to the ground.

“You can’t escape!” laughed the big man viciously, quickly approaching Little Hu, whose eyes filled with desperation. Off in the distance, Meng Hao sighed, looking back at the scene. Finally, he

lifted a finger on his right hand, causing a furious wind to spring up in the forest. The crushing pressure of the ninth level of Qi Condensation instantly enveloped the big man. Trembling, he looked up in shock to see Meng Hao floating down toward him.

Simultaneously, Little Tiger, who was still on the ground, pulled a poisoned dagger out of his sleeve. He leaped up with surprising speed, and the dagger flashed. At the exact moment in which the big man was surprised by Meng Hao, the dagger slashed through his neck.

He let out a miserable cry as blood showered everywhere, covering Little Tiger. Little Tiger was still weak and exhausted, but falling down just now had actually been a trick. When the man approached with his guard down, he had planned to make his move.

The big man collapsed to the ground, twitching. He tried to cover the gash in his neck, but blood flowed out in vast quantities. Within moments, he was dead. His eyes stared blankly off into the distance.

Little Tiger took a few steps away, looking back at Meng Hao, seeming ready to flee at any moment. Then he felt the power of Meng Hao's Cultivation base, and his body began to tremble.

Meng Hao didn't say anything. He walked over and stood over the corpse, examining it. Then he looked at the obviously nervous Little Tiger, staring at him silently.

Little Tiger didn't say anything either. He just looked at Meng Hao, a complicated expression in his eyes.

A long moment passed, after which Meng Hao opened his mouth. "It was because of this pearl that you killed Wang Youcai," he said calmly. An imperceptible look in his eye revealed that he was bluffing, but Little Tiger didn't see it.

Instead, Little Tiger stood there silently, refusing to speak. He was short, with dark skin and a skinny frame. His clothes were dilapidated, and he was obviously in a difficult position. He almost looked like a beggar. But the coldness he had just exhibited when killing the man just now seemed to make everything obvious.

Meng Hao looked at him for a while, before shaking his head. He let out a sigh, and turned to leave.

Just as he did this, however, a look of hesitation appeared in Little Tiger's eyes. He suddenly spoke, his voice hoarse and filled with nervousness.

“Elder... Elder Brother Meng, are you going to Mount Daqing to save everyone?”

Meng Hao halted in his tracks and looked back at Little Tiger. “What are you talking about?” he said, his voice low.

Chapter 72: A True Man

Little Tiger looked closely at Meng Hao. He had been naive as a child, but after joining the Reliance Sect, had experienced many unimaginable misfortunes. In his heart, he had become as hard as iron. No one knew how many Cultivators he had secretly slain.

He stared at Meng Hao and gradually came to the realization that he really did not know about what had happened recently.

“Elder Brother Meng, in recent days, the entire Cultivation world of the State of Zhao has been searching for you. The three great Sects issued a joint order for your arrest. Multitudes of Cultivators have spread out in all directions to hunt you down.” He hesitated a moment before continuing.

Meng Hao's expression did not change even in the least bit. He floated in the air, looking down wordlessly at Little Tiger.

“The three great Sects ordered that you were not to be killed,” he said slowly. “You could be injured or crippled, but not slain.” The entire time, he continued to look at Meng Hao, unable to tell what he was thinking.

“If what you're saying is false,” said Meng Hao coolly, his expression the same as ever, “then don't blame me for forgetting our past ties.”

Hearing this, Little Tiger inadvertently took two steps backward, his face flickering.

“Elder Brother Meng must surely remember Master Uncle Shangguan from the Inner Sect. Two months ago, he surrounded the three counties near Mount Daqing with a horrific, enormous spell.” His voice rang out as he spoke. He clenched his fists. “He plans to use the blood of the mortals there

to concoct Blood Pills to reach Foundation Establishment. It's been going on for two months already. With my Cultivation base, I'm no match for him, but I came to try to save my father and mother!"

Meng Hao stared at him in shock, his head spinning. Fury erupted within him, and a violent aura of killing intent began to emanate from him. He knew that Shangguan Xiu's true goal was not to concoct Blood Pills, but rather to lure him out.

His face grew incredibly grim.

"Shangguan Xiu has involved the mortals of three counties, and the Cultivation world of the State of Zhao does nothing to stop him?" Meng Hao's voice was as cold as ice as he spoke. "Does anyone actually believe his goal is establishing a Foundation?"

"Everyone says that Shangguan Xiu longs for Foundation Establishment," said Little Tiger, "and that he intentionally picked the three counties around Mount Daqing because of the auspicious sign that appeared here years ago. With Blood Spirit Pills, he can easily break through to Foundation Establishment. In the past, the three great Sects would never allow him to do something like that, but right now they seek out Patriarch Reliance's meditation zone. That's why they sent everyone looking for you, and have ignored what is happening here. They don't want to have to deal with extra trouble. Furthermore, Shangguan Xiu is no ordinary person. I looked into it and found out he's from Milky Way City. Apparently, the three great Sects did attempt to interfere at first, but then backed off for some reason."

Meng Hao listened quietly, then began to smile, a cold, dark smile. The killing intent which existed in his heart far outmatched the killing intent he had felt in the past toward Wang Tengfei or even Ding Xin. The intensity of this desire to kill sent this Core sea churning. It was fiercer than anything he had felt in his twenty-one years of life.

"Shangguan Xiu...." Meng Hao spun and looked off toward Mount Daqing. He flicked his wide sleeve and Little Tiger flew up onto the treasured fan, a shocked look on his face.

"Elder Brother Meng, what's going on?" blurted Little Tiger, his breath quickening.

"We're going to Mount Daqing. If what you've said is true, very well. But if you've lied to me, then you will never again have to worry about people chasing after you to get your treasure." The treasured fan flickered, and they shot off.

Little Tiger was quiet, having nothing more to say. He stood on the treasured fan next to Meng Hao, a conflicted look in his eye. Soon the look disappeared, replaced by determination.

It didn't take long before Mount Daqing loomed up in front of them. Meng Hao did not charge in directly. The treasured fan flashed, and they landed on the ground. Up ahead, everything was enveloped by a glowing red aura. It seemed that outside of the aura, every five hundred kilometers, a black robed Cultivator sat cross-legged, meditating.

There were a dozen or so of them, and they appeared to be the supporting the base of the spell which surrounded the three counties.

Far away on top of the mountain, someone sat cross-legged in meditation.

In the counties below the mountain, everything was quiet. Wispy strands of Blood Qi rose up from them.

Meng Hao's killing intent grew stronger. Taking a deep breath, he released the bonds he had placed on Little Tiger.

"When I call your name, you must come," said Meng Hao slowly. Then he walked forward, his body whistling in the wind and emanating an ice-cold air.

"Wang Youcai isn't dead," blurted Little Tiger. Meng Hao ignored him as he raced forward.

Little Tiger watched him disappear, then sighed and sat down silently to meditate. He had looked into Meng Hao in addition to Shangguan Xiu. He knew that Meng Hao had no immediate family in Yunjie County and that Shangguan Xiu was most likely using this blood magic specifically to draw him out.

"Elder Brother Meng, I just want to save my father and mother. If you live through this, then I will owe you a great debt." He looked up, complex emotions flickering in his eyes.

Meng Hao shot forward, straight toward the blood-red aura. Little Tiger, though young, was clever and had been correct in his suppositions. As for Meng Hao, he had always been intelligent. Despite failing as a scholar, he had undergone a baptism of sorts in the Reliance Sect. After everything he had experienced there and after, how could he not see through to his opponent's true purpose?

Shangguan Xiu had set a trap for him. But how could he not go? Even though he had no immediate family in Yunjie County, it was his home. His childhood memories were there, and they were beautiful.

Shangguan Xiu was utterly devoid of conscience, and his actions offended Meng Hao to the bone. His desire to kill billowed to untold heights.

Even though he was risking death, even though he was playing into Shangguan Xiu's hand, Meng Hao knew that in life, there are some things a man must do.... even if it was dangerous, he would go anyway.

Fear and doubt were not for true men.

His murderous intent had never been so strong, his desire to kill never so intense. It could not be dispelled by the death of one person, but rather every person involved in maintaining the blood spell.

“In my years of Cultivation, there are people who I haven't killed. It's not because I couldn't, but because I didn't want to.” His speed increased, his eyes flashing with death, but his heart calm. By now he had reached the area of the blood spell. He shot toward a Cultivator of the sixth level of Qi Condensation who sat there meditating.

He wore black robes and looked to be about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. As Meng Hao rushed toward him, he opened his eyes. Shocked, he lifted his hand, but in that instant, Meng Hao, his face expression cold and filled with death, shot past him.

There was a sword in Meng Hao's hand. Behind him, a head flew up into the air, its face filled with confusion. The body fell over onto the ground.

The reek of blood filled the air. The corpse twitched a few times and then was still.

There was no shout of pain, no struggle. To Meng Hao, it was as simple as slaughtering a chicken. As he had said, it was not that he couldn't kill, he just didn't like to.

“When you try to cut off a chicken’s head,” said Meng Hao to himself, “it will usually put up a bit of a struggle. People usually struggle even harder. But without a head, you don’t even match up to a chicken.” Not even glancing back at the corpse behind him, he moved on, eyes filled with killing intent.

He moved quickly, and before long, another cross-legged figure appeared in front of him. This person had clearly not sensed the death of his compatriot; he sat there meditating, maintaining the spell.

He didn’t even have a chance to open his eyes before his head flew off his body.

“Shangguan Xiu, you force me into killing. Very well... today I will kill everything in front of me.” He flicked the wooden sword in his hand, sending droplets of blood flying about everywhere, then vanished.

Because of the death of the two Cultivators, ripples had appeared in the red-colored spell. This in turn shocked the rest of people who were maintaining it; one after another, they opened their eyes and stood up, glancing around cautiously.

Meanwhile, atop the mountain, Shangguan Xiu’s eyes flickered open. They glittered as he looked down at what was going on below.

The Blood Qi seemed to grow thicker, but he couldn’t see clearly what was happening. He frowned and harrumphed. He lifted his right hand, and a Globe of blood appeared, about the size of a human head. Blood Qi swirled around inside. With the flick of a sleeve, he sent the Blood Globe shooting down Mount Daqing, where it slammed through the blood-colored spell with a reverberating boom.

The blood-colored spell was growing weak. Suddenly, a shrill scream could be heard, echoing out from within the spell. Difficult to describe, it seemed to be filled with pain.

Moments later, another scream rang out. This scream clearly came from someone else, but it was equally blood-curdling. Shangguan Xiu frowned. Looking down at the blood-colored spell, it appeared to have shrunk by almost half and was somewhat murky.

A third person screamed, then a fourth, almost at the same time. More screams echoed out, over and over, until finally the blood-colored spell was completely translucent. Shangguan Xiu looked down to see... a dozen headless corpses.

His eyes narrowed, and his body spun. There, on a small mountain path, wearing a blue scholar's robe, was Meng Hao. He was spattered with blood and gore, and despite looking somewhat frail and weak, walked slowly up the mountain, his face expressionless.

In his hands, he carried a dozen severed heads. Shangguan Xiu looked at him as he approached. Meng Hao tossed the heads forward, and they plopped to the ground in front of Shangguan Xiu, who then flicked his sleeve, sending them scattering about.

“Your turn,” said Meng Hao, his voice hoarse. He usually didn't want to kill, but today. He did.

Chapter 73: Fierce Fighting

“Ninth level of Qi Condensation!” Eyeing Meng Hao, Shangguan Xiu took a deep breath. He had been maintaining the spell here for two months. The Cultivators from Milky Way City didn't know the true reason he was here, and he didn't want their top level experts around anyway. He was here for Meng Hao.

Based on everything he had seen and heard recently, he had been sixty-percent certain that Meng Hao possessed some sort of unholy treasured item that could endlessly duplicate treasures.

Otherwise, how could he have so many medicinal pills and flying swords? Also, how could Meng Hao have not noticed that ten of his flying swords went missing on the day of his battle with Wang Tengfei?

They appeared to have been broken, but in fact, had been secretly taken away by Shangguan Xiu and carefully studied. He had discovered that all ten of the swords were composed of exactly the same materials.

Even though all flying swords look the same in general, there will always be tiny differences left behind in the manufacturing process which can be spotted later. Except, among Meng Hao's swords, the details were exactly the same. This, of course, aroused Shangguan Xiu's suspicions.

And yet, he wasn't completely convinced because of that evidence. But now, seeing that Meng Hao's Cultivation base had already reached the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he was even more sure. Eighty percent or more.

“You may have reached the ninth level of Qi Condensation, but clearly you just broke through,” said Shangguan Xiu, his eyes shining coldly. “Should you try to run away again today, I will detonate that Blood Globe I just sent down the mountain. If that happens, then the people of the three counties will be reduced to ash and smoke in the blink of an eye.” He really was worried that Meng Hao would flee, so before attacking, had taken preparations to prevent him from doing so.

“I won’t be running away today.” As Meng Hao looked at Shangguan Xiu, nearly five years of memories flooded into his mind. Their issues from before the Sect dissolved, the chase after the Sect disbanded, all of these things flashed before Meng Hao’s eyes. His killing intent flashed. He lifted his hand, and a massive Flame Python appeared, over thirty meters in length. Not only was its size impressive, but from its head protruded a large horn. Flames flickered off of its body as it shot toward Shangguan Xiu, radiating intense heat.

The severed heads surrounding Shangguan Xiu crackled and burned from the heat, and some of them even began to roll in his direction. He laughed, slapping his bag of holding and producing a five-colored banner. The massive banner unfurled and a five-colored mist roiled out from within it. The mist then transformed into five mist spirits, each of them dozens of meters tall. With hideous grins, they charged toward the Flame Python.

A massive explosion occurred, smashing nearby boulders into dust and reducing the surrounding trees and rattan vines of Mount Daqing into powder. Dust and ash swirled in the air, making the scene somewhat blurry.

Amidst the haze, Meng Hao dashed forward at incredible speed. The remaining severed heads which had not been incinerated continued to tumble toward Shangguan Xiu. His eyes flashed, and his fingers flickered in an incantation sign. Then he shoved his hands out in front of him.

“Five-colored Death!” he shouted, and a shrill shrieking sound suddenly rose up around him. Meng Hao smacked his bag of holding. The scroll painting appeared in his hand. He unrolled it, and six beasts leaped out, howling.

A massive thunderous rumble surrounded them. Meng Hao charged toward Shangguan Xiu, whose cold eyes flickered radiantly. Shangguan Xiu moved forward as well. More severed heads were crushed into pulp.

“Do you know what the Reliance Sect was called before Patriarch Reliance?” said Shangguan Xiu coolly. “It was called the Demon Sealing Sect!” He suddenly looked toward the peak of Mount Daqing and stamped his foot down. Mount Daqing began to rumble, and then suddenly, an impossible-to-describe aura erupted out from within the mountain. It was only a strand, yet that

strand seemed to quiver with the very power of heaven and earth. It was not sentient, but rather, under the control of Shangguan Xiu. It roiled up from the ground beneath Meng Hao's feet.

Shangguan Xiu suddenly seemed to grow older, as if he had aged ten years. He looked almost like a corpse that had crawled its way out of the grave.

Clearly the magical technique he had just used was extremely difficult to employ, and required a sacrifice of longevity. Originally, he would never have used it, but seeing the level of Meng Hao's Cultivation base, he decided that he had no other choice. He wanted to bring about a swift end to the battle. After all, all the Cultivators in the State of Zhao were hunting Meng Hao right now.

This battle would surely attract their attention. If he could end the fight quickly, then he would have plenty of time to get his hands on the treasure he sought.

"The Demon Sealing Sect sought out the great Demons of the world, sealed them, released their spirit, and took their power to trample on the Heavens! You just entered the ninth level of Qi Condensation, what could you possibly use to fight me with? If I wanted, I could have reached Foundation Establishment fifty years ago!" As Shangguan Xiu spoke, Meng Hao waved the scroll painting, using it to resist the aura strand that had burst out around his feet.

But as soon as the scroll painting touched the aura, an explosion rang out, and cracks appeared on its surface as it was thrown violently away. The aura strand shot toward Meng Hao.

There was a bang, and Meng Hao coughed up a mouthful of blood. The feathered fan had appeared in front of him in the blink of an eye to shield him. Cracks split the feathers, as Meng Hao took advantage of the moment to evade. Evade he did, but he was still sent tumbling backward, coughing up three mouthfuls of blood.

Only one move had been made, and Meng Hao was already injured. It was clear that Shangguan Xiu possessed unfathomable secrets. He laughed coldly. He had expended some of his longevity to make this attack. Even though it hadn't killed Meng Hao outright, Shangguan Xiu was still determined to win. He walked forward, stepping over the smashed, bloody remains of the severed heads.

Meng Hao's mouth was filled with blood, but his eyes shone with viciousness. At the same moment that Shangguan Xiu began to walk forward, Meng Hao lifted his hand, and within the pulp of the severed head, a black aura arose. In an instant, the aura coalesced into a black scorpion. It moved like lightning, so quickly that Shangguan Xiu had no time to pull back his foot, nor to leap away. The scorpion's stinger sank into the flesh of Shangguan Xiu's foot.

As the stinger sank in, the scorpion turned into strands of blackness which poured into Shangguan Xiu.

His face twisted. This turn of events was too sudden and unpredictable. The scorpion, of course, was from the rare magical pill that he had acquired that day from Qian and Lu from the Violet Fate Sect. This magical scorpion was hyper toxic!

The black aura entered Shangguan Xiu's foot, and then merged into his Qi passageways, filling his entire body in an instant. His face turned black and he spit up a mouthful of black-colored blood, which stank like rotten fish.

"What poison is this!?" said Shangguan Xiu, his expression shocked as he retreated. A feeling of weakness spread through him like floodwaters. Knowing he had little time to think, he slapped his bag of holding and produced a medicinal pill, which he swallowed.

Meng Hao had planned things well to make a move in a moment just such as this. Even his three mouthfuls of blood had been coughed up intentionally, all to make Shangguan Xiu think that he had the upper hand. As soon as his opponent retreated and pulled out a medicinal pill, Meng Hao charged forward. He smacked his bag of holding, and the black net shot forth, threatening to envelop Shangguan Xiu.

It takes longer to describe what was happening than the actual time it took to happen. Shangguan Xiu's expression flickered as he downed the medicinal pill. His fingers began to flicker in an incantation, even as the net began to cover him. Meng Hao moved forward without pause. The black, wooden bow appeared in his hand, and he pulled back on the bowstring, then sent an arrow screaming toward Shangguan Xiu.

Shangguan Xiu moved backward at high speed. A medicinal pill, a black net, an arrow and an incantation. He didn't have time for all, he would have to pick two.

A booming sound rang out. Shangguan Xiu downed the pill, but abandoned his incantation. He managed to evade the black net, but couldn't avoid the arrow. It shot into his right shoulder, emerging from the other side in a shower of blackened blood.

Intense pain flashed through him, but Shangguan Xiu let out a low snort. Meng Hao didn't pause for even a moment. A second arrow whistled forth, followed by a third and a fourth. Meng Hao moved forward relentlessly. Every step he took, he shot an arrow; seven steps, seven arrows.

The seven arrows shot forward, screaming through the air with shocking killing intent!

Shangguan Xiu continued to retreat, struggling to control the spread of the black strands throughout his body. And yet, he also had to dodge the incoming arrows. But being at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he could only do so much. He might be at the absolute peak of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, a hair away from the Foundation Establishment stage, but he was still not at the Foundation Establishment stage.

No, he was still far from Foundation Establishment stage. Just like Meng Hao, he was still in the Qi Condensation stage. The difference in the level of power between the two was like the difference between the sky and the ground.

He couldn't do everything perfectly at the same time. A booming sound reverberated through the air as the seven arrows pierced his right arm, completely destroying it. This was the only thing he could do to defend against the arrows. He paid the price of a right arm in order to be able to focus on bringing the poison in his body under control temporarily.

Even as he did so, an eighth arrow shot toward him from Meng Hao, then a ninth. He raised his head to the sky and howled.

From the day he began to walk the path of Cultivation until today, he had never been in such a dangerous, tight situation. He had lost an arm! The price he had paid, the pain he felt, drove his desire to kill Meng Hao to a new, intense height.

His eyes were bloodshot; the poison was under control, but could not easily be expelled. In fact, as of now, he could tell that it would be impossible to expel the poison while he was in the Qi Condensation stage. Only if he reached Foundation Establishment could he do so.

“Milky Way Sea!” he shouted, his hair flying about him crazily. He bit the tip of his tongue and spit out a glob of blood. A violet pearl flew out from within the blood, within which could be seen what appeared to be a seething mass of wind. As soon as it appeared, a fierce gale arose, sending Meng Hao's latest three arrows into a spin. Then, they simply collapsed into pieces.

Chapter 74: Not Past One Hundred Years

The pearl spun back into Shangguan Xiu's mouth, whereupon he used his remaining arm to slap his bag of holding. Multiple flying swords, banners and other magical items appeared, all flying

forward at the same time. Then, one by one they exploded into pieces. Shangguan Xiu lifted his hands, and the fragments of the various magical items rose up to create something like a sea.

From a distance, the multiple fragments glinted blindingly, making it seem as if there really was a sea floating in the sky. The sea began to spin, and then shot directly toward Meng Hao, whistling through the air.

This was the Milky Way Sea, a magical technique that had earned Patriarch Milky Way his name many years ago. Eventually, he divided the technique into multiple levels. The lowest level could be used only by someone of the ninth level of Qi Condensation.

Of course, any Cultivator of the Foundation Establishment stage could flick a sleeve and create a Milky Way Sea out of fragmented items. However, during the Qi Condensation stage, this was truly something powerful.

As such, it was not an easy technique to pull off. Only someone at the peak of the ninth level could do it, and they would have to have the support of a vast amount of spiritual power. In all of Milky Way City, Shangguan Xiu was the only Cultivator at the Qi Condensation stage who could do it.

At the moment, he wanted to end the fight as quickly as possible, not only to acquire Meng Hao's treasures, but also to get back to Milky Way City to dispel the poison from his body. So, he attacked with his most powerful technique, sending the cloud of fragmented treasures speeding toward Meng Hao. As it approached, Meng Hao took a deep breath and then slapped his bag of holding.

Flying sword after flying sword emerged. Ten swords, fifty, one hundred, until a total of three hundred flying swords were spinning around him. Meng Hao lifted his hands, then pushed them out ahead of him.

As he did, the three hundred flying swords formed a massive sword rain, which then congealed into the shape of a Flying Rain-Dragon. He walked forward, and two golden strands of light appeared in his hands; the two wooden swords. His body turned into a beam of light as he flew up into the Flying Rain-Dragon sword rain.

It was as if he had become the spirit of the flying-sword Flying Rain-Dragon. It raised its head to the Heavens and roared, then shot toward the Milky Way Sea.

An explosion reverberated out which shook heaven and earth. The Milky Way Sea of fragmented treasures lashed against Meng Hao's flying swords. Popping sounds could be heard as sword after

sword collapsed into pieces. But if the Sea smashed ten swords, then Meng Hao would produce ten more to replace them.

Right now, the most flying swords he could control simultaneously was three hundred. Within his bag of holding, he currently had about seven hundred, which he had slowly duplicated over the last year. After his fierce battle with Ding Xin, and during the process of breaking through to the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he had prepared himself completely.

Seeing this, Shangguan Xiu's face changed. His left hand flickered in an incantation pattern, then produced more magical items which he added to the conglomeration.

Meng Hao's flying swords screamed as they continuously battered the Milky Way Sea. The sound of it reverberated out in all directions, and yet the power of this Milky Way Sea was formidable. At the moment, he wasn't able to move forward very easily. Suddenly, he spun his body, causing the flying swords around him to begin to rotate around him. They rotated faster and faster until they became a whirlwind, with Meng Hao at the center. He stopped moving, but the flying sword whirlwind continued to spin faster and faster.

From a distance, it looked as if a rapidly spinning tornado were slicing through the middle of the Milky Way Sea. The fragmented treasure items of the Milky Way Sea continue to smash against the flying swords, but after the space of a few breaths, the swords pushed forward, slicing clean through the sea.

Shangguan Xiu's face twisted. Meng Hao's Cultivation base was shocking, as was the number of magical items he had. The most shocking thing, though, was his battle experience. His ability to quickly change his magical battle techniques was something that left Shangguan Xiu in utter disbelief.

Amidst the reverberating roar, Meng Hao and his sword rain ploughed through the Milky Way Sea, sending pieces of it scattering about. Meng Hao suddenly leaped forward, the two golden strands that were the wooden swords emitting shrill whistles as they shot through the air with him. Shock covered Shangguan Xiu's face.

"Meng Hao!" he cried, shooting backward as fast as possible, his face panic-stricken. In complete contrast, when Meng Hao attacked, he didn't say even a word. His expression was the same as ever. He increased his speed even more, aiming the two wooden swords, one to stab directly toward his opponent's heart, the other, his forehead.

Shangguan Xiu was vexed to the extreme. He had held the upper hand at first, but had then been poisoned. Things had only gone downhill from there. He couldn't dispel the poison, which meant he couldn't use the full power of his Cultivation base. He constantly needed to use some of his power to suppress the effects of the poison. Now, he was forced to retreat, one step at a time.

His hand flashing, Shangguan Xiu smacked his chest; he coughed up a mouthful of blood, amidst which was the pearl that had appeared a moment ago. A curving arc of light appeared, shooting forward to block the two wooden swords. The shield immediately began to tremor, and then shattered, shoving Shangguan Xiu backward even faster as he retreated.

Seeing the shield shattering, Shangguan Xiu quickly said, "Meng Hao, let's stop here. The three great Sects are looking for you, and our fight today will surely have attracted their attention. They could arrive at any moment. I won't harm the inhabitants of the three counties. Let's abandon our enmity, what do you say?"

Meng Hao didn't respond. His spiritual energy soared, and the wooden swords glowed, pushing through the shield. Shangguan Xiu was now extremely alarmed. With a howl, he waved his arm, pointing down toward the bottom of the mountain.

"If you keep going, I will exterminate the people of the three counties!"

"Little Tiger!" shouted Meng Hao. This was the second time he had spoken during the battle.

As his shout echoed out, a twinkling, blood-red color could be seen at the bottom of the mountain. A head-sized Blood Globe appeared. It began to expand, as if it were about to explode. An emaciated figure appeared; it was none other than Little Tiger. His jaw was clenched, and he held a pearl outstretched in his hands.

The pearl shot out toward the Blood Globe, spinning around it rapidly to form a restrictive barrier that caused the blood to stop expanding.

"Meng Hao, I can only hold on for the time it takes an incense stick to burn!" Having said this, Little Tiger coughed up a mouthful of blood, then sat down cross-legged to meditate.

Seeing this happen caused Shangguan Xiu's face to flicker with more emotions. But he didn't have time to do anything more. With a boom, the shield collapsed and Shangguan Xiu's pearl shattered. The wooden swords advanced again, Meng Hao behind them, his killing intent rising to the heavens.

Blood sprayed from Shangguan Xiu's mouth, and he lost control of the poison in his body. It exploded out, threatening to send him into unconsciousness. He continued to retreat, a sad smile on his face.

"The Heavens will give me no aid...." he said with a bitter laugh. "Meng Hao, I will not lose this battle. And you... I vow that I will smash your Qi passageways!" His smile seemed to contain intense discontent along with complete helplessness. But it did not contain despair. However, the discontent and helplessness created an air darker than any despair.

His left hand smacked his bag of holding. Ignoring the incoming wooden swords, he held up a medicinal pill. As soon as it appeared, the nearby spiritual energy seemed to surge, and a strong medicinal aroma filled the air. With a bitter laugh, he swallowed the pill.

When he saw the pill, Meng Hao's eyes narrowed. It was amber-colored, and was none other than a Foundation Establishment Pill. Inscribed on its surface was a seal; this pill was the exact same Foundation Establishment Pill he had sold at Milky Way City.

"I, Shangguan Xiu, reached the first level of Qi Condensation when I was seven years old," he muttered to himself. "At thirty, I was at the sixth level. By thirty-nine, I was the ninth level. Today, I'm ninety-nine years old...." He didn't even look at Meng Hao, but instead stared up into the sky. In an instant, the power within his body surged. He didn't move, of course; he wouldn't be able to until the Foundation Establishment Pill had been fully absorbed.

However, even though this was a weakness, the power in his body was immense, already much more than that of the ninth level of Qi Condensation. As he soared toward Foundation Establishment, the two wooden swords slowly came to a stop about seven inches from his body.

Meng Hao's expression changed. He could sense his opponent's aura growing stronger and stronger. He was establishing his Foundation right here on Mount Daqing. If Meng Hao's expression changed, then Little Tiger's changed even more.

"I could have established my Foundation fifty years ago," said Shangguan Xiu, a dark expression on his face, his appearance wild. "But I didn't want to. I didn't want a Flawless Foundation. I've been planning for fifty years to establish a world-shaking Foundation that would surpass a Flawless Foundation! I wanted a Perfect Foundation. But today.... Sadly, today I've been wounded and poisoned. If I don't reach Foundation Establishment, then I will surely die. Fifty years of preparations, and the last step... ruined by you! Meng Hao, do you know how much I hate you!?" Shangguan Xiu lowered his head and stared at Meng Hao. He did not grind his teeth or howl. His

face was calm, and yet his eyes were filled with an intense hatred that was clearly carved into his bones and onto his heart.

Meng Hao's heart began to race, and he felt the shadow of death upon him. But he didn't retreat. His eyes flashing, he thought back to his own experience consuming the Foundation Establishment pill. He hadn't been able to move for two months.

"I was at the eighth level of Qi Condensation, so it took me two months," thought Meng Hao. "Shangguan Xiu has been at the peak of the ninth level for fifty years, he will be able to absorb the energy much faster. But, there has to be a way!" His eyes glittering, he produced a Plateau Charging Pill and popped it into his mouth. As the spiritual energy billowed out of his body, he waved his hands toward the two wooden swords.

With a rumbling sound, the two wooden swords trembled and then began to emit a powerful air. Slowly but surely they moved closer to Shangguan Xiu. They were about three inches away from him when they slowly grounded to a halt. This was Meng Hao's limit. He didn't have enough spiritual power, and just couldn't make the swords move any further.

"You don't know your own limitations," said Shangguan Xiu with a cold laugh. "I could have established my Foundation fifty years ago. With the profundity of my Cultivation base, I will be able to absorb the Foundation Establishment Pill in less than an hour. You'd best do whatever you can now to flee. But even if you run to the edges of the earth, I can tell you now, you're dead." He stared at Meng Hao, his hatred conjuring up hundreds of ways to kill Meng Hao.

Chapter 75: An Ancient Path Appears Again!

Meng Hao's face was grim. He looked at the two wooden swords, which hovered three inches away from Shangguan Xiu. Those three inches were like a massive ravine that Meng Hao could not cross with his current Cultivation base.

As for Shangguan Xiu, at the moment, he couldn't really be considered a Qi Condensation Cultivator. Although he was still some distance from Foundation Establishment, a Dao pillar was forming within his Core Lake. As of this moment, despite the fact that Meng Hao was at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he was so weak compared to Shangguan Xiu that he wouldn't be able to withstand a single blow.

The gap between the Foundation Establishment stage and the Qi Condensation stage is like that between the sky and the ground, and is something that will never change. With the exception of some unexpected event which goes against the will of the Heavens, it would be impossible for someone of the Qi Condensation stage to kill someone of the Foundation Establishment stage.

A contest between the two would be like a fight between an infant and a strong man. Even if the strong man were weakened somehow, he could still slay the infant with the movement of a hand.

Today, Meng Hao had little more than an hour before a Foundation Establishment Cultivator appeared in front of him. His chances were already small, but at that time, he would have no chance at all.

Time slipped by, and the shadow of death grew closer. Even if he fled, in a very short time, it wouldn't matter where he went, even if it were to the remotest corner of the Milky Way Sea, he would still be unable to evade death.

“What should I do....” Meng Hao's eyes were bloodshot. He wasn't the only nervous one. Down at the bottom of the mountain, Little Tiger's face was growing pale. Seeing the developments just now, he gritted his teeth.

“Meng Hao!” he shouted. His fingers flickered with an incantation, and then he pushed down on his chest. He spat up a massive amount of blood, which flew out in front of him and then formed into a handful of red-colored clouds. “This pearl is my life, allow me to offer some assistance.”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he collapsed into unconsciousness. The pearl sucked Little Tiger's blood cloud into it and then began to shine with a red glow. It circulated a few more times around the Blood Globe, but then suddenly shot toward Meng Hao. When it reached him, the glow intensified, enveloping Meng Hao with its light.

At that moment, a strange sensation filled Meng Hao's heart. It felt as if his Cultivation base were suddenly climbing higher!

His golden Core sea began to roar as it expanded. Within an instant, it had suddenly doubled in size. Its boundlessness increased so much so that it felt as if it would explode out of his body.

Meng Hao body suddenly shined with a golden light, making him look completely extraordinary.

The Demonic Core within him did not undulate, but instead began to spin rapidly. As it did, intense spiritual power flooded through Meng Hao's body, filling his mind with a thunderous roar, and ... a thread of Qi!

The Qi was weak, just like the thread he had felt when he reached the first level of Qi Condensation.

What Meng Hao didn't know, was that this strand of Qi in his mind was actually something that only Foundation Establishment Cultivators should possess; Spiritual Sense!

Even Shangguan Xiu couldn't develop it, because he hadn't completely passed into the Foundation Establishment stage.

And yet, Meng Hao hadn't passed into Foundation Establishment either. Instead, he had reached the tenth level of Qi Condensation! Popping sounds rang out through his body. Vast quantities of filth were pushed out through his pores as he experienced a sort of baptism into a higher level of Qi Condensation than anyone else in the world.

The tenth level of Qi Condensation!

Meng Hao's head spun. In the blink of an eye, his body was much tougher and stronger. Not only had he developed Spiritual Sense, but his body has miraculously grown much more powerful.

In the Cultivation world, the tenth level of Qi Condensation was something rarely seen. In fact, throughout the years, many of the most powerful members of a given generation had done research about the Qi Condensation stage... to determine whether there really even was a tenth level, an eleventh level and a twelfth level.

Theoretically speaking it was possible; in some ancient text fragments these levels were mentioned. Supposedly, in ancient times, there were a total of thirteen levels in the Qi Condensation stage! According to the legends, even in ancient times, it was rare for someone to reach the tenth level, and even more rare the eleventh level. Any person who reached that level inevitably went on to rock the world.

In the modern Cultivation world, the tenth level of Qi Condensation was nothing more than a legend.

Over the years, generation after generation of Cultivators had researched it and eventually a consensus had been reached. In ancient times, there had been thirteen levels of Qi Condensation. But, the ninth level had been set as a limit. The tenth level and beyond had been crippled in accordance with the will of the Heavens. From that time on, there were only nine levels!

There was another opinion, rejected by most as being absurd, that the ancient will of the Heavens was dead, and that a new will of the Heavens had arisen. The new will of the Heavens only approved of nine levels of Qi Condensation, and had thus broken the path of the tenth level. This was because following the path of the tenth level allowed one to fight against the Heavens, which was prohibited.

If a Cultivator could accumulate enough spiritual energy of heaven and earth, then they could once again forge the path to reach the fabled tenth level of Qi Condensation of ancient times!

The path was the focal point. Unfortunately, that path had been broken since ancient times, and though it still existed, was essentially broken beyond all repair.

But today it appeared in Meng Hao's body, visible not only to him, but also to a dumbfounded Shangguan Xiu. How could he possibly believe that right there in front of him, Meng Hao... had actually entered into the legendary tenth level of Qi condensation?

"Impossible... the tenth level of Qi Condensation is just a legend." Shangguan Xiu's face was filled with disbelief. "According to the stories, the tenth level of Qi Condensation is a body-strengthening stage... It exists in theory, and even in ancient times, it was rare for it to be achieved.... Impossible!"

Were Little Tiger not unconscious, he would also be shocked. Even though the pearl was his, and was composed of his life force, it had never had such a shocking effect on him. Whatever level he was at, it allowed him to wield a level of power equal to half of the following level. For example, now he was at the fifth level of Qi Condensation, but in terms of power, he was already half way through the sixth level.

Meng Hao's hair flew about wildly and his eyes glowed brightly. He took a deep breath, feeling the immense power that surged through him. He felt the thread of Qi in his mind, as well as the strength rippling through his muscles and blood. He knew that as of now, he wasn't in the least bit weak.

And yet, there was a side-effect. As soon as he reached the tenth level of Qi Condensation, it seemed as if the Heavens immediately severed any connection to him. He couldn't sense any of the power of heaven and earth, as if he had been completely cut off. He felt a wild sucking feeling within him, as if he were a newborn child who needed nutrients... but was denied.

At the moment, his body still appeared to be that of a weak scholar, but in reality, his flesh was filled with enough strength that he felt as if he could rip a city wall in half.

Right now, there wasn't time to consider all of this, though. His eyes flashed as he looked Shangguan Xiu and the disbelief written on the man's face. Meng Hao took in a deep breath and then lifted up his right hand, pointing his finger toward the wooden swords.

This finger strike contained all the power of Meng Hao's tenth level of Qi Condensation, all of his Spiritual Sight, all of the strength of his physical body.

This was Meng Hao's most powerful attack. In fact, this was probably the most powerful attack than any Qi Condensation stage Cultivator in the State of Zhao could muster.

A boom rang out as he tapped the wooden sword. It erupted with sword might, piercing through the three-inch gap and stabbing deeply into Shangguan Xiu's chest. A bang sounded out as it stabbed completely through his chest, emerging from the other side in a shower of blood.

Shangguan Xiu's body shook, and yet he couldn't move. His eyes filled with dread as he sensed massive amounts of spiritual energy flooding out from the wound. In the blink of an eye, the energy seepage had caught up with this Foundation Establishment. Now the time it would take to reach the Foundation Establishment stage was much, much longer.

It was at this time that Meng Hao's hand lifted up again, and tapped the other wooden sword. It hummed as it proceeded forward toward Shangguan Xiu's neck.

"Meng Hao, you don't dare to kill me...." Shangguan Xiu was completely in a panic now. His previous cold arrogance and killing intent had vanished, replaced with a desperate struggle to evade death.

Meng Hao said nothing. His eyes glowing darkly as the sword he had just tapped passed through the three-inch gap and stabbed into Shangguan Xiu's neck. In the instant that it pierced into his neck, Shangguan Xiu suddenly twisted his head to the side in an impossible fashion. The wooden sword sliced open a massive wound which erupted with blood, and yet it didn't kill him.

Dread permeated Shangguan Xiu. He could feel his life force beginning to fade and his spiritual power dissipating. As the spiritual energy poured out of him, his body was beginning to grow a bit more responsive.

“Meng Hao, there’s no hatred between us that can’t be resolved. If you let me go, I will give you the Sublime Spirit Scripture....” Shangguan Xiu couldn’t be any more terrified. Even before he finished speaking, the two wooden swords circled back, stabbing back through his chest, showering blood everywhere. Shangguan Xiu let out a blood-curdling scream filled with weakness and despair.

Meng Hao didn’t care in the least bit when he mentioned the Sublime Spirit Scripture. His eyes were as hard as ever; it didn’t matter what Shangguan Xiu said, he wouldn’t stop until he was utterly and completely dead.

This was Meng Hao. Once he made a decision, he wouldn’t change his mind easily.

Chapter 76: Beyond Flawlessness

The two wooden swords circled around, emitting a shocking sword aura. They sped toward Shangguan Xiu’s head, one from the left, one from the right, carrying Meng Hao’s killing intent with them. This time, it was clear that Shangguan Xiu would not be able to evade.

“There is something more precious than a Flawless Foundation,” shrieked Shangguan Xiu in a piercing voice. “It’s something that in the Southern Domain, in fact in all the four continents, is a hundred thousand times more rare than your tenth level of Qi Condensation. I’m talking about a Perfect Foundation!! Meng Hao, you....” Then Meng Hao’s two swords stabbed into his head, sending fountains of blood in all directions.

Shangguan Xiu died instantly. He had not lived past one hundred years, but rather, had died feeling infinite grievance.

His non-reconciliation to death was due to his great plans, and due to the fact that he was in the middle of establishing his Foundation. But then his head exploded, and his body dropped down off of Mount Daqing and splashed into the river below. His aspirations, and his body, floated away into the distance.

Meng Hao snatched his dark green bag of holding as he fell. He didn’t look at it, but instead tucked it into his robe.

He panted. Despite having reached the tenth level of Qi Condensation, he had just wielded the two wooden swords to slay someone who was on the verge of reaching Foundation Establishment. He now felt extremely drained.

He watched Shangguan Xiu's body disappear in the distance, and then turned and hopped onto a wooden sword. His body transformed into a beam of light, and he shot down the mountain to where Little Tiger lay unconscious.

The boy's face was as pale as death, and his eyes were tightly shut. His aura was like gossamer threads, and his life force flickered like a tiny flame that could be extinguished at any moment.

Meng Hao looked at Little Tiger thoughtfully, and then glanced at the pearl which floated in the air next to him. The power of the pearl was shocking to the extreme, and was truly a treasure. Its power could even be compared to that of the copper mirror.

"To duplicate it would cost an astronomical amount of Spirit Stones... what a pity." Meng Hao sighed and looked up into the sky.

He'd known from the beginning that the pearl was linked to Little Tiger's life force. If he stole it, then Little Tiger would die.

"You entrusted me with your life. How could I, Meng Hao, act the villain? If I did, it would plague my conscience for the rest of my days. I would never be able to think clearly, and my days of Cultivating would come to an end." His eyes glittering, he flicked his sleeve, and tapped Little Tiger's forehead.

Little Tiger's body spasmed, then his eyes snapped open. He was instantly on guard, getting to his feet and retreating backward several paces. He glanced at the pearl in Meng Hao's hands, and his body began to shiver slightly. A look of despair crept into his eyes.

Meng Hao lifted the pearl with a finger, causing it to shoot straight toward Little Tiger, who snatched it out of the air. A complex expression filled his face, and he stared at Meng Hao blankly.

"Many thanks for your assistance. This treasure is astonishing. You need to be cautious and take care of yourself." As soon as the pearl left his hand, Meng Hao's body began to grow weaker. The telltale signs of the tenth level of Qi Condensation began to disappear. As his Cultivation base dropped, the spiritual energy of heaven and earth which had just been cut off from him, slowly began to return.

The unbridled gravitational force within his body slowly vanished.

Meng Hao didn't regret his decision. There were some things that he just couldn't do. He refused to defy his own conscience in such a way.

The Blood Globe that Shangguan Xiu had used to threaten the lives of the people of the three counties was instantly smashed between Meng Hao's fingers. It transformed into a vast amount of Blood Qi, which floated back toward the three counties.

As far as the common people went, all they knew was that for the past two months, they had felt somewhat dizzy, and now were much more clear headed. They also felt a bit weak. This was because, unbeknownst to them, their longevity had been damaged, and close to five years had been taken from the life spans.

Meng Hao could see this, but there was nothing he could do except sigh to himself. He flicked his sleeve and made to leave.

"Elder Brother Meng," said Little Tiger, "Shangguan Xiu...."

"There is no such person in the world anymore." He didn't look back, just continued off into the distance. The battle here would definitely attract the attention of the three great Sects. And Meng Hao could guess why they had permitted Shangguan Xiu to cast this massive spell here; it was because of Meng Hao. Shangguan Xiu wanted his bag of holding, and the three Great Sects wanted him. At the moment, he had no way to deal with the situation. The only thing he could do was go somewhere remote to hide and think for a while.

Little Tiger didn't say anything more. He watched Meng Hao leaving, and then a look of determination filled his eyes.

"Meng Hao, you didn't covet my most valuable treasure. I, Dong Hu, am not a good person. But you can rest easy. In this life, I will never do anything to let you down." He turned, casting his vision into the town far off in the distance. He caught sight of his father and mother, and a gentle look filled his eyes. Then the warmth vanished. Lowering his head, he quickly made his way off into the distance.

At that exact moment, the sky filled with countless beams of prismatic light. In the lead was none other than Liu Daoyun from the Cold Wind Sect.

"Meng Hao, you won't escape this time!"

Meng Hao frowned, turning into a flash of light as he sped off into the distance. He used the last remaining vestiges of the power of the tenth level of Qi Condensation to instantly put a vast distance between himself and the pursuers. Far off in the distance, he had caught sight of more disciples of the three great Sects, and among them had been Foundation Establishment Cultivators and Core Formation Eccentrics. They had obviously been unwilling to show up themselves, and had instead sent some lower level disciples over to check things out. But now that Meng Hao's presence had been confirmed, they would surely make appearances.

“Shangguan Xiu was backed by Milky Way City. It seems that power was not small.... The three great Sects must have stayed away because that was their agreement. When they felt the battle magic disappear, then they could approach. Shangguan Xiu had his secrets, and didn't want people to see what was happening. He was even careful about the people from Milky Way City. He didn't let them know his true purposes either.”

He left Mount Daqing, passing the North Sea and crossing the wide wilderness, heading in the direction of the Reliance Sect.

About half way through the wilderness, in a random mountain range, Meng Hao sped along at top speed, an indistinct expression on his face. As he raced along he would occasionally look down at a piece of turtle shell which he held in his hand. This was an item he had taken out of Shangguan Xiu's bag of holding.

It was about the size of his palm, and its edges were rough. Obviously it had been broken off from a larger turtle shell.

Its surface was inscribed with rows and rows of small characters. They were difficult to make out. Only by infusing his eyes with spiritual energy was he able to read them clearly.

“In the Cultivation world, it is possible to achieve the so-called... Perfect Foundation!” Meng Hao gasped.

On the surface of the turtle shell were two medicinal pill recipes. One was for a Perfect Foundation Pill, the other was for a Perfect Gold Core Pill.

“The turtle shell spells it out clearly. The Foundation Establishment stage doesn't just have three types, the Flawless, Cracked and Fractured. There is a fourth type, the Perfect Foundation. It's extremely rare, being seen only one ten thousand cases....” Meng Hao breathed rapidly, staring

down at the turtle shell and thinking back to what Shangguan Xiu had said before he died. Now he understood his opponent's regret at being forced to ascend to Foundation Establishment after being poisoned. And now he understood the raging hatred in Shangguan Xiu's eyes.

Meng Hao contemplated things silently. He had read a lot about Foundation Establishment back in the Magic Pavilion of the Reliance Sect.

In Foundation Establishment, Dao pillars would come to being within the Core Lake. Because Foundation Establishment increased one's longevity, it was categorized as stealing good fortune and defying the Heavens. As a result, the Dao pillars could never be perfect, but would always contain cracks. This was in accordance with the Dao of the Heavens. It could be summed up in the expression, "you get some, you lose some" or perhaps "when something comes in, something goes out." It was part of the cycle of heaven and earth, and was permitted to exist.

Foundation Establishment consisted of early, mid and late sub-stages. In total, nine Dao pillars would appear. If each pillar had one crack, it meant a total of nine cracks would appear. This is what is referred to as a Flawless Foundation. A Flawless Foundation contained the least amount of cracks, and leaked the least amount of spiritual energy. After long periods of breathing exercises, the body would become incredibly powerful, much more so than other Foundations.

In the modern Cultivation world, this was the most powerful Foundation type. The special methods to achieve it could only be found amidst the clues in the great classic scriptures, for example the Qi Condensation manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture. Such secrets could lead to horrific bloodbaths. In fact... that was why the Reliance Sect had been disbanded.

Without such a scripture, the only way to have a chance at establishing a Flawless Foundation was to have incredible latent talent or outstanding good fortune. Most often, it was a Chosen who could piece together the clues to do so.

If an additional crack appeared on each of the Dao Pillars, this was called a Cracked Foundation. Although this type of Foundation was weaker than a Flawless Foundation, it could not be looked down upon. Usually, only disciples of the great Sects were able to achieve it.

Last, of course, was the Fractured Foundation. This was when, after reaching late Foundation Establishment, more than eighteen cracks existed on the Dao pillars, which is too much. This Foundation could be considered nearly shattered. In terms of both Cultivation speed as well as battle prowess, both were much weaker. With this type of Foundation, the chances of forming a Core were much lower.

Meng Hao thought about all of this and then looked down at the turtle shell. According to the description here, by concocting and consuming a Perfect Foundation Pill, there was a high probability of establishing a Perfect Foundation. In this case, no cracks whatsoever would appear. This was a type of Cultivation that defied the Heavens, and was a path that could not be returned from.

Because this Foundation was not permitted by the Heavens, it would provoke Tribulation Lightning. True success required defiance of the Heavens. In this respect, it was similar to the tenth level of Qi Condensation.

“From what Shangguan Xiu said, it seems the tenth level of Qi Condensation is not tolerated by the Heavens. Apparently, establishing a Perfect Foundation is the same....”

“If you have a Fractured Foundation and then consume this pill, you have a ten percent chance of establishing a Perfect Foundation. With a Cracked Foundation, you have a thirty percent chance, and with a Flawless Foundation, a sixty percent chance. The pill repairs the cracks, enabling you to establish a Perfect Foundation. But... you have to be particular about when you consume the pill. The sooner you take it after Foundation Establishment, the better. If too much time passes, the effectiveness will be reduced. And it takes two months to concoct the Perfect Foundation Pill.” Meng Hao’s heart raced as he sped along.

“No wonder Shangguan Xiu wanted to join the Reliance Sect... Just like Wang Tengfei, he wanted a chance to get the Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture! After establishing a Flawless Foundation, his chances would be much higher... It’s also no wonder he disappeared on the day the Sect was disbanded. With secrets like this on his person, he didn’t dare to show his face...” Meng Hao clutched the turtle shell tightly in hand, continuing to race forward.

In addition to the turtle shell, Shangguan Xiu’s bag of holding also contained a small pill furnace fashioned from translucent green crystal, about the size of a hand. He also had large quantities of medicinal plants, all of them placed in jade boxes. There were hundreds of different types.

Many of the medicinal plants were unfamiliar to Meng Hao, but thankfully, there was also a jade slip in the bag of holding with complete records regarding identification methods for all of the plants. Perusing this, Meng Hao grew more and more excited.

Chapter 77: Lord Revelation

Although these medicinal plants were not precious materials, they were still rare. Many Cultivators would spend decades attempting to collect them.

And yet here in Shangguan Xiu's bag of holding were hundreds.

There were also two medicinal pills placed inside of jade boxes, one orange and one blue. Obviously, they were extremely valuable.

"These plants are all materials needed to create a Perfect Foundation Pill... As for these medicinal pills..." After examining them thoroughly, he looked again at the turtle shell, eyes shining.

"Concocting the Perfect Foundation Pill requires seven minor pills. These are two of those seven that Shangguan Xiu already concocted." Meng Hao understood things now, but was still a bit shocked. Shangguan Xiu had spent fifty years collecting all of these things together, and yet that was still not enough time for him, a Cultivator of the Qi Condensation phase.

"And he was even backed by Milky Way City..."

Meng Hao felt that there were still things he didn't quite understand, though. In order to concoct the Perfect Foundation Pill, it seemed Shangguan Xiu had secretly taken items from Patriarch Milky Way's treasure storehouse, as well as items accumulated over hundreds of years by his clan. In addition, he had scoured the lands, all to collect these items together.

And yet, he still lacked a few necessary medicinal materials. He had one stem of a particularly rare plant, but required three. At long last, Meng Hao understood the insanity with which Shangguan Xiu had pursued him in his attempt to acquire the copper mirror.

In the end, he had delivered all his fortunes directly into Meng Hao's hands. If Shangguan Xiu had known this would happen, he never would have caused problems for Meng Hao. But he had, and his fifty years of preparations were irrevocably lost.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, placing the turtle shell and the medicinal materials into the bag of holding, which he then placed, along with his other bags of holding, into the bag of the Cosmos.

He stood there in the forest and looked up at the sky. His eyes slowly began to shine as he thought about the Perfect Foundation. His heart pounded.

"After consuming the pill, Tribulation Lightning will fall. I shouldn't even be thinking about a Perfect Foundation right now. I can make a decision about it after I reach Foundation Establishment. What I need to think about now is the matter between the three great Sects and

Patriarch Reliance.” He closed his eyes and took a few breaths, pushing down all the anxious thoughts. When he opened his eyes again, they were calm

“A year has already passed, and the time set by Patriarch Reliance has arrived. He promised that if I could gather the experts of the State of Zhao here, he would give me a handsome reward...” Meng Hao’s eyes glittered.

“But to do such a thing would be very dangerous.” He frowned, hesitating. “My Cultivation base is at the Qi Condensation stage. I would be like an egg thrown up against rocks.”

“I probably shouldn’t get involved. After all, Patriarch Reliance said a year later, but didn’t give a specific date. When my Cultivation base is a bit higher, maybe after I reach Foundation Establishment, then I can think about it. At that time I’ll be in a bit of a safer position.” He lifted his head. Ever since the time Patriarch Reliance had suddenly caused the three-colored spear to disappear, he had lost a little bit of his faith in the Patriarch’s trustworthiness.

“However, because of the arrest warrant of the three great Sects, their disciples are looking for me everywhere. If I get in a tight spot, then I’ll just have to face the danger and lead them into the Patriarch’s meditation zone.” Meng Hao raced on silently through the wild mountains, his decision having been made.

But even as he raced forward, he suddenly felt a strange, jittery sensation. His heart lurched, as if a giant, invisible hand had just passed through his chest and squeezed his heart.

He suddenly felt as if all of the vegetation around him had eyes that were staring at him coldly.

The feeling passed almost immediately. Even though the feeling was no longer there, Meng Hao’s face was pale. He looked around. Everything was silent, and nothing around him gave any clue as to what had happened. Had it been his imagination?

“What was that?” he thought, hesitating. After a moment, though, his eyes glittered, and he shot forward at top speed.

Meanwhile, somewhere very far away from Meng Hao but still in the State of Zhao, an old man in a purplish blue robe sat cross-legged on a mountain. His eyes were closed, but his right hand flickered as if he were performing an incantation. His eyes opened slowly and he looked off into the distance.

“There you are,” he said coolly. “The three Sects wanted to hide you from me. How laughable.” He took a step forward, and then disappeared.

At the same moment, Liu Daoyun was speeding along. Meng Hao had lost him, but he’d seen where Meng Hao had entered the mountains. He had followed in pursuit, his face filled with incredible hatred and murder.

His hatred for Meng Hao reached down his bones. The bloody incident of the silver spear had turned him into the butt of all the jokes of the State of Zhao and had nearly caused a war between two of the great Sects. Even though the war had been averted, he had paid a heavy price for his actions.

It nearly drove him insane to think about the day he had been brought up before the Elders of the great Sects. He had been bound on the Sealing Pole, then lashed with a Fire Whip over one hundred times. Oh, the misery and pain!

The lashes had torn his skin and left the flesh gaping. The pain had stabbed down into his bones. Even to this day, he would often wake in the middle of the night, and every time he did, his desire to kill Meng Hao grew stronger and stronger.

Unlike everyone else who was chasing Meng Hao, he did not plan to capture him. He would kill him!

It might arouse the displeasure of his Sect, but he had already decided to forsake them. At worst, he would flee the State of Zhao after killing Meng Hao. The Southern Domain was large, and filled with countries of Cultivators, especially in the center. As a Cultivator of the ninth level of Qi Condensation, he would surely be able to find somewhere willing to take him in. Then one day he would come back to the State of Zhao and wipe out the Cold Wind Sect. He would cleanse the pain of his lashing with blood.

At the moment, he moved at top speed, using all the power he could muster. He was determined to find Meng Hao and kill him before the Sect’s Foundation Establishment experts and Core Formation Patriarchs arrived.

“Meng Hao, you can try to run, but there’s nowhere to run to!” Liu Daoyun’s killing intent soared. He was even more confident of being able to kill Meng Hao when he thought of the astonishing treasure he had borrowed.

He stood on his crystalline sword as he entered the mountains. His gaze swept back and forth. Because he was of the ninth level of Qi Cultivation, and also an Inner Sect disciple, he had a voice transmission jade slip, which he used to inform all disciples in the area to notify him immediately if they saw Meng Hao.

A short time passed. As he soared along in the air, Liu Daoyun suddenly slapped his bag of holding, and a glowing jade slip appeared in his hand. He pressed it against his forehead and then laughed. He changed his course, shooting off toward the disciple who had just contacted him.

Time passed enough for half an incense stick to burn. It was then that Liu Daoyun caught sight of Meng Hao, moving forward on his treasured fan. Yes, this was the man who had killed a Cold Wind Sect disciple in one move by piercing his head.

At this same moment, Meng Hao looked back, and his cold eyes caught sight of Liu Daoyun. He frowned to himself. Ever since he had experienced the sensation of an invisible hand squeezing his heart, he had felt that he was being watched. Sure enough, after a while, he noticed that there were quite a few Cultivators around from the three great Sects.

There was no way to avoid them. Even if he attacked and killed them as quickly as possible, the word would surely spread via jade slips.

“Meng Hao!” shouted Liu Daoyun. His right hand flickered in an incantation pattern, and immediately, the flying sword beneath his feet issued a droning sound and shot toward Meng Hao.

“Let’s see you run away this time! I, Liu, will rip you to pieces today! That is the only way I can resolve the hatred in my heart!” Liu Daoyun’s eyes had grown red as soon as he caught sight of Meng Hao, and his killing intent grew even fiercer.

Meng Hao’s eyes flashed, and he was about to continue on forward when suddenly his mind trembled. A bit of Spiritual Sense still remained, which caused Meng Hao to suddenly move backward. Even as the flying sword approached him, a fierce wind arose, sending the crystalline sword spinning away.

At the same time, an old man suddenly appeared. He wore a purplish-blue robe, and had some age spots on his face, but his eyes shined with a fear-inspiring might that could make one’s spirit tremble.

His eyes seemed to contain the sun, moon and stars, making it seem as if you might be lost if you looked into them. A strange design was stitched onto his blue robe; it appeared to be an altar, in the middle of which was a solitary eye. This eye seemed to be filled with even more woe than the old man's eyes.

“Such strong grievances,” he said coolly, looking at Liu Daoyun. When the old man spoke, the spiritual energy around Meng Hao seemed to be thrown into chaos, and suddenly he felt as if he were bound in place. Once again, he experienced the sensation of an invisible hand clawing at his heart. His face flickered, and his heart pounded.

When Liu Daoyun saw the old man, his face fell, and he immediately took a few steps back and raised hands in a salute.

“I am Liu Daoyun of the junior generation. Greetings, Lord Revelation.”

At the same moment that Liu Daoyun made his salute, six figures appeared in the sky. They were quite some distance away, but in the space of a single breath had arrived onto the scene.

When he saw the six people, Meng Hao's heart sank. They were familiar to him. These were the Core Formation Eccentrics of the State of Zhao who had appeared on the day of the dissolution of the Reliance Sect. One of them was a woman, who had left quite a deep impression on Meng Hao.

Shortly after they arrived, the sky filled with droning streaks of light as over ten people approached. They were not soaring, but actually flying, sending out thunderous roars into the air. The nearby birds and beasts quivered. As the people arrived, their eyes all came to fall on Meng Hao.

His face grew grim as he looked around. He saw the irritable Foundation Establishment Cultivator who had attempted to attack him that day.

A powerful pressure was exerted on everything in the area. Liu Daoyun's face grew pale and he retreated backward several paces. He glared at Meng Hao; his killing intent was hidden for the moment, but the venom in his face was very clear.

Meng Hao's heart sank; today there was nowhere to hide. After a moment, his expression returned to normal. He took in a deep breath and looked around at the experts of the State of Zhao. He said nothing.

Chapter 78: No Choice but to Believe!

“Fellow Daoist Revelation truly deserves his reputation of being able to make ingenious divinations,” said one of the Core Formation Eccentrics from the three great Sects. He laughed.

“He arrived here even faster than us.”

“You three Sects didn’t notify me, so I was forced to divine things for myself,” said Lord Revelation in a cool tone.

“Very well,” said one of the Cold Wind Sect Core Formation Eccentrics. He wore a long black robe. “Now that the kid has been found, it won’t be long before we can get into Patriarch Reliance’s meditation zone. This matter has been going on for quite a while. Even the great Sects in the Southern Domain are aware of what’s going on.” His gaze had fallen onto Meng Hao, and he looked at him expressionlessly, as if he were cricket.

The lot of them didn’t pay him any heed whatsoever as they spoke, as if they knew that their words could decide his life or death. In fact, their conversation would determine his fate.

Meng Hao said nothing. He knew that if he wanted to fight back against their bullying, he would have to think of a method. His mind spun as he analyzed the situation.

“Patriarch,” said Liu Daoyun, bowing with clasped hands toward one of his Sect’s Core Formation Eccentrics. “This person has a treasured spear hidden on his person.” He lifted his head and looked at Meng Hao with a sneer, the venom written clearly on his face.

“So, the tiny Qi Condensation Cultivator turns out to be of the ninth level....” said the black-robed Cultivator coolly, his face seemingly permanently red. “No wonder he was able to throw the Cultivation World of the State of Zhao into such chaos.” He lifted his hand toward Meng Hao as if he were about to grab him.

“I am here, and so is the spear,” said Meng Hao suddenly, his eyes flashing. His voice could sever nails and slice iron. A wild look appeared in his eyes that seemed to say he knew he was powerless to prevent them from taking his treasures, but if they did, he would end his own life immediately.

Hearing Meng Hao speak, the old man who had been about to make a move on him stopped and frowned. The onlookers also frowned.

“My Cultivation base is low and weak,” said Meng Hao. “If the older generation wishes to rob my treasures, please do so. But if I lose even one treasure, then I will end my life. And if I am dead, then I can’t take you to Founder Patriarch’s meditation zone. I would rather die than be robbed by you!” As he spoke, his face shone with determination.

“I can just kill you,” said one of the six Core Formation Cultivators, “then use a heaven-defying Soulsearch to drag the location out of you.”

When Meng Hao heard this, he let out a hearty laugh. Not the slightest look of fear could be seen in his eyes. His laughter echoed through the mountains, stabbing into the ears of the old Eccentrics.

“If you plan to Search me then go ahead. Only Inner Sect Disciples know the location of the Patriarch’s meditation zone. But even if you know the location, without me alive, conscious, and unharmed, you’ll never be able to get inside.” When they heard this, all the old Eccentrics stared at him with eyes as cold as ice.

“You of the elder generation have profound Cultivation bases. Surely you know some Spirit Puppetry arts. But without my consciousness there, or if I have been injured in any way, you won’t be able to enter. You must have my complete and utter support!” Decisiveness filled Meng Hao’s voice. He gave them the feeling that he had thrown all caution to the wind, which made them frown.

Actually, when it came to Meng Hao, they didn’t care so much about him; what they truly were interested in was Patriarch Reliance’s Sublime Spirit Scripture. The Eccentrics frowned and then looked toward Lord Revelation.

He stared at Meng Hao, his eyes flashing. Even though he was capable of divining many things, he wasn’t able to divine anything at all about this particular matter. All eyes were on him as he spoke.

“I can’t divine the details. But even if ninety-five percent of what this kid says is false, we still can’t afford to gamble on it.” His words echoed the thoughts of all the onlookers. These Eccentrics were experienced and astute, as well as crafty. However, all their scheming couldn’t assure victory under these circumstances. This was because... they couldn’t afford to bet. Even if most of what Meng Hao said was a lie, there could be some truth to it.

If they lost, they lost the chance to get into Patriarch Reliance’s Immortal’s Cave. That in turn would mean they lost any chance at the Sublime Spirit Scripture. Anyone, be they at Foundation Establishment or Core Formation, could use Qi Condensation Manual of the Sublime Spirit Scripture to form a second Core Lake within their bodies. They could also repair the Dao pillars they had formed during their Foundation Establishment. If successful, it could make a Cracked

Foundation into a Flawless Foundation. To a Core Formation Cultivator, this would also have a big influence on their Core level, which was something they all yearned for.

There were only three great books in the world which contained the secrets methods of how to Cultivate a new Core Lake, even beyond the Qi Condensation stage.

“Very well,” said one of the six, a noble-looking old woman with a hoarse voice. When her words rang out, everyone grew silent. “We are here for the Sublime Spirit Scripture. There’s no need to cause further complications. Child, we won’t steal any of your treasures, nor will we Sousearch you or turn you into a puppet. But you must assist us, otherwise you are well aware of what the consequences will be. Which is more important, your life? Or the Patriarch’s? As for which decision is best, I’m sure you don’t need our advice on that.”

Meng Hao was silent for a moment, then suddenly said, “Give me one million Spirit Stones! And, I demand the right to kill this person!” His eyes flashed as he pointed at Liu Daoyun.

Liu Daoyun’s face grew somber and venom flickered within his eyes. He had just been contemplating various ways to kill Meng Hao. To be suddenly singled out by Meng Hao caused him to reflexively step backwards a few paces.

His heart raced, and cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He knew that these Patriarchs would most likely give in to Meng Hao’s every demand to get what they wanted.

“Patriarchs...” said Liu Daoyun, his face pale as he looked up at the two Core Formation Patriarchs from the Cold Wind Sect.

The red-faced old man gave a cold snort. He flicked his sleeve and looked at Meng Hao with cold eyes.

“That will not happen! Tiny Qi Condensation Cultivator, you have an exaggerated opinion of yourself. You dare to make demands of us?!”

“Meng Hao,” said one of the Core Formation Eccentrics, an old man in a red robe. “Don’t bring up the matter of killing again. And as for the Spirit Stones, we have no way to meet your demand.”

“If I get no Spirit Stones, and if this man doesn’t die, then I, Meng, will absolutely not agree to take you of the elder generation to the Patriarch’s meditation zone. Without my heartfelt consent, you’ll

never get into his Immortal's Cave." Meng Hao's voice was resolute, and his face emanated an expression that said he was ready to risk everything. He would die without even a frown if he had to.

"Meng Hao..." Liu Daoyun stared at him murderously, his eyes filling up with killing intent.

"Very well," said the dignified old woman in her husky voice. "As for this Cold Wind Sect disciple, your request is denied. Regarding the Spirit Stones, I will take the responsibility for that. I will give you one hundred thousand now, and the rest after we open the Immortal's Cave." If Meng Hao hadn't made any demands, it would have aroused suspicion. She flicked her sleeve, and a bag of holding flew toward Meng Hao. He didn't catch it, but instead moved backward and let the bag fall to the ground.

"Very well," said Meng Hao slowly. "The killing is off the table. Liu Daoyun, pick up that bag of holding and take the Spirit Stones out of it."

The woman's eyes flickered imperceptibly. The other Core Formation Eccentrics also gave him flickering looks.

Liu Daoyun was furious to the extreme. However, Meng Hao's request was not overly excessive. Even the red-faced old man didn't say anything, but rather indicated for Liu Daoyun to comply.

Liu Daoyun took a deep breath, pushed down his fury, then walked forward to pick up the bag of holding. He shook the bag, and a massive amount of Spirit Stones poured out onto the ground. They glittered brightly. Liu Daoyun looked at them for a moment, and started to breathe a bit faster.

Meng Hao looked over the Spirit Stones, his expression calm. Then he collected them into his own bag of holding. He had no choice but to exercise caution. These people were not Foundation Establishment Cultivators, but rather of the Core Formation stage. If they wanted to kill him, it would be easier than stepping on a bug.

If it wasn't for the fact that they couldn't afford to gamble in this matter, he wouldn't be able to stand up to them at all, regardless if it were regarding Cultivation base or scheming.

Therefore, Meng Hao did not attempt to pull off some tricky, crafty plot. Instead, he plotted openly. He was betting that even if these people didn't believe him, they had no choice but to believe.

“You have your Spirit Stones. But this is a weighty matter. Please consume this medicinal pill.” The old woman lifted her right hand, and a black-colored medicinal pill appeared.

When it did, a wind instantly picked up, as if a massive amount of spiritual energy were being gathered up. Slowly, the image of a wicked centipede came to be visible on the surface of the medicinal pill.

Meng Hao’s expression changed. He looked at the pill cautiously.

When Liu Daoyun saw all of this happening, a hideous grin appeared on his face. The Foundation Establishment Cultivators floating in the air watched on, their faces expressionless, but their eyes sneering at Meng Hao.

As for the Core Formation Eccentrics, none of them batted an eye. If the old woman hadn’t produced a pill, they probably would have. Their eyes glittered as they watched.

In terms of scheming, Meng Hao was like a child compared to them. If his plots had truly displeased them, then any ideas he came up with would be useless.

“If you consume the pill, then you can lead the way. If you don’t consume it, then we will have to try out our Sousearch and Spirit Puppetry arts.” The old woman spoke coolly, her expression containing neither happiness nor anger. She flicked her fingers, and the poison pill shot forward to hover in front of Meng Hao.

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment in thought. He wasn’t sure whether or not the pill really was poisonous. Perhaps it was something else even more nefarious. But he didn’t seem to have any other choice. He clenched his jaw, then reached out and grabbed the pill.

“Speaking of poison pills, I have one as well,” said the red-faced old man with a laugh. He flicked his wide sleeve, and a reddish pill appeared in his hand. It flew to Meng Hao.

“Actually, our Sect happens to have one as well.” It turned out the Core Formation Cultivators from the three great Sects all had poison pills. The pills transformed into beams of light as they flew toward Meng Hao.

The old woman’s face was calm, and it was impossible to tell what she was thinking. She looked around coolly at her fellow Eccentrics, saying nothing. They were all circumspect and far-seeing. If

Meng Hao swallowed one poison pill, he might as well swallow more. This way, he wouldn't just be under the control of the old woman. This was the most fair method.

“Seeing the Fellow Daoist's actions, I must humbly act to save my own face.” Lord Revelation smiled and waved his right hand. A three-colored medicinal pill appeared and raced toward Meng Hao.

Compared to the other medicinal pills, this pill appeared extraordinary. Meng Hao wasn't sure why, but when his gaze fell onto this pill, his entire body felt jittery.

Chapter 79: Kill!

“Four poison pills,” said Meng Hao, his voice grim and his expression unsightly. “I of the younger generation am worried that if I consume this pill, I won't be able to lead you forward. If the poison takes effect, I will die. If it doesn't take effect, then how will the elder generation ensure that I can dispel the poison later? Or have you not even considered that?!”

“Of course there is a poison dispelling technique,” said the red-faced old man from the Cold Wind Sect, his face expressionless. “Whether or not you chose to believe is up to you.” In this, he used Meng Hao's own tactic against him. The complete resolution of all the various matters now rested on Meng Hao.

He stood silently for a moment. As the man had said, the choice to believe lay in him alone. Unfortunately, if he chose not to believe, then the current situation would never be resolved.

Meng Hao's eyes glanced over the four pills. Three of them he recognized. “This is... a Centipede Dragon Pill. This one is a Frigid Corpse Pill and this is a Blood Withering Pill. As for this one...” The three-colored pill from Lord Revelation was something he had never heard of before. There had been no information about it in the ancient jade slip.

“Patriarch Reliance's Cultivation base is as high as the Heavens,” Meng Hao muttered to himself. “He should be able to figure it out.” He clenched his jaw, then lifted his hands and put one of the pills into his mouth. It appeared to contain something alive within it, and sure enough, Meng Hao felt a searing pain as it slid down his throat. And yet, the pain didn't cause him to hesitate. His eyes bloodshot, he forced down all of the pills. As he swallowed the pill given to him by Lord Revelation, he looked the man in the eyes.

Lord Revelation smiled the entire time. Meng Hao didn't hesitate at all. He knew that he had to swallow the pills to allay everyone's suspicious.

The instant Lord Revelation's pill entered his mouth, it dissolved into an aura which seeped into his flesh and blood. Seeing Meng Hao swallow the four pills in succession left Liu Daoyun feeling quite pleased.

The ten or more Foundation Establishment Cultivators watched Meng Hao with strange expressions in their eyes. Seeing his resoluteness left them feeling the need to be more vigilant.

Meng Hao took a deep breath. His expression grim, he looked up at the Eccentrics. He said nothing.

"Let's go," said the old woman with a nod. She waved a finger toward Meng Hao, then turned into a prismatic rainbow and shot away. The other Cultivators present followed, one by one. Her wave of a finger caused the bag of holding that lay on the ground at Meng Hao's feet to suddenly transform into a hideous mist spirit. Its body flickered as it wrapped around Meng Hao and then shot into the sky.

Liu Daoyun followed along, looking at Meng Hao with a cold smile.

"You're dead!" he said grimly.

Meng Hao didn't reply. He just looked coldly at Liu Daoyun's twisted face.

"After you take the Patriarchs into the Immortal's cave, just wait until you come back out. You're dead for sure. Even if you dispel the poison, I won't let you go. There's nowhere you can run to in the State of Zhao. By the way, you're a Reliance Inner Sect disciple, yet you have no choice but to lead people to kill your own Sect's Patriarch. How does that feel? Liu Daoyun's malicious words were filled with ridicule.

"You killed Sun Hua over a silver spear. How does that feel?" said Meng Hao coolly, looking down at Liu Daoyun below him. The earth sped past beneath him. This was a speed Meng Hao had never achieved before.

As far as Liu Daoyun went, Meng Hao didn't care about him at all. But Meng Hao's words hit him like a stick jabbed into a fresh wound. His eyes were red through and through, and he looked at Meng Hao with a matchless hatred; he wished to rip him into pieces. The incident with Sun Hua was the most humiliating thing that had ever happened in his life. In fact, it had ruined any future

prospects within his Sect. He had basically been cast aside. Right now, his eyes seemed as if they would shoot flames. He clenched his fists tightly as he glared murderously at Meng Hao.

Seeing Meng Hao's lack of expression arose a hard-to-describe feeling that threatened to drive him mad. He punched the air with his fist.

Panting, he gritted his teeth for a long moment before saying, "You swallowed four poison pills. I'll just wait until the poison takes effect. Your body will rot and your heart will be torn apart."

"Today, you will die beneath my sword," said Meng Hao coolly, sounding neither happy nor angry. He looked down at the barren mountains whizzing by beneath him, and then at the four mountain peaks of the Reliance Sect off in the distance.

"You sure can talk big," said Liu Daoyun with a cold laugh and a sinister expression. It seemed he didn't take Meng Hao's words seriously at all. "You'll do that all by yourself? I can't wait to see the poison kick in!"

After he finished speaking, a booming sound rang out. The group of people had arrived at the Reliance Sect main square. It was deserted, occupied only by fallen leaves, bird droppings and a few animals which scattered in fright.

A fierce wind accompanied the group's arrival, sweeping clean the Outer Sect square. Seeing the place, Meng Hao's face flickered with a variety of expressions.

"What does it feel like to see your Sect become like this, Meng Hao?" said Liu Daoyun with a sneer. As he spoke, Meng Hao turned and looked at him, killing intent springing from his eyes. He had already begun moving. He lifted his hand, and fifty flying swords appeared, flying straight toward Liu Daoyun.

"I think this place is the perfect location to bury you in."

There had been no indication whatsoever that Meng Hao would attack. Even as his words echoed out, the swords were upon Liu Daoyun. His expression changed; he had never imagined that Meng Hao would dare to attack him in the presence of all the Patriarchs.

He shot backward quickly, biting down on his tongue and spitting out some blood, along with a pearl. This pearl was different than the treasures he had used before. As soon as it flew out of his

mouth, it began to radiate an intense killing aura. It transformed into a hideous, black demonic face, which then slammed into Meng Hao's fifty flying swords.

An explosion reverberated out as the demonic face blocked most of the flying swords. However, one flying sword pierced through and continued on toward Liu Daoyun.

Liu Daoyun's face twisted; he knew that he was in a dangerous life-or-death situation, a critical juncture. He let out a howl, throwing up his arm to defend against the sword. The sword stabbed through his right shoulder, sending blood spraying about. A horrified shriek rang out throughout the deserted Reliance Sect.

Even as the sword stabbed into his shoulder, it suddenly exploded, causing Liu Daoyun's right arm to disappear into a cloud of blood. Blood also sprayed from his mouth, and he retreated backward, face pale and eyes shining with fear and astonishment.

Everything happened too quickly, in the space of time it takes for a spark to fly up. His right arm was destroyed, and his horrified screams still echoed through the air. The Eccentrics from the three great Sects looked back one by one, their eyes cold. This was especially so of the people from the Cold Wind Sect.

Liu Daoyun retreated, shrieking and howling.

"Patriarchs, this guy...."

His expression cold, Meng Hao stepped forward. Even as Liu Daoyun was in the middle of speaking, Meng Hao waved his right hand, and one hundred flying swords appeared, covering the entire square in a massive sword rain. It descended upon Liu Daoyun. Liu Daoyun might have been at the ninth level of Qi Condensation, but so was Meng Hao. Furthermore, Meng Hao's Cultivation was based on the Sublime Spirit Scripture, and he had a golden Core sea. He even has a sliver of Spiritual Sense in his mind. This was more than enough to crush Liu Daoyun. The sword rain whistled through the air. Liu Daoyun had no more time for speaking.

There was a boom, and Liu Daoyun spit up more blood. A glittering light shone in front of him as his crystalline sword defied the might of Meng Hao's one hundred flying swords. And yet, this in itself caused more injury to Liu Daoyun, who retreated further, howling.

"Patriarchs, save me!"

“Meng Hao, hold your hand!” came a voice from among the four Formation Establishment experts from the Cold Wind Sect. They frowned, obviously unwilling to allow Meng Hao to slay Liu Daoyun in front of all these people. Their bodies turned into beams of light as they sped forward.

“This is between me and him,” said Meng Hao, not even looking at the four Foundation Establishment experts. “Even if the poison takes effect on me right now, I will kill this man!” His expression was filled with murder and resolve.

The person he wanted to kill was Liu Daoyun of the Cold Wind Sect. But there were others present from the three great Sects other than the Cold Wind Sect. They, of course, would not stand by idly and watch Meng Hao be poisoned to death before opening the Immortal’s Cave. They would not allow small matters from other Sects to interfere with their interests.

The others flew forward, blocking the path of the Cold Wind Sect Foundation Establishment experts.

“Fellow Daoist Zhang, there’s no need to pay attention to the trifling matters of Qi Condensation Cultivators. Come, come, we haven’t seen each other for years. Why don’t we chat a bit about the old days?”

“Correct. Brother Chen, we haven’t seen each other for three years. I have a few questions about Cultivation that I was hoping to discuss with you.” The four Cold Wind Sect Foundation Establishment Cultivator’s faces grew livid when they heard all of these words. They were about to speak when suddenly Liu Daoyun let out another horrified scream.

Meng Hao’s fingers flickered in incantation patterns, and two hundred flying swords filled the sky. They descended upon Liu Daoyun with ear-piercing whistling sounds. Meng Hao took another step forward, and flashed an incantation pattern. A Flame Python emerged, several dozen meters long. Its roars reverberated out across the square. Blood sprayed from Liu Daoyun’s mouth as his crystalline sword shattered into pieces. He retreated backward constantly, desperation filling his eyes.

On the other hand, Meng Hao’s eyes shone with killing intent and determination. He flew forward, and a sword appeared in his right hand. It was the wooden sword, and it sped toward Liu Daoyun with unstoppable force.

“Get out of my way!” The faces of the four Foundation Establishment experts changed. They howled and attempted to force their way through to block Meng Hao.

“This man tried to kill me many times. This is a personal grudge. If anyone gets in my way, I’ll kill myself before opening the Patriarch’s Immortal’s Cave!” As his voice rang out, he completely ignored the four Foundation Establishment experts. Without a shred of hesitation, he shot toward Liu Daoyun, the wooden sword outstretched, clearly intending to slay him.

“Patriarchs, save me!!” screamed Liu Daoyun shrilly. It seemed the Foundation Establishment experts were about to attack, when a dry cough could be heard. It came from the old woman. Shock filled the hearts of the four experts, and they instantly stood stock still, their faces pale. The dry cough had slammed into their hearts like a lightning bolt from the Heavens, sending their minds spinning.

“This is too much!” said the red-faced old man from the Cold Wind Sect. He snorted, and a cold look appeared in his eye, which shot out toward Meng Hao. Even as this happen, Lord Revelation let out a hearty laugh. He flicked his sleeve; the cold look that had been shooting toward Meng Hao instantly fell apart.

“You!” said the red-faced old man, his eyes filled with rage.

Chapter 80: Meng Hao’s Scheming

“Fellow Daoist, there’s no need to lose your temper,” said Lord Revelation, smiling. “As far as these trifling issues amongst the junior generation, why don’t we just watch on?”

As these words were exchanged between the two of them, Liu Daoyun let out another miserable cry. Meng Hao stepped forward, and with the slice of a sword, sent Liu Daoyun’s left arm flying off from his body. Blood sprayed everywhere. More flying swords flew out from Meng Hao’s bag of holding. One after another, they stabbed into his opponent. Blood spread out everywhere. In the space of an instant, Liu Daoyun’s body was penetrated by a dozen swords.

Leaning up toward him, Meng Hao quietly said, “If I say that you will die this day, then die you shall.”

Despair filled Liu Daoyun’s wide eyes. Blood seeped out of his mouth.

The four Foundation Establishment Cultivators watched in shock as the scene unfolded. They were especially astounded by Meng Hao's vicious expression.

"Enough!" said one of the Core Formation Eccentrics from the Cold Wind Sect, his face extremely unsightly. He waved his finger, and suddenly the spiritual energy in the area seemed to churn into motion and race toward Meng Hao. It wrapped around his body, leaving his own spiritual energy untouched, but pulling him away from Liu Daoyun.

As Meng Hao drifted away from him, hope gleamed within Liu Daoyun's eyes, despite his severe wounds.

"Boom!" said Meng Hao coolly, the killing intent in his eyes flashing.

At the same time as the word left his mouth, the dozen flying swords impaled in Liu Daoyun's body suddenly detonated. A blood-curdling scream echoed out in all directions. Liu Daoyun's body was torn to pieces. Not even his head was left intact as chunks of flesh flew out in all directions.

As for the four Foundation Establishment Cultivators, the pupils of their eyes shrank to dots. They stared at the gore, and then at Meng Hao, whose face was expressionless. They would never forget this moment for the rest of their lives.

Especially memorable was the speed with which Meng Hao attacked, and the decisiveness in his voice. It revealed that his way of thinking was anything but ordinary. He had turned everyone who was not a member of the Cold Wind Sect into his assistants. The grisly result revealed how stubborn he truly was.

Anyone else might be able to think of such a plan, but few people would have the gall to pull it off. As of this day, they had witnessed Meng Hao's first true kill!

"He's dead, you can release me now," said Meng Hao, his voice indifferent.

The Core Formation Eccentrics floated in the air, staring down at Meng Hao. His resoluteness to kill left a deep impression in their hearts.

Even Lord Revelation took a long look at him. Everything that had happened just now gave him a glimpse of the cruelty Meng Hao was capable of.

The Core Formation Patriarch from the Cold Wind Sect who currently held Meng Hao bound had a grim look on his face. Meng Hao had killed Liu Daoyun right in front of him, even after he had intervened. He had lost face because of this. With a mere thought, he could rip Meng Hao to pieces in much the same fashion as Liu Daoyun had died. But considering the expressions on the faces of the surrounding Cultivators, that was not an option.

With a cold snort, he flicked his sleeve, and the invisible bonds around Meng Hao disappeared. But he still hit Meng Hao with an invisible attack, causing him to spit out a mouthful of blood. Meng Hao looked at him, his face pale, but his eyes shining with a dark look.

“Liu Daoyun constantly ridiculed me and swore to kill me,” said Meng Hao, looking at the Core Formation Eccentric who had injured him just now. “I of the junior generation had no choice but to attack first. I request that you members of the senior generation preside over matters in an impartial manner. At the moment, I am somewhat worried that the Cold Wind Sect will withhold their antidote pill. Could you please produce the pill so that I of the junior generation can rest at ease when I open Patriarch Reliance’s Immortal’s cave?”

The eyes of the four Foundation Establishment Cultivators flashed as they suddenly seemed to comprehend how cruel and treacherous Meng Hao was.

The Core Formation Eccentrics had been around a long time, and their eyes flickered upon hearing Meng Hao’s words. They instantly understood what he was thinking, and they frowned as they looked toward the two Cold Wind Sect Core Formation experts.

Their faces were as cold as ice.

“With a scheming heart like yours, you will find it hard to stay behind in the State of Zhao,” said Lord Revelation. “I have an opening for a servant, Meng Hao. You should consider it.” His eyes twinkled as he looked at Meng Hao. His smile seemed as grim and mysterious as the decoration on his long robe, a solitary eye set in the middle of a mystical square.

The red-faced old man from the Cold Wind Sect harrumphed. The three great Sects didn’t usually get along, and at the moment, he was well aware that the surrounding Cultivators were gazing at him with flashing eyes. He didn’t want to cause further complications, but in his heart, he had marked Meng Hao for death. He waved his right hand, and a white-colored medicinal pill appeared and shot toward Meng Hao.

It emitted a fragrant aroma. From his study of the ancient jade slip, Meng Hao could tell at a glance that this was the antidote for the Frigid Corpse Pill.

He grabbed it. He didn't eat it, though, but put it into his bag of holding. Then he took a breath and headed toward the peak of the East Mountain.

As for the experts from the three Great Sects, they watched him closely, ready to make a move in an instant if he tried to do anything out of the ordinary. Lord Revelation floated next to them, eyes glittering as he gazed at the East Mountain.

Meng Hao didn't soar directly up to the top of the peak. The Eccentrics would just have to be patient. Meng Hao walked the path up to the East Mountain, passing Wang Tengfei's Immortal's Cave. He also caught sight of Elder Brother Chen's and Elder Sister Xu's caves. Images from the past coalesced in his mind, and he let out a sigh.

Finally, he stopped in front of the Immortal's Cave that had belonged to him. He looked at it quietly, then moved on, eventually reaching the peak of the East Mountain, and the Reliance Sect's main temple hall.

The setting sun shone onto the hall, making it look very dignified. Taking broad steps, Meng Hao strode inside. His gaze swept over the statues inside, coming to rest on the statue of Patriarch Reliance.

The day that Patriarch Reliance had frightened off the Cultivators from the other Sects, he had told Meng Hao of the secret method to open the way to his Immortal's Cave. Now, over a year later, Meng Hao had finally returned.

The appointed year had already passed, actually. As Meng Hao approached the statue of Patriarch Reliance, the experts from the State of Zhao watched him from behind.

He took a deep breath, then lifted his right hand and pushed his finger against a spot on the statue. Every few seconds, he would push his finger against the same spot. Again and again he pushed, until he had pushed it one hundred seventy-nine times. Suddenly, the temple hall began to shudder. The statues shook violently, then shattered, causing the entire hall to collapse into pieces. Then, a brilliant light shined out from the statue of Patriarch Reliance, sweeping away all the debris and rubble, leaving only the statue itself.

Underneath the statue was a stone platform. When the surrounding Cultivators caught sight of this, their eyes shone with anticipation.

The statue radiated an incredible power, and its eyes shone as if they were alive. This caused the Cultivators to be even more excited, although none of them dared to approach the statue.

Meng Hao took a few steps back, then cupped his hands and bowed deeply. “Disciple Meng Hao wishes to disturb the Patriarch’s slumber. Patriarch, can you please open the door to your Immortal’s Cave?” He lifted his head, and his eyes glittered. His back to the State of Zhao experts, his lips moved as he murmured some complicated sounds.

“Converge!”

The instant the word left his mouth, the statue began to vibrate, and an even more brilliant light shone from its eyes. The light grew intensely bright, and a fierce wind kicked up. Looks of astonishment covered the faces of the State of Zhao experts.

Cracks appeared on the surface of the statue, more and more. Within the space of a few breaths, it exploded with a bang, sending pieces flying around in all directions. Now, the stone platform which the statue had stood on began to issue a blinding light.

The blinding light issued by the rotating spell caused the State of Zhao experts to breath heavily. Anyone familiar with spells like this could tell that it was a sealing spell which was being unbound.

A thunderous roar echoed out, and a wide beam of light shot up into the sky. Then the beam began to twist around until it formed a giant ring.

The inside of the ring grew blurry, and then transformed into a vortex, a passageway to another location.

As soon as the ring of light formed, Meng Hao leaped into the air and shot forward. He disappeared into the ring. Behind him, the experts from the State of Zhao hesitated, their faces twisting.

“Foundation Establishment disciples, you go first,” said Lord Revelation. The six Core Formation Cultivators nodded their agreement, and the dozen or so Foundation Establishment Cultivators gritted their teeth and flew forward. They disappeared into the vortex.

After the space of ten or so breaths, Lord Revelation and the Core Formation Eccentrics exchanged glances. One member from each of the three great Sects went next. After they entered, the remaining Eccentrics as well as Lord Revelation followed.

Upon entering the vortex, their minds spun, and they began to breathe hard. Looking around, the first thing they caught sight of was an enormous stone stele. Golden characters were inscribed onto the stele. The characters at the very top instantly sent their eyes shining.

“Sublime Spirit Scripture!!”