

The Heavens 851

Chapter 851: Loyal Personality

There was one other familiar person on the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul, Li Shiqi.

She wore a long white robe, and walked slowly across the black soil, sending out divine sense until she found an Immortal ruin off in the distance.

She would not make her selection casually, nor rashly begin to test herself against the ruin. That was her personality.

After walking along for some time, she finally came across a blood-colored lake. At one time, the lake had been vast and deep, but now there wasn't much left to it.

At the very bottom, a bloody flower was visible.

It was an orchid that was as red as blood.

A Blood Orchid.

Li Shiqi looked at the orchid silently for a while, after which a gleam of determination appeared in her eyes, and she walked toward it. This was the first ruin she had selected. Now that she had made her decision, she would see it through to the end. That was her personality.

“There is much good fortune in this world,” she murmured softly, “and I can't have all of it. I just want to find something that is suitable for me, that will be good enough.” As she walked toward the Blood Orchid, she felt increasing pressure. Eventually, she sat down cross-legged, her expression blank as she submerged herself in contemplation.

Virtually all of the people on the three Ancient Roads were similarly deep in contemplation. Some were like Li Shiqi, who made her selection carefully. Others tried out one Immortal ruin after another.

Different personalities. Different paths.

Time passed. Everyone was fighting for their own future, attempting to gain enlightenment regarding their own personal divine ability. The crowds outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were all watching closely and patiently. This was the creation of a divine ability, not some simple copy of some other magic. The more time one spent developing the divine ability, the more likely it would lead to something breathtaking.

“After these three stages, there will definitely be people who become famous overnight and draw the attention of all of the sects. There might even be some people, whether they are on the name lists or not, who be immediately recruited!”

“There will also be people who suffer disastrous failures and completely lose any advantage they previously had.”

“We definitely have to watch closely in case someone creates a ten-stele divine ability. In the future, that person will surely be deemed Chosen.”

Conversations like this played out in many of the various areas in the Ninth Mountain and Sea where people had gathered to watch the trial by fire. Some of those people were Chosen like Taiyang Zi, who had been to Planet South Heaven, but most of them were people who had never seen Meng Hao, only heard of his name.

As of this moment, all of these Chosen were watching the trial by fire with their own thoughts and feelings.

They knew that there very well might be people participating who in future days would be their competition within their own sect.

Time passed by. Soon, three days had passed. Meng Hao had already passed through 19 Immortal ruins, and after spending some time at each one had left disappointed and wondering if something was defective about him.

“It’s so depressing...” he said with a sigh. “How come the enlightenment I achieve at each of these ruins always has to do with spirit stones....” Currently, he was walking up to an enormous copper mirror, which, as soon as he laid eyes on it, filled him with the impulse to pull out a spirit stone and put it on the surface of the mirror.

After a moment, Meng Hao left the mirror, his face filled with determination.

“Apparently each one of these ruins makes me involuntarily think about spirit stones. That inevitably leads to thinking about those promissory notes... Well then, I’ll just make a divine ability that’s completely unique!” Taking a deep breath, he made his decision, and his eyes began to shine with a strange light. The more he thought about it, the more sense his choice made.

His body flashed as he shot off toward another Immortal ruin.

More time went by. Fatty had passed out and regained consciousness numerous times during the past few days. Every time he awoke, he would grab hold of the mushroom and viciously chomp a few bites out of it. He was currently chewing the final mouthful of the magical fungus. Feeling a bit anxious about leaving anything behind, he bit a chunk out of the wooden stump that the mushroom had been growing out of, swallowed it down, and then passed out again with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, and a look of anticipation.

Chen Fan still stood in front of the boulder, painting his beloved wife. His brush moved with increasing quickness, and Shan Ling’s image was becoming clearer and more and more lifelike with each brushstroke.

Wang Youcai continued to sit in front of the bronze mirror, his eyes bloodshot to the point where tears of blood were dripping down his face and onto his clothes. His entire body was trembling, and blue veins bulged out on his face and neck. His expression was savage and hideous.

“I can see more than this!!”

As Li Shiqi quietly stared at the Blood Orchid, her previously white clothes were beginning to turn red, the exact same red as the flower itself.

Three more days passed. Meng Hao had now passed through 39 Immortal ruins. It was at this point that rumbling echoed out from the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul, and all the cultivators in the Ninth Mountain and Sea who were watching the Ancient Roads turned their attention to the Nascent Soul vortex screen with eagerness.

“Someone succeeded!”

“The sound’s coming from the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul! I wonder how many stone steles will appear!”

The Patriarchs in the palace floating in the sky all began to look over.

On the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul, an old man had lifted his head back and was laughing uproariously. He waved his hand, and all of the black-colored mud and soil around him suddenly lifted up into the air, then began to form together into a statue. It had three heads and six arms, and as soon as it fully coalesced, emanated a shocking might.

“I have gained the enlightenment of this barrow!” declared the man. “This soil contains spirits, spirits that I will transmogrify into the divine wills of the people who are buried here! This will become my divine ability, which I shall henceforth name... Descent of the Spirits!”

As the old man’s voice rang out, two stone steles rumbled out from the void to land in front of him. A powerful glow could be seen that filled the entire world, revealing everything clearly to the onlookers.

“Two stone steles.... Not bad! This guy’s pretty good!”

“He also used the least amount of time. Earlier, nobody really noticed him, but now people are going to start paying attention to him.” As the discussions continued among the spectators, the representatives from the various sects quickly began to add the old man’s name to their records.

However, even while the old man’s laughter was still ringing out, rumbling sounds could be heard from seven or eight other cultivators on the three various Ancient Roads, as they too completed their divine abilities.

Rumbling filled the air as one stone stele after another descended. In all cases, though, there were only two pillars, never three.

In the following days, more and more contestants completed their divine abilities, one after another. All of the three Ancient Roads were the same. At the very least, one stone stele appeared, and at the most, four, which of course attracted much attention.

Suddenly, on the seventh day, on the Ancient Road of Dao Seeking, a roar could be heard unlike anything before it.

The old man with the age-transformation powers now bore the appearance of a middle-aged man, an age that was truly the prime of life. He floated in midair, performing an incantation gesture, causing an extra layer of skin to appear on him, which then began to peel off as if he was molting. These were not scattered bits of flesh, but a fully connected body of skin!

The skin seemed to be smiling, although that smile was horrifying to look at!

“I have created this divine ability, Life Possession!” he said coolly as he floated there in midair. “This skin that I have shed can possess the body of even a false Immortal!” Everything rumbled as eight stone steles descended.

Those eight steles caused wild colors to flash about, and sent the crowds out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea completely abuzz.

There were even several Patriarchs in the starry sky palace whose eyes shone with gleams of surprise.

“Eight stone steles! What a shocking creation!”

“He performed well in the previous stages, and now that he’s created an eight-stele divine ability, it goes to show that he definitely has potential!”

“Hahaha! The Three Great Daoist Societies might not spare him a second glance, but the Seven Seas Sect must have disciples such as him.”

The outside world was in an uproar, too. Eight stone steles was currently the most that had appeared for anyone.

Almost in the same moment as the eight stone steles descended, rumbling could be heard coming from the images of more people on the Ancient Roads trial, as if some specific critical point had been reached. More divine abilities appeared, although none of them caused eight steles to descend; at most, six appeared.

But then... an incredible noise rose up on the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul, and everything began to tremble. Wind screamed and massive energy surged that stifled even the old man with the eight stone steles. Soon, all of the powerful experts in the outside world were looking over.

The source of the noise... was Fatty!

He hadn't made a very big impression in the previous stages, mostly because of his lack of control. Now, he opened his eyes, and while they seemed blank at first, it was possible to see that nearly half of the huge woodpile had been consumed; it appeared to be in a shambles.

Fatty rose numbly to his feet, then suddenly opened his mouth and took a deep breath. That breath caused the Heavens to tremble, and clouds to gather together. In the blink of an eye... an enormous mouth was visible up above.

The mouth was filled with numerous razor-sharp teeth, and as it bit down toward the ground, it grew larger and larger, until it was more than ten thousand meters wide. Everything trembled violently as the enormous mouth slashed through anything and everything to take an enormous bite.

Everyone on the outside looked on with wide eyes and slack jaws.

It was at this point that the Heavens rippled as thirteen stone steles descended, rumbling, from up above. They were floating in the air around Fatty as his eyes grew clear from his previous reverie.

"Thirteen stone steles! What... what divine ability did that fat guy create?!?"

"Thirteen stone steles! That's second only to Sir Fan from back in the day! This little fatty is extraordinary! I never imagined that he would have such powerful intuition!!"

In the palace in the starry sky, the sect Patriarchs were all watching with wide eyes. Even the Three Daoist Societies were shocked. It was at this point that the Patriarch from the Paleo-Immortal Mausoleum, one of the Five Holy Lands, suddenly rose to his feet. It was with incredible speed, and before anyone could react, that he shot forward and disappeared into the screen up ahead.

There were four other Patriarchs who stood up, but they weren't fast enough, and the Patriarch from the Paleo-Immortal Mausoleum suddenly appeared in the world in front of Fatty. He had long gray hair that draped down over his shoulders, and wore a long robe.

“What is the name of this divine ability?!” he asked as soon as he materialized. He immediately waved his hand, causing the entire area to be locked down so that no one else could enter.

Fatty started shivering.

“I’m not sure,” he replied, unsure of how this old man had appeared in front of him. “I just ate some of that wood, and the magical fungus, then I had a dream about being really hungry, and my gums were itching and I constantly felt like I had to file my teeth and eat stuff.”

“Excellent, excellent. A loyal personality and an excellent divine ability. Henceforth, it shall be known as Gulping Down Heaven!

“Are you willing to join the Paleo-Immortal Mausoleum as one of our disciples?!” The old man’s eyes shone with a mysterious and approving light as he looked at Fatty.

“Uh, alright,” replied Fatty, blinking. Then he asked, “But... but what about all my beloved concubines back home? Can they come with me?”

“As I thought, you’re a man who values relationships. Don’t worry. Your concubines may also join the Paleo-Immortal Mausoleum!” With an emotional sigh, the old man waved his hand. Fatty was covered with a brilliant light, and then he vanished, and the world around him collapsed. Back in the palace in the starry sky, the various Patriarchs weren’t very happy, but there was nothing they could do.

Chapter 852: Flowers in Full Bloom

The other Patriarchs were angrily grumbling in the palace up in the starry sky.

“Dammit, I was just a bit too slow and lost out on a potential star! He got snatched away!”

In the outside world, great waves of shock rolled about as a consequence of Fatty being taken as a disciple.

“What was that fat guy’s name again? I can’t believe he got taken as a disciple by the Paleo-Immortal Mausoleum, one of the Five Great Holy Lands!”

“I’m pretty sure his name is Li Fugui. His life is sure going to be different from now on!”

“Considering he made a thirteen-stele divine ability, that Li Fugui is definitely Chosen. Think about it; it won’t be long before he has a cultivation base breakthrough. Eventually, he’ll definitely get to Dao Seeking, and then he’ll then move on to Immortality!”

“But what about that tree stump he was on top of? How come it had all those bite marks, as if a dog had been chewing on the wood? Was it like that from the beginning?”

All of the spectators outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were shaken inwardly. Some couldn’t figure out what to think, others were filled with envy.

As the discussions continued, another rumbling sound could be heard from the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul. This time, it came from Li Shiqi. By now, her garments were entirely the color of blood. She sat cross-legged next to the Blood Orchid, almost as if she herself had become a part of it!

She opened her eyes, and in that moment, the Blood Orchid... completely wilted!

When that happened, Li Shiqi’s countenance shone with unprecedented spirit and vigor. Instantly, her cultivation base rose up, pushing her immeasurably close to Spirit Severing.

At first, she looked confused, but once she regained clarity, she performed an incantation with her delicate hand and then pointed up into the air. All the Heavens up above turned blood red, and a Blood Orchid materialized over her and slowly began to bloom.

Rumbling echoed out, and one stone stele after another descended from the blood-red Heavens. One, two, three... ten, twelve... thirteen....

In the end, fourteen stone steles fell from up above to stand tall in the earth around Li Shiqi, causing everything to tremble and shake. As Li Shiqi rose to her feet, she was the complete focus of all attention.

The audiences in the Ninth Mountain and Sea exploded into an uproar.

“Heavens! She’s even more shocking than that fat guy! Fourteen stone steles!!”

“She was enlightened about the Blood Orchid? The Church of the Blood Orchid is definitely going to go crazy! They won’t hesitate to pay any price to recruit her!”

“How could it be that two Chosen appeared on the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul? Neither of them were very eye-catching before, and yet now, they’re so shocking!”

When Fatty made his debut, five Patriarchs in the starry sky palace had flown out, including the Patriarch from the Paleo-Immortal Mausoleum. Now, however, seven people flew into the air. No one from the Three Great Daoist Societies had moved a muscle. However, even the Patriarch from Moonset Lake, one of the Five Great Holy Lands, was in motion.

The seven Patriarchs reached the screen at the same time, and then all of them appeared in front of Li Shiqi in the world of the trial by fire.

“Girl, are you willing to join the Moonset Lake, one of the Five Great Holy Lands?!”

“The Five Great Holy Lands already have plenty of Chosen,” said another of the seven. “If you join them, you might never be able to distinguish yourself. Based on your powers of understanding, you could definitely be an Empress of this generation in the Church of the Emperor Immortal!” Everyone was now trying to recruit Li Shiqi.

It was at this point that an old man wearing a blood-colored robe suddenly spoke up.

“You were enlightened regarding the Blood Orchid, and used that to create a divine ability. This shows that you have destiny connecting you to the Church of the Blood Orchid. Join us, and you will be in line to become our Holy Daughter!” The other six Patriarchs present were all shocked. The cultivators recruited from within the trial by fire usually had to pass through a probationary period. However, the Patriarch from the Church of the Blood Orchid offered to make a candidate their Holy Daughter, which was not in keeping with the general rule. However, considering she had been enlightened regarding the Blood Orchid, the others could understand.

Li Shiqi looked quietly for a moment at the old man from the Church of the Blood Orchid. Finally, she made a curtsying bow.

“Senior, I am Li Shiqi, and I am willing to join the Church of the Blood Orchid.”

The uproar in the outside world grew even more intense. Li Shiqi left with the Patriarch from the Church of the Blood Orchid, after which all the cultivators from that organization knew that a young woman named Li Shiqi was like the fish who had jumped over the dragon gate, and had successfully passed her examination.

In the future, her glory would likely exceed that of Li Fugui. She had gained enlightenment of the Blood Orchid, and had then created a divine ability from it. To the Church of the Blood Orchid, which had been established because of the Blood Orchid itself, this definitely qualified her to be a candidate to become a Holy Daughter.

By this time, Meng Hao had passed through 72 Immortal ruins. Fewer people were paying attention to him because of all the commotion caused by Fatty and Li Shiqi. However, some people with especially high cultivation bases were the type to consider the future, and look deeply into matters.

They did not participate in the various discussions, but when they saw Meng Hao gaining enlightenment from so many Immortal ruins, they were inwardly shocked. The Patriarchs in the palace were also paying attention to this, although no one took the initiative to say anything about it.

By now it was obvious that if any of the other sects tried to fight over someone like Meng Hao, they would be forced to offend the Three Great Daoist Societies. After all... the Three Great Daoist Societies were in charge of the entire trial by fire.

Everyone well knew that in the assessment of divine ability creation, only those with wild ambitions could gain enlightenment from so many Immortal ruins. Regardless of whether it be on the Ancient Road of Dao Seeking, Spirit Severing, or the Nascent Soul, there were few people who walked the same path as Meng Hao. Most others gained enlightenment from a handful at most, which was a vast difference from Meng Hao.

As people in the outside world discussed the matter of Li Shiqi and Fatty, Wang Youcai sat cross-legged in front of the bronze mirror. His eyes were completely red, and continuously dripped with blood. His body was trembling, almost as if he were possessed.

“I can see even more! I can see everything....

“My latent talent doesn’t measure up to Dong Hu, and my cultivation base is not as good as Meng Hao’s. But I refuse to back down!” More blood built up in Wang Youcai’s eyes, and his pupils seemed on the verge of exploding.

“This is my only chance. In the past several stages, nobody was paying attention to me. But now... I WILL rise to prominence!

“I want to see... everything! I want to see all destinies. My eyes will see what lies beyond the Heavens, and past the underworld that lies beneath the Earth!” Blood flowed out of his eyes continuously, and his pupils were beginning to shatter.

After ten breaths of time... a rumbling sound could be heard from the world in which Wang Youcai sat. At the same time, Wang Youcai’s murmuring voice could be heard.

“I can see now....” In the instant he spoke the words, his eyes suddenly collapsed into pieces. Everything in front of him went black, and from this instant, was gone for all eternity. As his eyes shattered, he closed them.

The shattering occurred in a split second, and as it did, the world around Wang Youcai cracked and... exploded into pieces.

As everything fell apart, he rose to his feet. Stone steles were descended through the shattered canopy above, one after another. By now, all attention on the outside world was focused on Wang Youcai.

They saw the world shatter, and saw the stone steles descended, and everyone gasped.

One, five, ten, thirteen, fifteen....

A total of sixteen stone steles descended, swirling around Wang Youcai, who stood there quietly with his eyes closed.

“Henceforth, my eyes shall remain closed in perpetuity. Should they open, Heaven and Earth will experience shocking changes!

“My divine ability, is called.... Blackest Night.”

As Wang Youcai's voice rang out, the Ninth Mountain and Sea looked on in astonishment.

"Sixteen stone steles! There are actually sixteen stone steles!"

"That's Heaven-defying! From ancient times until now, the only person who ever exceeded that is Sir Fan of the Nine Seas God World, whose exploits are recorded in the ancient records!!"

"I bet even the Three Great Daoist Societies are shocked!"

In the starry sky palace, many of the Patriarchs of the various sects gasped as they watched Wang Youcai. Even they were shocked by what they were seeing.

"He destroyed his own eyes to create a divine ability, leaving him blind! However, considering his battle prowess, even though he's in the Nascent Soul stage, he's capable of slaughtering Spirit Severing! When he reaches Dao Seeking, if he opens his eyes, the result will be shocking."

"How ruthless! How stubborn!"

Ten people flew toward the display screens with incredible speed. The fastest was the Patriarch from Moonset Lake. However, he did not enter the screen, but rather turned and clasped hands to everyone else.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Daoists, the Daoist magic of Moonset Lake is quite suitable for this child. After the moon sets, there is no light in the sky. Instead, the black night is endlessly deep. I request... that you please do not fight with me over this child!"

"Daoist Elders of the Three Great Daoist Societies, if you give some face to Moonset Lake, then we promise to repay the favor in future days!" He clasped hands and bowed deeply, his expression very somber. Everyone else stopped in their tracks, their eyes glittering. No one spoke, but instead looked toward the Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies.

The Patriarch from the Nine Seas God World thought for a moment and then nodded his head. "I take no issue."

Sitting in the center position of the Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies was an old man who had the bearing of a transcendent being. He wore a white robe, and had a calm expression. Immortal qi swirled around him as he said, “There is a person here who has destiny with the Immortal Ancient Daoist Rite. However, he will not join us during this trial by fire. Actually, the only reason I agreed to hold this event was to see him. The person you have mentioned is not him, so I will do nothing to stop you.”

Next to him was an old man from the Sublime Flow Sword Grotto. He smiled slightly, a smile that seemed somewhat cold and almost looked like a fierce sword.

“I have also taken a liking to this child, but... huh?” The old man from the Sublime Flow Sword Grotto had just begun speaking when suddenly, his face flickered, and he looked over at the screens. Next to him, the Patriarchs from the Nine Seas God World and the Immortal Ancient Daoist Rite did the same.

“91!”

“He’s gained enlightenment from 91 Immortal ruins!”

On the Ancient Road of Dao Seeking, Meng Hao stood in a tall pagoda. When his eyes opened, they seemed confused, but quickly regained clarity. Without pause, he left and headed in another direction.

He sent his divine sense out, looking for more Immortal ruins, eventually finding the 92nd, and then the 93rd....

Time passed by on the Ancient Roads. One person after another created their divine abilities, but none were as shocking as those which had occurred earlier. Chen Fan created his divine ability, but only eight stone steles descended in response.

At any other time, it would have been shocking, but at this point, it was nothing especially noteworthy.

Time passed, and now more attention was being paid to the participants who had not created their divine abilities yet, but were still continuing to gain enlightenment from the Immortal ruins. Everyone understood that these people would either fail, or would have Heaven-defying results.

Once again, Meng Hao became the center of attention. By now, the number of Immortal ruins he had gained enlightenment from had exceeded that of Sir Fan!

“96!!”

“Does he really seem like the kind of person who can gain enlightenment from all 99 ruins? From ancient times until now, less than a hundred people have ever done that! Of course, of all those people, Sir Fan was the only person that ended up creating a nineteen-stele divine ability!”

“No one else could measure up to Sir Fan. I wonder how many stone steles... will descend when Fang Mu creates his divine ability!?”

Chapter 853: Nine Bridges!

Outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea, everyone was watching Meng Hao and discussing his progress.

“Maybe he’ll outdo Wang Youcai from earlier. Or who knows, maybe he won’t match up!”

“There’s no way he’ll come in behind Wang Youcai. From ancient times until now, less than a hundred people have ever gained enlightenment from more than 90 Immortal Ruins!”

“You can tell that this Fang Mu has terrifying divine sense and incredible willpower. The final creation of his divine ability will truly be a test of his intuition!”

In the palace in the starry sky, each and every one of the various Patriarchs were also staring fixedly at the screen that represented Meng Hao’s area.

While everyone paid such close attention to the screens, Meng Hao was standing atop a towering cliff. His eyes opened, and his expression was blank like before. Then he headed off into another direction.

Nearby the cliff were the ruins of an archaic temple. This was the 97th Immortal ruin he had gained enlightenment from, which then caused another dot of light to appear on his screen in the outside world. That immediately sent everyone into an uproar.

“97 Immortal ruins! This Fang Mu defies the Heavens!”

“I can’t wait to see whether or not he can create an even more Heaven-defying divine ability!”

“It’s not guaranteed. Of all the people who have done a similar thing, only Sir Fan followed up with a peerless divine ability!”

As for all the other people who were going about the trial by fire in the same way as Meng Hao, the person with the next greatest amount of Immortal ruins under their belt only had 83!

That was the young man in the mask. Had Meng Hao not participated in the trial by fire, he would definitely have been the complete center of attention in the previous stages, and would now be in first place.

Meng Hao’s appearance on the scene cast him in the shadows.

Currently, he had no idea what was going on outside his own world. His expression was one of determination as he gritted his teeth and continued onward. He left the 83rd Immortal ruin and then began to search for another.

As more time passed, they made slower and slower progress. It took a few days before Meng Hao finally regained his senses in the 97th Immortal Ruin. After sitting there cross-legged for some time, he slowly rose to his feet and made his way to a different location, a deep crater.

Glittering light could be seen deep within the crater, as if, years in the past, a meteor had smashed down here.

This was not a location that just anyone could find. Anyone who did find it would find it difficult to endure the pressure. Only Meng Hao, with his incredible divine sense and shocking willpower, was able to descend into the crater and then sit down cross-legged.

“98!” The crowds in the outside world were shocked, and the Patriarchs in the starry sky palace looked on with glittering eyes.

“After this, there’s only one more, and that will be all 99!”

“From ancient times until now, no one in the Spirit Realm has ever gained enlightenment from so many Immortal ruins on the Ancient Road of Dao Seeking!”

“Who exactly is this Fang Mu?! Where is he from? If he can really pull it off, his fame will shake all of the Ninth Mountain!” The outside world was abuzz, but the palace in the starry sky was dead silent.

All of the Patriarchs from the various sects were paying close attention, and none of them were speaking.

As for the other competitors in the trial by fire, no one was paying attention to any of them. Even the masked young man, who had just reached the 88th Immortal ruin, was behind Meng Hao, who was clearly in first place.

Five days passed!

Meng Hao slowly opened his eyes. He looked exhausted, and even more blank than before. This time, he had teetered on the edge of not awakening. The crater was filled with chunks and fragments of stone, each one of which emitted different auras, which had combined together to transform into an ancient vortex that influenced the mind.

It was as if he had been experiencing a Daoist magic that came straight from an ancient era. Someone had waved a hand, and a star up above was crushed down into a meteor, which then slammed into the ground.

The massive blow had cracked the land, and shattered some of the heavenly bodies up above. In that instant, Meng Hao had felt as if his own divine sense were being ripped to shreds. It was only by virtue of his intense willpower that he was able to claw his way back to lucidity.

“More and more difficult....” he thought. “I’ve already gained enlightenment from 98 Immortal ruins. According to what Ling Yunzi said, there are a total of 99 Immortal ruins, and after that, an intact Immortal pavilion!

“But, after sending my divine sense out, I can sense the final Immortal ruin, but not any Immortal pavilion.

“Unfortunately, even with my divine sense, I’m only able to sense the general direction of that final Immortal ruin, and not anything specific about it. However, I have a premonition that it... is very dangerous!” After a moment, he stood up and walked silently out of the crater. After that, he stood on the edge of the crater, thinking.

He was currently hesitating about whether to continue onward, or just make his divine ability right here. By this point, he already had some ideas about what type of divine ability he wanted to create.

After a moment, his eyes shone with decisiveness. He was not the type of person to back down easily. Even if the danger was great, he was stubborn. Were that not the case, he would not have been able to travel the long path from being a scholar to possessing eighty percent of the power of a true Immortal!

“The more powerful the divine ability, the more stone steles will descend. And I need stone steles!” Meng Hao took a deep breath, ceased any thoughts of hesitation, then headed off in the direction of the 99th Immortal ruin, as indicated by his divine sense.

Although he didn’t know the specific location, Meng Hao was confident that he would be able to find it. He just needed to expend a little bit of time.

One day. Two days. Three days....

The palace in the starry sky was completely silent as the Patriarchs of the various sects looked on.

Then, an archaic voice echoed out within the palace. This person had not spoken at all yet, nor had he attempted to solicit recruits. It was an old man from the Kunlun Society.

“Can he find the 99th Immortal ruin? Actually, I’m very curious about something. This 99th ruin which is shared by all three Ancient Roads... what exactly does it look like?

“Fellow Daoists of the Three Great Daoist Societies, could you quell my curiosity?”

Were it any other sect that inquired about the matter, the Three Great Daoist Societies would pay heed to the question. But the Kunlun Society was different. The three Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies exchanged glances, after which the old man from the Nine Seas God World spoke up.

“According to the legends, during the great war, the three exalted Paragons united all of the Immortal Ancient Doyens. They extracted all of the Immortal qi from the world and sacrificed it to a boundless spirit, which was the fallen... Pāramitā Heaven-Trampling Foundation!”

These words provoked a collective gasp from all of the Patriarchs. Looks of astonishment appeared on their faces, and some of them even rose to their feet.

“WHAT?!”

“The legendary Pāramitā Foundation?”

The Kunlun Society elder’s eyes went wide. He said nothing, but from his expression, he was clearly shaken.

Time passed, and Meng Hao continued to search for the 99th Immortal ruin. More people created divine abilities on the three Ancient Roads. There were also people who failed, and chose to give up.

Seven days later, there were only seven people on the three Ancient Roads who had yet to create a divine ability!

Those seven people were now the subject of intense scrutiny. Everyone was watching to see what would happen. There was one person on the Ancient Road of the Nascent Soul, two people on the Ancient Road of Spirit Severing, and the remaining four were on the Ancient Road of Dao Seeking.

One of them was the young man in the mask, another was the cultivator with the mosquitos.

“If anybody in this trial by fire can exceed twenty stone steles, it’s one of these seven!”

“See that one, with 90 Immortal ruins? His name is Li Yan, that cultivator with the mask. He’s yet another that has gained enlightenment of 90!!”

“This is really incredible. Now there’s a second person in this trial by fire who has acquired enlightenment from 90 Immortal ruins!”

There were many cries of shock in the crowds in the outside world as quite a few people began to pay attention to the masked young man, Li Yan. As for the Patriarchs in the starry sky palace, they too would occasionally glance away from Meng Hao to look at the masked young man's screen.

Currently, Meng Hao was making his way through the world, following the direction of his divine sense as he searched for the 99th Immortal ruin. He had already searched for seven days, and felt certain that he had thoroughly explored all of the areas indicated by his divine sense. Despite that, he still hadn't found the ruin.

"Just... where is it?" Suddenly, Meng Hao stopped in place. Frowning, he looked around silently, and then simply closed his eyes. He sent his divine sense out again, and could vaguely sense that there were Immortal ruins up ahead of him. When he opened his eyes, he saw nothing.

Muttering to himself, he closed his eyes again. Then, without opening his eyes, he began to walk forward. It was using this method that he proceeded on for about two hours until, suddenly, his body trembled.

He did not open his eyes, and yet, was able to see something incredible with his divine sense, right there in front of him.

He saw... nine bridges!

Nine incredibly shocking bridges that seemed to rise above the heavens. The sight of these bridges was unmatchably astonishing as they rose up into the air, each one higher than the one before it. They formed something that almost looked like a staircase, linking up into the boundless starry sky.

As he examined the bridges with his divine sense, Meng Hao gradually got the feeling that if someone could tread these nine bridges all the way to their end, then that person would definitely become matchlessly powerful.

Meng Hao's body was trembling; there was an indescribable pressure radiating out from the bridges, something that seemed capable of crushing him in an instant. Right now, it wasn't being sent out at full force, but rather, simply swirling around the bridges.

Even still, Meng Hao coughed up a mouthful of blood and staggered backward several paces. He had the intense sensation that these nine bridges were actually incomplete. Were they intact, then even looking at them would destroy him in body and spirit.

“What exactly are these bridges?!?!” he gasped, not daring to open his eyes. He carefully observed with his divine sense, and began to experience a vision.

He saw illusory images of things that had happened countless years in the past. He saw a figure that looked like a sun attempting to tread on the bridges. However, before he could get past the first bridge, he shattered into countless pieces.

He saw an old man with white hair, who radiated boundless coldness. He stepped onto the first bridge, then the second....

As he proceeded higher and higher, he became more and more powerful. In the end, all the colors in the sky and the land faded. The ninth bridge began to tremble, as if it couldn't stand up to the old man's steps.

The old man reached the end and stood atop the final bridge. Then he turned, and Meng Hao was able to clearly see his eyes. In that instant, Meng Hao's mind filled with roaring.

Blood sprayed from his mouth, and he once again staggered back. When he lifted his head back up, he unhesitatingly opened his eyes.

As soon as his eyes opened, the nine bridges vanished. The air up ahead of him was absolutely empty, devoid of any object.

“This place is the location of the 99th Immortal ruin!” Meng Hao was panting, and his eyes glowed with a strange light. He wiped the blood from his mouth, sat down cross-legged, and rotated his cultivation base to begin healing his injuries.

It was at this point that, in the outside world, 99 dots of light appeared on the screen which represented him in the outside world!

Chapter 854: Secret Clues!

“He found it!” In the palace, the old men from the Three Great Daoist Societies were all watching with brightly shining eyes. This was especially true of the old man from the Immortal Ancient Daoist Rite, whose entire face glowed with unprecedented brightness.

“He is the first person from ancient times until now to tread the Ancient Road with a Spirit Realm cultivation base and find the Pāramitā Heavenly Foundation!”

“He can only observe from a distance, not get near. Based on his divine sense and willpower, he should be able to determine that it isn’t safe. He won’t brazenly get close.”

“That depends on his good fortune. In these worlds of the sixth, seventh, and eighth stages, time passes differently than in the outside world. Actually, contemplating enlightenment for one day in there is like spending ten years at it out here!”

Murmured conversations filled the palace.

In contrast, the crowds in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were buzzing with chatter.

When they saw the 99th dot of light, everyone knew exactly what it meant. Everyone was in an uproar, and now, the name Fang Mu was deeply imprinted in the hearts of everyone present.

Even as everyone on the outside was in a tumult, Meng Hao opened his eyes. He breathed heavily for a moment, then gritted his teeth and closed his eyes again. He sent his divine sense out to once again observe the nine astonishing bridges.

The bridges appeared to be complete, but Meng Hao knew that if they had been, he would have been killed simply by looking at them. Right now, even observing them from a distance caused him to be injured. Actually, it was a good thing the bridges were broken down. Otherwise, considering his cultivation base, as soon as his divine sense touched them, he would have been completely annihilated.

“Nine Heaven-defying bridges like this were actually destroyed.... These are no mere bridges! They were obviously especially created to allow cultivators to experience incredible cultivation base growth, to be able to punch through to an incredible realm of power!

“I never imagined that I would be able to see something like this here! This is extremely good fortune for me!” As he thought about it, Meng Hao’s mind suddenly trembled.

“There was never any rule about only being able to create one divine ability.... In that case, why not create two?” Originally, Meng Hao had already devised a plan to create a divine ability, but after seeing the nine bridges, a new form of enlightenment had appeared in his mind, which then transformed into the shape of a divine ability. Furthermore, he didn’t wish to give up on either of the two ideas.

The first divine ability aligned perfectly with his personality. As for the second one, Meng Hao sincerely desired to possess it.

He took a deep breath and then decided to stop thinking about it. He focused his divine sense on the nine bridges, and on resisting the pressure. Not only was he imprinting the image of the bridge onto his mind, he decided to try to get a bit closer, to acquire a bit of good fortune from the pressure weighing down.

Time slowly passed by.

Ten days later, only four people remained. The other three had finally realized they couldn’t continue to gain enlightenment from the Immortal ruins, and had decided to create their divine abilities. Of those three, the individual who had found the most Immortal ruins had found 76.

The divine abilities they created were powerful. One of them caused eleven stone steles to descend, which provoked a lot of attention.

Ten more days passed, and of the four remaining people on the Ancient Roads, two of them could not continue, and chose to create their divine abilities. One of them was the young man with the mosquitos, who had found 89 Immortal ruins. At that point, he created a thirteen-stele divine ability.

Quite a few people were astonished by this, and the young man quickly rose to prominence.

As of this moment, there were only two people left on the Ancient Road. One of them was Meng Hao, and the other was the young man in the mask, Li Yan!

Li Yan had already found the 93rd Immortal ruin, and was now the second person in the trial by fire to have exceeded Sir Fan.

He and Meng Hao were the focus of the attention of the entire Ninth Mountain and Sea.

Three more days passed. Meng Hao coughed up some blood, and his vision went blurry. During the more than twenty days that had passed, he had sustained injuries on multiple occasions as he forced himself to continue to contemplate the nine bridges, and imprint their image on his mind.

It was difficult, but with his intense willpower, he was slowly but surely able to continue to grind away. He was not so wildly ambitious that he intended to commit all nine bridges to memory, only the first one.

Finally, the twenty-first day arrived. In this special location, contemplating enlightenment for that amount of time was like spending more than two hundred years on the outside. Rumbling filled Meng Hao's mind, and his eyes shone with the glow of enlightenment as the full image of the first bridge materialized in front of him.

In that instant, deep within his mind, he was able to sense exactly how damaged the bridge was. Suddenly, ninety-nine percent of the bridge actually vanished, and he found that the first bridge was actually... nothing more than a fist-sized rock!

It was a mere stone, but even looking at it caused Meng Hao to cough up blood, and he knew that if he approached it, he would be destroyed in body and spirit. These more than twenty days of contemplation were like two hundred or more years in the outside world.

In the moment that he understood the real situation regarding the first bridge, and the outline of the bridge itself appeared in his mind, images began to appear in his eyes, a vision.

Within the vision were nine enormous suns hauling an astonishing statue. They seemed so large that they were impossible to see the ends of. An army of countless cultivators lashed out with attacks that ripped a huge hole in the air, which they then entered.

Behind the shocking statue were nine astonishing bridges that shook the heavens. Boundless light that covered everything radiated off of them.

The scene caused Meng Hao's mind to tremble, and reminded him of the things he had seen back in the Immortal Ancient Daoist Rite Temple. Some of the images were almost exactly the same.

Then, the vision changed. He saw a world-shaking war. Countless living things were being slaughtered, and heavenly bodies collapsed. The starry sky shattered, and in every breath of time, endless numbers of lives perished.

The nine bridges exerted incredible pressure, causing the starry sky to begin to collapse. Next, Meng Hao saw three enormous figures appear up above. When they joined forces, the starry sky disappeared, and the world went black, as if all the auras in existence were absorbed, condensed to form nine mountains, which then crushed down toward the nine bridges.

The bridges... shattered!

The vision abruptly ended. Meng Hao had no time to thoroughly analyze the images before they vanished. He was left standing there, his jaw slack, his eyes wide. His mind was blank and trembling.

“Those nine mountains....” Meng Hao was panting. From what he could sense, he had only been able to glimpse a tiny bit of some huge secret.

“Why does the world I live in consist of only nine mountains and nine seas, with four planets circling around each of those mountains?!”

“I never thought about it too much before, but how come Planet South Heaven is so special? Why did that Outsider want my parents to guard it?!”

“Also, what about that place I went to underneath the Ancient Dao Lakes on Planet South Heaven? That being which was crushed and then sealed there said something like... Immortals are the source of all chaos!”

“What exactly does that mean?!” Meng Hao’s breathing was unprecedentedly ragged, and he was shivering all over. He now had an idea of what it all meant, but didn’t dare to consider that it was true.

As his mind trembled, the nine bridges in front of him vanished. This time, they really were gone; even when Meng Hao searched with his divine sense, he was unable to find them.

After a long moment of silence, Meng Hao sighed lightly. The matter of the vision was something far removed from the current situation, and considering the level of his cultivation base, he wasn't really qualified to begin to probe such secrets.

"One day, I'll understand it all!" he thought, his eyes shining with determination. He took a deep breath and sent his divine sense out one last time. Seeing that it was impossible to locate the bridges, he decided to search for the Immortal pavilion that Ling Yunzi had mentioned.

Several days later, he still remained empty handed. No matter what methods he used, even closing his eyes, he was unable to detect any Immortal pavilion. In fact, he was now fairly certain that he would be unable to find it at all, so he decided to sit down cross-legged in the location where the nine bridges had stood, and begin to create his divine ability!

He quickly slipped into a trance.

Many ideas and thoughts flitted through his mind, as well as numerous flickering images. The enlightenment he had received in the 99 Immortal ruins began to merge together, until finally, a will exploded out from within his mind that was a divine ability belonging solely to him.

As Meng Hao was piecing together the enlightenment to create a divine ability, Li Yan had passed the 95th Immortal ruin, but could not find the 96th.

After a while, he had no choice but to stop regretfully and begin to create his divine ability.

By this point, everyone out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea, as well as the Patriarchs in the starry sky palace, were now waiting to see what types of divine abilities Meng Hao and Li Yan would create.

There was something else going on that nobody in the palace noticed. Although the elders from the Three Great Daoist Societies seemed to be looking at the vortex screens with glittering eyes, deep within their gazes could be seen faint sighs of disappointment.

Such sighs were deeply hidden, yet seemed to be a disappointment that was not entirely unexpected.

Days passed, and the anticipation among the audience out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea only continued to grow.

“Just what types of divine abilities are Fang Mu and Li Yan creating? Which one will have the most stone steles?!”

“My guess is Fang Mu. After all, he gained enlightenment from 99 Immortal ruins. That’s unheard of!”

“It won’t necessarily be Fang Mu. It could be that he just took advantage of some lucky situations. In the end, I bet the best divine ability will be created by Li Yan!”

“If neither of them can create a sixteen-stele divine ability, then that means Wang Youcai will take first place in the sixth, seventh, and eighth stages!”

Two more days passed, when suddenly the area around the masked Li Yan burst into flames.

The flames were black, and instantly set the Heavens ablaze. Li Yan’s eyes opened, and his pupils were composed entirely of fire!

Flames roared all around him, covering the land, burning everything. The entire world became a sea of flames, and then began to melt, as if it couldn’t sustain the heat. The people outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were now able to clearly see Li Yan and everything that was happening in his world.

Gasps rang out from many areas in the Ninth Mountain and Sea, and in the palace in the starry sky, the Patriarchs looked on with strange gleams in their eyes. The old man from the Bones of the Flamedevil, one of the Five Great Holy Lands, couldn’t help but observe with wide, glowing eyes.

“Li Yan is incredible! What type of flame divine ability did he create? It can actually melt the entire world!”

“He’ll definitely get at least sixteen steles. His divine ability appears to be on a similar level as Wang Youcai’s, but from the feel of it, it’s more powerful!”

Li Yan slowly stood, a proud expression on his face beneath the mask. Then, he breathed in three times.

Each breath caused everything to tremble, and the flame sea to spread out even farther. After three breaths, the entire world was engulfed in flames. Finally, Li Yan inhaled deeply.

When he inhaled, all of the flames in the world began to churn and roil, tumbling toward Li Yan as he sucked them into his body.

Next, a rumbling sound emanated out from his body, and although no one could see any flames, when they looked at Li Yan himself, it caused them to feel twinges of pain like that caused by fire.

“A body magic!”

“Heavens! That’s the most difficult thing to create! A body magic!!”

“It’s not just any body magic, that’s almost a Daoist magic!”

“Although it’s not a complete Daoist magic, it’s definitely unique. If in the future he continues to cultivate it to the peak, there’s a high likelihood he could refine it into a true legacy Daoist magic!!”

Chapter 855: A Writ of Karma!

Everyone in the Ninth Mountain and Sea was completely shaken. In the starry sky palace, the Patriarchs of the various sects looked on with strange gleams in their eyes. The elder from the Holy Land of the Bones of the Flamedevil chuckled and rose to his feet.

“Presumably, this young man is not the type to be selected by the Three Great Daoist Societies. This magic is connected by destiny to the Bones of the Flamedevil. Ladies and Gentlemen, I humbly request that you do not compete with me in this matter.” Even as he spoke, the old man moved with incredible speed. However, at the same time, eight or nine other people sped forward.

Of the Five Great Holy Lands, Wang Youcai and Fatty had been taken by the Moonset Lake and the Paleo-Immortal Mausoleum respectively. Up to now, only the Blue Lotus Sky, Mount Sun, and the Bones of the Flamedevil hadn’t truly made a move. Now, though, they sprang into action.

Even as they neared Li Yan’s world, rumbling echoed out as multiple stone steles descended. One, three, five, seven....

In total, seventeen stone steles appeared!!

One more than Wang Youcai!

Each one of the seventeen stone steles was fully three hundred meters tall, and as they spun around Li Yan, they turned into a vortex that sent light towering up into the sky. Li Yan stood in the middle of it all, surrounded by the boundless glow, looking like an unparalleled Chosen.

When the crowds out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea saw the seventeen stone steles, they were completely shocked.

“From ancient times until now, he’s second only to Sir Fan!”

“Seventeen stone steles! He’s definitely worthy to have been enlightened regarding 95 Immortal ruins! He created a body magic that summoned seventeen stone steles!”

“It’s impossible to predict what kind of future he will have, especially since his cultivation base is at the peak of Dao Seeking. Once he joins a sect, he’ll get some training and will definitely become an incredible Chosen!”

All sorts of envious and jealous comments could be heard echoing out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea. In Li Yan’s world, the Patriarchs from the various sects had arrived. After some bickering, the Bones of the Flamedevil managed to recruit Li Yan as a disciple.

As of now, the only person left in the world of the sixth, seventh, and eighth stages was Meng Hao. His divine ability had not fully been created yet.

Everyone was now watching closely, including the Three Great Daoist Societies in the palace up in the starry sky.

The anticipation in the air continued to grow more intense.

“If he can outdo everyone else, then he’ll take first place! Let’s see how many stone steles his divine ability will cause to descend!”

“He gained enlightenment from 99 Immortal ruins. If he gets anything less than fifteen stone steles, it would be completely disappointing!”

“It’s hard to say. I heard that one year, somebody gained enlightenment from 98 Immortal ruins, but in the end only created a nine-stele divine ability!”

Three days later, as Meng Hao sat there cross-legged, his eyes suddenly opened.

“Each time I gained enlightenment from the first 98 Immortal ruins,” he thought, “I saw images of spirit stones and promissory notes. In the future, I hope to make all the Chosen in the great Nine Mountains and Seas write me promissory notes!

“That is my grand aspiration....

“Writing me a promissory note is also sowing Karma, and those Karma threads can be used to interfere with fate. However, most people aren’t willing to write promissory notes. Therefore... I will create a divine ability that forms ties of destiny with them by force!” Meng Hao’s eyes glittered and he raised his right index finger.

Immediately, the world began to tremble as countless threads appeared. Some of the threads were bright, and some were dark, but all were Karma Threads, and they did not originate from this world, but from Meng Hao!

Shockingly, just a movement of his finger had caused all of his Karma Threads to become visible. The entire world began to shake even more violently, and roaring filled the air, as if the entire place were about to collapse.

Meng Hao looked up and gazed at the Karma Threads, and his eyes glittered brightly. He suddenly formed his right hand into a claw, which reached out and grabbed one of the Karma Threads. The instant he touched it, he suddenly saw an image of Fan Dong’er.

He yanked on the Thread, and it twisted. At the same time, Meng Hao pulled out a piece of paper. Then, he unhesitatingly caused the Karma Thread to twist into the shape of a magical symbol, which he then imprinted onto the piece of paper.

As soon as the mark appeared, Fan Dong'er, who sat cross-legged in meditation in the Nine Seas God World trying to suppress the female corpse on her back, felt a tremor run through her. Her eyes opened wide and then shone with astonishment.

Next, her face flickered, and she coughed up a mouthful of blood. A look of astonishment covered her face.

“What just happened? Did somebody just use the Dao of Karma to plot against me?”

In the instant that Fan Dong'er's face flickered, Meng Hao's expression became one of excitement. He took a deep breath, and then a strange light appeared in his eyes. This magic which forced ties of destiny was only in the first level of development. In the second level, he would be able to fuse promissory notes into the Karma Threads, and then unleash the full divine ability.

As far as the third level went, he would be able to use the promissory notes as Karma seeds, which, if successfully planted and the magic was allowed to grow to its full extent, would give Meng Hao the power to determine life or death with a mere thought.

“This is my divine ability. A Writ of Karma. It might not be complete, but in the future, as my cultivation base grows more abstruse, I WILL perfect it!” As Meng Hao's words rang out, the world around him shook, then filled with fissures. Everything trembled as Meng Hao came into clear view of everyone on the outside world.

The Patriarchs up in the palace were shocked.

“It's a Daoist magic!!”

“It's the Ji Clan's Dao of Karma! Wait, no! It's something different than the Ji Clan's Dao of Karma! The Ji Clan severs Karma, but this forcefully ties destiny together. It's equally domineering, equally shocking!”

“That's not just a Daoist magic, that counts as a secret magic!! Fang Mu's intuition is incredibly high!”

“I'm curious to know what enlightenment led him to create such a Daoist secret magic like this!!”

Daoist magics were rare, but secret magics were even rarer!

The spectators out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were looking on with wide eyes. Gasps could be heard, and unprecedented looks of astonishment could be seen.

“This defies belief!!”

“This Fang Mu created a magic that seems to be both a Daoist magic and a secret magic! I’m afraid only the powerful experts from the great sects would be able to understand it!”

“In any case, it caused the world to begin to collapse. Now, I wonder how many stone steles will descend!? Will he exceed Li Yan?!”

As the world trembled around Meng Hao, intense rumbling sounds could be heard as the stone steles began to fall.

One, three, five, seven....

People looked on, astonished, as a total of twenty-one stone steles descended. They Circulated around Meng Hao endlessly, creating a completely astonishing spectacle.

Instantly, the crowds in the Ninth Mountain and Sea began to seethe with excitement.

“Twenty-one stone steles! Heavens! That... that exceeds Sir Fan!!”

“Inhuman! This guy’s battle prowess is monstrous, and his creativity is inhuman! Even though we couldn’t see his latent talent, it’s surely extraordinary! He’ll definitely take first place in this trial by fire!!”

“I bet all of the Three Great Daoist Societies are in shock!! Twenty-one stone steles! This Fang Mu is definitely going to be famous in the Ninth Mountain and Sea!”

In the starry sky palace, the Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies were all sitting there as before. However, everyone else had already leapt to their feet. Their eyes shone with incredible

brightness. If by any chance the Three Great Daoist Societies did not want to recruit Meng Hao, then they were ready to fight over him.

All of the disciples that had been recruited before Meng Hao could still be considered Chosen. However, sometimes people or events can come along that are simply beyond compare. Attempting to compare them with others would be unfair.

In the vast Eastern Lands, Fang Xiufeng and Meng Li looked at each other and smiled. Meng Li's face was covered with a proud smile as she looked back at Meng Hao on the vortex screen, and her heart filled with love.

"Little bastard!" muttered Patriarch Reliance. "It's good that in the end, you didn't lose me any face!"

Pill Demon and Chu Yuyan both let out light sighs. Chu Yuyan didn't understand much about Meng Hao and his proclivity toward promissory notes, but Pill Demon knew something of it, and a strange expression could be seen on his face. As for the rest of the crowds, most of them didn't understand Karma very well, but they could speculate as to the general idea.

"With a magic like this, who will ever dare to refuse to write me a promissory note!" Meng Hao was inwardly delighted, and completely satisfied with the divine ability he had created.

At this point, everyone assumed that the Three Great Daoist Societies would swoop in to recruit Meng Hao. The Nine Seas God World and the Sublime Flow Sword Grotto were definitely moved, and they were just getting ready to enter discussions with the Immortal Ancient Daoist Rite, when all of a sudden, Meng Hao suddenly closed his eyes again. Apparently... he was sinking back into contemplation!

This scene instantly caused everyone to stare in shock.

"What is he doing?"

"Could it be... could it be that he intends to create another divine ability?" Even as shock rolled through everyone, a bright light suddenly began to shine around Meng Hao, and the music of a great Dao began to echo out.

Meng Hao truly was in the midst of contemplating enlightenment. The reason he didn't immediately absorb the power of the twenty-one stone steles was that, considering his current state, he was now ready to use his understanding of the nine bridges to create another divine ability.

"He's actually going to create another divine ability!!"

"How... how is that possible? He already created one divine ability, how can he create another one? Does he think that creating divine abilities is as simple as eating or drinking?"

All the spectators in the outside world were completely shocked, even Meng Hao's father and mother. The Patriarchs in the starry sky palace were also staring with wide eyes.

Li Yan, as well as all the other competitors who were now waiting outside, stared at Meng Hao in a daze.

This was especially the case when, only a few hours later, a massive rumbling sound surrounded Meng Hao, and an intense energy surged up from him. Because the previous world had already collapsed, the energy affected the altar Meng Hao sat on, which everyone could see. There was no need for them to experience the divine ability; everyone was able to sense that this incoming divine ability was incredibly shocking.

"He's actually creating another divine ability! What kind of jinx is this guy?!?" The crowds were in an uproar, and before they even had a chance to calm down, Meng Hao suddenly frowned.

"No," he murmured, "my line of thinking was a bit off." He waved his hand, causing the surging energy that had shocked everyone to suddenly be extinguished. Once again, he began to contemplate.

When everyone saw that happen, they were left completely speechless.... The other competitors in the trial by fire began to smile bitterly. The divine ability that Meng Hao felt to be off, was actually far more powerful than any of the divine abilities they had created. Each and every one was left completely without words.

After a few more hours, energy once again began to surge up from Meng Hao. But then....

"Off again!" he said angrily. He once again quashed the energy and started over.

The crowds were now looking at each other, dumbfounded. They began to smile wryly as they looked over at Meng Hao on the vortex screen.

As for the Patriarchs in the starry sky palace, their eyes were shining brightly, and it looked like they were getting ready for a struggle. An inhuman cultivator like this was someone each and every one did not wish to allow the Three Great Daoist Societies to recruit as a disciple.

The Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies were gaping in astonishment. Then, they exchanged glances, and within each others' glittering eyes, they could all see anticipation and something hidden deep within.... Hope!

Chapter 856: Paragon Bridge

This was a hope that they had held throughout all the numerous times they had hosted this trial by fire in the Ninth Mountain and Sea.

It was actually a far more important reason than disciple recruitment!

The three elders were panting slightly, but considering their high cultivation bases and levels of concentration, it didn't matter how many years they had watched the recruitment event with such hope; they wouldn't allow others to pick up any clues by looking at their facial expressions.

However... a virtually imperceptible flicker of astonishment could be seen in the eyes of the old man from the Kunlun Society, who seemed to have picked up on a few of the oddities about the situation.

Time passed by slowly. Several hours later, rumbling once again surrounded Meng Hao, quickly vanished... and then returned with even more intensity than before.

This indicated that the divine ability Meng Hao was creating was growing in power!

The audience in the Ninth Mountain and Sea stared fixedly at the vortex screens, and the cross-legged Meng Hao. They waited in keen anticipation to find out what miraculous divine ability he would create.

“That Daoist magic from before caused twenty-one stone steles to descend. Then he started making another divine ability. If he succeeds... I wonder how many stone steles will appear?!”

“This is unheard-of! The ancient records don’t contain information about the first time the Three Great Daoist Societies held this trial by fire, but from the time records were kept until now, nobody has shaken the stars like this shocking Fang Mu!”

“A Chosen like that would be the focus of all attention no matter which sect he joined. It’s just strange that before today, I’ve never heard of him before!”

The buzz of conversation echoed out everywhere, both in the outside world, and among the trial by fire competitors on the Ancient Road. Everyone was shaken by Meng Hao.

They were all waiting... for Meng Hao’s miraculous creation!

The next day, more shocking rumbling could be heard. The following day, the sound of it filled the Ancient Road of Dao Seeking. Three days later... it once again began anew. Even the people on the Ancient Roads of the Nascent Soul and Spirit Severing could hear it.

It had filled the entire Ancient Road!

More people were astonished than ever!

Four days later, the intense roaring that echoed out from Meng Hao left the Ancient Road via the vortexes, passing out into the Ninth Mountain and Sea.

When that happened, Meng Hao finally opened his eyes.

In that instant, boundless, radiant light poured out from his pupils, such that anyone who faced him would feel blinded by the piercing light. Meng Hao’s expression was calm as he raised his hands into the air. There in his mind was the image of the first bridge, indelibly imprinted there, never to disperse for all eternity.

As he raised his hands into the air, the world around him began to tremble, and countless rifts appeared. The air swirled, and began to scatter in layers. In just a few breaths of time, all of the land around him was shattered and began to break down. Wind screamed, and the air collapsed.

As for Meng Hao, he remained cross-legged, but as everything around him dissipated, it seemed as if he was floating in the middle of nothing, surrounded by twenty-one stone steles, each one three hundred meters tall.

It was at this point that, all of a sudden, a rumbling sound could be heard coming from the boundless void up above. It was like an echoing roar, which was accompanied by... descending stone steles!

One, two, three... a total of nine made their way down to join the other twenty-one stone steles. Furthermore, these new steles were actually silver-colored!

Their appearance was far more magnificent than the other twenty-one steles, and far more shocking.

The Patriarchs in the starry sky palace looked on with widened eyes, and the crowds out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were immediately sent into an uproar of disbelief.

“He... he isn’t even finished creating the divine ability! He’s just mobilizing his energy, but the stone steles already descended!”

“Those stone steles are silver-colored! I’ve never even heard of such a thing!”

“This divine ability is surely Heaven-defying! If it wasn’t, how come a mere surge of its energy would cause the stone steles to descend, even before it’s complete!”

“Just what divine ability is this?!?!?”

While the crowds engaged in heated discussion, Meng Hao sat there, his face calm, his eyes devoid of either joy or sadness. His mind seemed to be completely immersed in silent contemplation of the first bridge.

His energy continued to grow more intense. After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, the image of the bridge in his mind suddenly began to expand, growing out in the blink of an eye, until it covered his entire body.

It was as if he had become the bridge!

And at the same time, the bridge... had become him!

Even more noticeable to Meng Hao was the indescribable pain that completely filled him. It was an anguish that made it seem as if a hundred streams of qi were ripping his insides open.

Great beads of sweat rolled down his face as within his body appeared... one hundred meridians!

These one hundred meridians were Immortal meridians, which previously had not yet existed inside of him. However, now that the bridge had spread out, it forced them open. Although it would only last for a moment, and was not permanent, it actually created a mold for Meng Hao's Immortal foundation!

When you added in the ethereal Immortal meridian he already had, it was a scene that would thoroughly flabbergast anyone who could see it. However, even the three Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies would be incapable of seeing what was happening inside of him. Even if they tried to force their vision inside of him, all they would be able to see was a blinding light.

The instant the one hundred meridians were forced open inside of Meng Hao, massive rumbling could be heard as more stone steles descended from up above. Shockingly, there were nine gold-colored steles!

The sight of these nine gold-colored stone steles threw the crowds in the outside world, as well as the other competitors in the trial by fire, into complete tumult.

"Eighteen stone steles!!"

"Heavens! Nine silver steles and nine golden steles! The divine ability isn't fully created yet, but... but there are already eighteen stone steles!"

"This guy is peerless among Chosen!!"

Meng Hao couldn't hear the buzz of conversation from the outside world. His body was trembling, and he was filled with the sensation that this divine ability that he had created was indescribably

powerful. It seemed like a magic that he was actually incapable of wielding with his current cultivation base.

It was a magic that required all one hundred meridians to be genuinely open before it could be used!

Even a weaker version would still need at least fifty meridians.

At the moment, all of his one hundred meridians had been forcibly opened, but Meng Hao knew that it was only temporary. He was borrowing power from his own good fortune, a result of his creation of a divine ability, and it was something that wouldn't last for very long. However, to Meng Hao, it was still incredible good fortune. It opened up a path for him, so that all he had to do was take a step forward, and he would be able to proceed unhindered into true Immortality.

“Even if I can't actually use this magic for the time being, I will still see it completely created!” His eyes shone with determination as the full power of his cultivation base surged into action, causing an intense roaring to fill the air.

Gradually, the image of a bridge started to be visible behind him!

The bridge was just a vague illusion. If a perfectly clear image of the bridge could be considered a hundred percent, then this illusory image would only be ten percent!

However, even with only ten percent clarity, it was still filled with an archaic, ancient aura. It seemed to be filled with a natural law that did not conform with the Nine Mountains and Seas. That natural law was Heaven-defying, as if it could split open the vault of heaven, and place the Heavens... beneath its feet!

The energy was boundlessly domineering, as if, when it looked out, all living things would have no choice but to worship on bended knee! This was a supreme power!

Meng Hao began to tremble with increased intensity. The one hundred meridians that had been opened had been shining with boundless light moments ago, but were now beginning to grow dim, as if their light were being sucked in by the bridge.

In the blink of an eye, only thirty of the meridians remained open. At this point, a frenzied determination shone in Meng Hao's eyes. He tilted his head back and roared, and the remaining

Immortal meridians inside of him went dim. In that instant, the bridge behind him suddenly became twenty percent clear!

That twenty percent caused all three Ancient Roads in the Ruins of Immortality to quake. Up above in the palace, the Patriarchs' minds were reeling. They appeared to be completely shaken. Outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea, there were even some cultivators who coughed up blood.

Furthermore, up above in the void appeared nine... seven-colored stone steles!

Nine silver. Nine gold. Nine seven-colored!

The entire world was dumbfounded!

“What divine ability is that!?!?”

“That’s beyond a Daoist magic, and even above a secret magic! Just what magic is it?!”

“Could it be... could it be a legendary Paragon magic!?!?”

With the exception of the three Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies, everyone in the starry sky palace was on their feet, faces filled with astonishment.

“Paragon magic!! For Fang Mu to be able to create a Paragon magic while in the Spirit Realm means that his intuition is stupefying!!”

“He can’t actually use the magic right now, but in the future, when his cultivation base rises into the peak of the Immortal Realm, he’ll be able to use this magic to slay experts of the Ancient Realm!”

The Patriarchs were now in an uproar. The spectators out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were completely astonished, and were staring with wide eyes and open mouths. They didn’t know what Paragon magic was, but when the bridge appeared behind Meng Hao, they could sense their cultivation bases trembling!

Blood sprayed out of Meng Hao’s mouth, and he was incapable of continuing on any further. The bridge winked out, and his body returned to its normal state. However, he felt completely

exhausted, almost as if he were ill, and his face was ashen. But his eyes shone with unprecedented brightness.

“When that bridge appears, it is supreme and unparalleled. In that case, its name shall be...

“The Paragon Bridge!!

“This is my second divine ability!”

Meng Hao slowly rose to his feet, under the eyes of the countless people watching in various locations.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, then closed his eyes and sent his divine sense out to the forty-eight stone steles.

He suddenly inhaled, and the stone steles trembled and began to emit Immortal qi. It transformed into a gentle power that rushed toward Meng Hao, surrounding him like a vortex. As he absorbed it into his body, his Immortal meridian almost seemed to come alive as it voraciously consumed the qi.

Thirty percent, forty percent, fifty percent, sixty percent, seventy percent!!

Before coming to the Ruins of Immortality, Meng Hao’s Immortal meridian had only been illusory. But now, it was consuming Immortal qi with shocking speed. The stone steles began to vanish, and by the time the last one was gone, the Immortal meridian inside of him was fully eighty percent solidified!

This was an Immortal Ancient Dao meridian, formed by the ancient bronze lamp. It was an Immortal meridian that exceeded that which any modern cultivator could have, and came from ancient times. According to Shui Dongliu, it had even changed Meng Hao’s destiny!

Now, it was eighty percent complete, and radiated Immortal might. Now, Meng Hao’s cultivation base exploded with intense energy, that of a true Immortal!

With an Immortal meridian that was eighty percent complete, he now seemed to be undergoing huge transformations. Although he clearly was not a true Immortal yet, he was actually... even more powerful than Pill Demon when he had become a true immortal!!

Chapter 857: Warrior Pavilion!

The crowds outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were staring with wide eyes and slack jaws. Their minds were completely and utterly blank.

“He gained enlightenment from 99 Immortal ruins, created two grand divine abilities, and caused a total of forty-eight stone steles to descend....”

“Never before has something like this happened, and perhaps it never will again....”

“Which Daoist Society... will he choose to join?!”

As the discussions raged, Meng Hao stood there, filling everyone with unprecedented shock.

That was especially true of the Chosen of the various sects. By now, the name Fang Mu was deeply rooted in their hearts, and to them, he was clearly the most powerful opponent they would ever face.

“His energy... is that of a true Immortal!” The Patriarchs up in the starry sky palace were all panting, and their eyes shone with light.

“Earlier he was clearly not a true Immortal. Could it be that after creating that shocking Paragon magic, he actually became a true Immortal?!”

“There was a legend in ancient times that creating Paragon magic would transform the cultivation base. It seems that legend is accurate!”

“No, he’s still not a true Immortal. He has the energy of a true Immortal, but lacks the Immortal root!”

As the other Patriarchs discussed the matter, the hope in the eyes of the three old men from the Three Great Daoist Societies grew even more intense. They did not speak, but they were all looking at Meng Hao. More specifically, they were looking at the area surrounding Meng Hao.

It was at this point that the old man from the Kunlun Society suddenly said, “This Fang Mu has already created a Paragon magic. Logically speaking, he should now appear on the altar on the Ancient Road.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, the old men from the Three Great Daoist Societies narrowed their eyes.

By now, the forty-eight stone steles around Meng Hao had vanished completely. It was then that, all of a sudden, an ancient pavilion suddenly materialized directly in front of Meng Hao.

It was richly ornamented, and brimming with Immortal will. This was no ruin; it floated up above in the air, surrounded by green stone slabs and exotic plants. Its marvelous appearance made it seem like the only thing in existence.

Immortal qi swirled around it, letting off an ancient will, and a feeling of holiness. It was as if this place had at one time been a Holy Land.

The pavilion was decorated with carved black jade, and emanated intense pressure. It was the same feeling Meng Hao had gotten when looking at the nine bridges. In front of the pavilion was an enormous boulder, upon which two characters were written in calligraphy as flamboyant as flying dragons and dancing phoenixes.

Warrior Pavilion!

The two characters were blood red, and shone with intense light. When Meng Hao read them, he could hear roars that truly sounded like they came from real dragons and phoenixes.

As for the crowds outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea, they couldn’t see what was happening clearly, because the vortex screen depicting Meng Hao had suddenly gone blurry.

People began to cry out in shock.

“What just happened?”

“All of a sudden, we can’t see the screen!!”

Back in the starry sky palace, the Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies slowly rose to their feet. The other Patriarchs were staring in shock; they couldn’t see the images on the screen either. Apparently, the Immortal pavilion blocked the view of anyone on the outside.

The Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies had very serious looks on their faces as they looked at each other and then transmitted three sentences amongst themselves.

“He actually found it! Activate the spell formation and unleash the Heavenly communication magic!”

“I never imagined that, after all these tens of thousands of years of trials by fire, this day would finally arrive!”

“Throughout the years, our Three Great Daoist Societies have tried every means possible, but have been unable to even lay eyes on it, let alone acquire the legendary item within. According to our previous calculations, only people in the Spirit Realm can actually find the Immortal pavilion!”

Although no one could hear the three Patriarchs’ words, the old man from the Kunlun Society narrowed his eyes. After a moment of contemplation, his face suddenly lit up.

“So, it turns out that the Three Great Daoist Societies have repeatedly held this trial by fire throughout the ages, not just to recruit disciples, but for another purpose!”

Other Patriarchs apparently recalled something in particular and, from their expressions, seemed shaken. Despite their cultivation bases and abilities of concentration, they were still panting and trembling.

“Fellow Daoists from the Three Great Daoist Societies, this matter...”

The person who responded was the old man from the Nine Seas God World.

“This is a private affair of our Three Great Daoist Societies,” he said, his eyes shining with a strange light. “It has nothing to do with you, Ladies and Gentlemen. In a moment, the trial by fire will continue!”

Meanwhile, Meng Hao was looking at the Immortal pavilion. It had appeared in front of him quite suddenly, apparently in response to his creation of the Paragon magic.

“Ling Yunzi said that there were 99 Immortal ruins as well as an intact Immortal pavilion. Could it be that this pavilion is... the very one I was looking for before, but couldn’t find?” His eyes went wide.

After a moment of thought, he was about to step forward when, quite abruptly, an ancient voice was transmitted into his mind.

“Fang Mu, I am Ling Yunzi of the Nine Seas God World. I represent all of the Three Great Daoist Societies to pass a message to you. Use whatever means necessary to enter the Immortal pavilion and bring out a Feng Shui compass that rests inside. If you do, the Three Great Daoist Societies are willing to give you any reward you wish. As long as it is within our power to accomplish, we will do it!”

Meng Hao’s eyes flickered, and he didn’t respond. However, he did stop in place, and a look of hesitation appeared on his face.

“There is no need to worry about any danger,” Ling Yunzi continued. “The Immortal pagoda appeared because of your good fortune, and I am personally unable to appear there at all; if I were to appear there, it would cause the pavilion to immediately vanish. As for you, there will be no danger to you when you go inside.”

Meng Hao hesitated for another moment before a gleam of determination appeared, and he hurried forward toward the Immortal pavilion.

No one in the outside world could see what was happening on the screens. However, the Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies were panting, and their eyes shone with a strange gleam.

They could not enter the world Meng Hao was in either, and could only remain on the outside. They had waited for many years for this particular opportunity.

As Meng Hao neared the Immortal pavilion, the pressure grew more and more intense. However, for some strange reason, while the pressure would have prevented any other person from getting close, it actually dissipated for Meng Hao, making a sort of personal path for him to walk.

Meng Hao's eyes glittered. He sensed no danger, so he slowly walked up to the Immortal pavilion and stood in front of it. Then he took a deep breath as he lifted his hand and pushed on the front door.

Absolutely no sound could be heard as the door opened. However, the instant it did, boundless light shone out from inside, blinding light that completely enveloped Meng Hao and then spread out in all directions outside of the pavilion. After a moment, Ling Yunzi let out a miserable shriek. As it turned out, he had actually been following Meng Hao in an attempt to personally enter the Immortal pavilion.

However, the light instantly forced him back. Blood oozed out of his eyes, ears, nose and mouth, almost as if he had been cursed. Filled with fear and shock, he immediately shot backward and then left the world, lest he be killed.

Now, Meng Hao was the only person in the vicinity of the Immortal pavilion. He stood there in the light, completely unharmed, until the glow slowly faded away. He looked blankly at the pavilion in front of him, then took a deep breath.

"What is this place...?" he murmured. Inside of the Immortal pavilion, he could now see numerous shelves, which, shockingly, were completely filled with all sorts of magical items.

There was a whip that was surrounded by a dragon-like mist of swirling smoke. It appeared to have been constructed from sinew and tendons, and it emanated a shocking pressure, as if it had been refined from a true dragon. There was an ancient mirror, covered with cloudy mist. From the look of it, there was some living being sealed inside of it.

There was a crimson eye that, although shut, gave Meng Hao a shocking feeling when he looked at it.

There was a cauldron that rested atop a toad, which it seemed the cauldron was suppressing.

Further away was a long, green spear, with a spearhead carved from bone. When Meng Hao looked more closely at the wood that made up the shaft, his mind reeled. He recognized that wood! It was from... the World Tree!

There was a broadsword, stained with black, wet blood. That blood seemed to still contain a consciousness and was emitting shocking howls.

In addition to those items, there was also a Feng Shui compass. For the most part, it was ordinary in appearance. However, a white crystal was inset into the very middle of the compass. The crystal emanated a gentle glow that caused the entire Feng Shui compass to appear extraordinary.

From the look of it, the white crystal could be removed from the center of the compass, as if the compass had merely been created to allow the crystal to emanate its power.

There were many magical items of all sorts, the use of many of which Meng Hao was unable to determine. The whip was one of the more bizarre items, but actually any of them would cause a huge stir if they showed up in the outside world.

In addition to all the magical items, there was also a desk in the Immortal pavilion, upon which were some bamboo slips, as well as various other writing utensils.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, and his eyes shone with brilliant light as he took a step forward, entering the Immortal pavilion. As soon as he stepped foot inside, the door shut behind him.

Simultaneously, an ice-cold voice suddenly echoed out.

“In compliance with the last will and testament of the Three Great Paragons, anyone with a Spirit Realm cultivation base who creates Paragon magic may enter the Warrior Pavilion and select a treasure.”

Meng Hao looked around, but couldn't see anyone except for himself in the Immortal pavilion. The voice that had just spoken was cold and detached, seemingly emotionless. After it spoke that single sentence, it said nothing further.

Meng Hao hesitated for a moment, then began to look around at the various precious treasures, his heart thumping eagerly.

He actually wished he could take all of the magical items in sight, but after gazing about for a bit, his eyes came to rest on the Feng Shui compass.

“That must be the Feng Shui compass the Three Great Daoist Societies want me to get for them,” he thought, his eyes flickering. After looking at the Feng Shui compass for a moment, he began to mutter to himself.

“The Three Great Daoist Societies’ trial by fire has an additional purpose, which is to get someone to come in here and retrieve this item for them. If I don’t comply with their wishes, I fear my future will be fraught with grim possibilities after I leave this place.” He wasn’t quite willing to go along with their request, but after a moment of consideration, he looked at the Feng Shui compass with glittering eyes. Then he stepped forward and picked it up.

In the moment he lifted up the Feng Shui compass, he also retrieved a flying sword from his bag of holding and vigorously went to work trying to pry the white crystal out.

“You people think you can profit at my expense!? Never!” Gritting his teeth, he shoved down on the sword until a popping sound rang out and the crystal flew out from its spot in the center of the Feng Shui compass. Meng Hao grabbed it, then smiled as he carefully put it away in his bag of holding.

Then he looked over the Feng Shui compass again. It actually looked perfect. After ensuring that there were no scratches on it, he cleared his throat and looked around at all the magical items.

“Although that voice said I could only take one treasure, it didn’t say anything about repercussions for taking another. I might as well try.” His heart began to beat even faster as he walked over to the spear. He reached his hand out, but almost as soon as his hand was about to grab it, a powerful force of expulsion pushed back at him.

The cold voice once again rang out inside the Immortal pavilion.

“This item is not connected to you by destiny. You have already taken a treasure. You may leave now.”

“Not connected by destiny?” thought Meng Hao. “Destiny is like the cause and effect of Karma. So does that mean that I have no Karma connecting me to these magical items?” A strange light gleamed in his eyes, and he suddenly cleared his throat. It was at this moment that the Seventh Demon Sealing Hex, the magic of Karmic Hexing, was suddenly unleashed.

Chapter 858: The Last Time!

The Seventh Demon Sealing Hex was a magic unique to the League of Demon Sealers. It seemed similar to the Ji Clan's Dao of Karma, but was fundamentally different. As he unleashed the magic, Meng Hao's eyes gleamed with a strange light, and he looked around at all the magical items.

Instantly, he was able to see numerous threads attached to the various magical items. These were none other than Karma Threads.

All of the magical items had Karma Threads attaching them to the Warrior Pavilion, and now Meng Hao could see each and every one of them clearly.

"So, even magical items can have Karma on them," he thought. "Well, now I'm not so worried." Clearing his throat, he glanced around craftily.

"First, I'll hex the Karma on these magical items, and then I'll form a destiny connection with them!" Waving his hand, he caused the Seventh Demon Sealing Hex to cover all of the magical items in the Warrior Pavilion.

In the blink of an eye, bright light shot out in all directions, and the entire Warrior Pavilion began to shake.

Meng Hao's heart pounded as he waited for a few moments. Seeing that there was no further reaction, he relaxed a bit, then looked around craftily one more time.

"The floor tiles here are excellent," he thought, licking his lips. "Later on, I think I'll pry up a few to take with me. And the wood those shelves are made from is anything but ordinary...."

"Those decorative tiles are nice too!" His eyes shone brightly as he took a deep breath.

He quickly performed an incantation gesture, causing Karma Threads to appear on top of his head. These were his own personal Karma Threads, which glittered with resplendent colors. Meng Hao settled his qi and calmed his mind, then searched through his Karma Threads until he found one that seemed to be on the verge of fading away.

That Karma Thread was the one that had been created when he first laid eyes on the spear moments ago. Of course, the thread was incredibly thin, as if even a slight breeze would cause it to scatter.

Meng Hao took a deep breath, then lifted his hand and pointed out toward that particular thread. Instantly, the Karma Thread twisted into the shape of a magical symbol, which then descended into Meng Hao's hand.

"Bind destiny!" he said. Instantly, the thread began to glitter with radiant light. At the same time, the spear began to tremble, as if it were struggling against something.

As it fought, the Karma thread attached to Meng Hao's head that represented the spear suddenly grew very clear. Now it seemed to be even more closely attached to Meng Hao, as if the Karma between the two of them was growing deeper.

"A Writ of Karma! Bind destiny!" Meng Hao's eyes shone with bright light, and he let out a bellow. The magical symbol on his right hand began to glitter radiantly as he crushed it. A boom rattled out as the magical symbol shattered. In the moment that it dispersed, the spear ceased struggling, and Meng Hao could suddenly feel something like a summons, echoing out from the spear.

Unable to withhold his excitement, he stretched his hand out into the air. The spear immediately flew through the air with a screaming whistling sound and landed directly in his hand

Meng Hao laughed out loud.

"Mine! All of the magical items here are mine now!" Even as excitement filled his heart, suddenly, a murderous aura surged toward him from behind.

The aura was so intense that it seemed capable of destroying him in body and spirit by merely brushing against him.

Meng Hao's face fell, and he jerked his head around. However, there was nobody behind him. The murderous aura was still there, though; apparently it came from the Warrior Pavilion itself.

Cold sweat dripped down Meng Hao's face, and he didn't dare to move. The murderous aura filled him with intense nervousness, and he began to edge his way toward the door. The murderous aura followed him as he went, as if it were attempting to intimidate him.

"I was just creating some ties of destiny!" Meng Hao said quickly. "What are you flipping out for?" After a moment, he continued, "Uhh... a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding. Warrior Pavilion,

my brother, this was all just a misunderstanding, alright?” The murderous aura seemed as intense as ever.

After a long moment, though, Meng Hao sensed that the aura was dissipating. Seeing that it hadn't attacked him, his eyes darted around. He had half a mind to leave, but when he saw all the magical items around him in the Warrior Pavilion, he just couldn't make himself do it.

“Warrior Pavilion, my brother, don't pay any attention to me!” he called out loudly. “I'm fine here by myself. You get back to whatever it was you were doing, alright?” With that, he carefully sidled over to the sword covered with black blood.

Ever-vigilant of the murderous aura, he quickly used A Writ of Karma to find the Karma Thread that connected him to the sword, then bound the destiny as quickly as possible.

The sword trembled, and the murderous aura from the Warrior Pavilion exploded out. Cold beads of sweat broke out on Meng Hao's forehead, but he gritted his teeth and used Ties of Destiny a few more times. After the third time, the sword stopped struggling, and an invisible connection formed between the two of them.

The sword flew out and began to swirl around Meng Hao like a dragon.

Meng Hao had no time to rejoice as the Warrior Pavilion's murderous aura exploded in intensity throughout the entire pavilion. It seemed to be incensed, and matchlessly fierce.

“That was the last time!” said Meng Hao. “The last time!”

He then licked his lips and stood in place, not daring to move for a long moment, after which he cautiously inched over toward a magical jade flower. Gritting his teeth, he immediately slammed A Writ of Karma into the magical flower. A magical symbol appeared; this flower was apparently different from the other magical items, and he succeeded on his first try.

Almost immediately, the shocking murderous aura caused everything to tremble violently. Meng Hao's entire body was now soaked with sweat.

“That was the last time!” he cried out urgently. “I promise, that was really the last time!”

“Warrior Pavilion, my brother, it was really the last time. I’m taking off now, see you!” The intensity of the murderous aura caused Meng Hao’s face to grow pale, and his heart to tremble. Even as he spoke, he quickly began to walk toward the exit.

However, after only a few steps, he couldn’t help but use Ties of Destiny on a little bottle he saw on a nearby shelf. It was blackish-green, and although it seemed unremarkable, Meng Hao could sense a boundless aura emanating off of it.

“Dammit!” he thought, gnashing his teeth. At the same time, he found the Karma Thread connecting him to the bottle and used it to make a magical symbol. As soon as the symbol landed in his hand, he crushed it and, without taking the time to check whether or not he had succeeded, quickly grabbed the little bottle.

As soon as his hand wrapped around it, his body flashed toward the Warrior Pavilion’s exit. At the same time, the murderous aura exploded toward Meng Hao at an incredible speed, and a faint roar of rage could be heard echoing about.

“The last one!” he cried. “That was really, really the last one. I’m going now, I’m going now!” Meng Hao’s scalp was numb as he shot forward. Behind him, the murderous aura swept toward him as if to drive him out.

Next to the door was the table he had seen earlier. As he passed, he couldn’t stop himself from reaching out to grab a jade slip he saw sitting there.

That seemed to push the murderous aura of the Warrior Pavilion past the limits of its patience. It transformed into an explosive attack that shot toward Meng Hao.

A faint howl could be heard from within the murderous aura: “Get the hell out of here!”

When it smashed into Meng Hao, blood sprayed from his mouth, and he was flung toward the door like a kite with its string cut.

The door slammed open, and Meng Hao was thrown out, whereupon the door slammed shut again.

Almost immediately, the Warrior Pavilion began to fade away. At the same time, the scene was now clearly visible to the Patriarchs of the Three Great Daoist Societies up in the starry sky palace, as well as the Patriarchs from the other sects.

On the screen, they saw Meng Hao flying out, blood spraying from his mouth, his expression one of incredible determination. From the look of it, he had been willing to look death calmly in the face in order to complete the task assigned to him, and had been willing to pay any cost.

Meng Hao coughed up another mouthful of blood and then cried out, “Fang Mu of the junior generation, despite facing great personal injury and near death, went through hell and high water to accomplish the mission given to him by the mighty Three Great Daoist Societies!” With that, he produced the Feng Shui compass and held it aloft.

It was a very moving image. Blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth, and his face was pale white. His body trembled, and he was clearly very seriously injured. His words, and the image he presented, instantly moved the three Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies.

The three Patriarchs were panting, and were completely incapable of controlling the wild exuberance they felt in their hearts.

It was at this exact moment that the pale-faced Ling Yunzi suddenly materialized in front of Meng Hao. He immediately made a grasping gesture with his right hand, and the Feng Shui compass in Meng Hao’s hand flew over to him. He nodded to Meng Hao, and then sighed inwardly with emotion. He himself had just been injured by the light from the Warrior Pavilion, and knew how dangerous it could be. When he saw the injuries Meng Hao had received, he was filled with sympathy. Then he noticed Meng Hao’s solemn and stirring facial expression, and he suddenly had the feeling the things that had previously occurred between the two of them must have been misunderstandings.

“What a good kid!” he said. “Here, take this medicinal pill. It’ll take care of those injuries!” Moved, he waved his right hand, causing a white medicinal pill to fly out and hover in front of Meng Hao. Because of his skill in the Dao of alchemy, Meng Hao could tell from the medicinal aroma of the pill that it was definitely a treasured pill.

“It’s too bad I can’t duplicate it right here and now,” Meng Hao thought. He quickly accepted the pill and then put it into his bag of holding.

“I think you should eat it now,” said Ling Yunzi, looking concerned. “Those injuries are quite serious.”

Inwardly, Meng Hao chuckled bitterly. He had no desire whatsoever to consume the medicinal pill. All he needed to do was activate his Eternal stratum, and he would recover almost immediately. However, Ling Yunzi's was staring right at him, so Meng Hao endured the pain of his loss, clenched his teeth, and finally consumed the pill.

As soon as the medicinal pill dissolved into him, a warm current filled his body, and all of his injuries were healed.

"What a loss," he thought. "What a terrible loss. If I could have duplicated that medicinal pill, I could have sold it later for an exorbitant price." Inwardly, he was laughing bitterly, but on the outside he put on an expression of appreciation as he clasped hands and bowed toward Ling Yunzi.

Ling Yunzi nodded again. The more he thought about it, the more he felt that Meng Hao was among the best of the best, both in terms of cultivation base and intuition, not to mention fate.

"I really misunderstood him in the matter of the latent talent and those other stages," Ling Yunzi thought.

Smiling broadly, he then said, "Fang Mu, are you willing to become a Conclave disciple of the Nine Seas God World?!"

In response to the words, the Patriarchs in the starry sky palace all looked on with glittering eyes.

The Patriarch from the Immortal Ancient Daoist Rite smiled faintly, a smile that contained abstruse meaning. The Patriarch from the Sublime Flow Sword Grotto hesitated for a moment. As for the Patriarch from the Nine Seas God World, he laughed out loud.

Meng Hao gaped for a moment, and was thinking about refusing. Then he thought about how funny it would be if he joined the Nine Seas God World under his assumed name Fang Mu, considering that Fan Dong'er was also a member.

He cleared his throat and clasped hands.

"Junior is willing," he replied. "Unfortunately, I have a few random matters that I have to take care of. If senior is willing to give me a bit of time to handle those affairs, then when I'm finished, I will immediately go to the Nine Seas God World."

Chapter 859: The Final Two Stages

“Of course, if that is your wish,” Ling Yunzi said with a smile. “Why don’t you think about it a bit. Once you get to the Nine Seas God World, you can give me your final answer.” He waved his sleeve, causing a command medallion to fly out to Meng Hao.

“When you’ve taken care of your affairs, crush that medallion. It will bring you to the Nine Seas God World.” With that, Ling Yunzi turned and vanished. At the same time, the air around Meng Hao shattered. When things grew clear again, he was back on the altar on the Ancient Road.

All of the other competitors in the trial by fire were looking at Meng Hao with expressions of disbelief.

As for everyone in the outside world, although they weren’t sure about the details of what had gone on between Meng Hao and the Three Great Daoist Societies, that didn’t mean they were any less amazed regarding Meng Hao’s rise to prominence in the trial by fire.

This was especially the case due to Ling Yunzi’s recruitment of Meng Hao as a Conclave disciple.

When the spectators in the Ninth Mountain and Sea heard that, their gazes became torn between envy and admiration. All of them were staring at Meng Hao on the screen.

“He’s pretty much the number one figure in the entire trial by fire. It’s no surprise that he ended up joining the Nine Seas God World.”

“I wonder if he’ll participate in the final two stages. Of course, after that is the most important part... the arena matches!”

“If I were him, I would participate in the final two stages, but not the arena matches. After all, the Chosen from the great Sects will be able to join in the fighting there. They’re qualified to do so without participating in the testing, which is why they don’t walk the Ancient Road. They can directly go straight to the arena matches!

“This Fang Mu might be strong, but it’s doubtful that he can measure up to all those Chosen.”

“That’s really too bad. Throughout the successive trials by fire put on by the Three Great Daoist Societies, the arena matches are the highlight. There are incredible prizes up for grabs!”

Even as the discussions continued outside, the ninth stage was beginning on the three Ancient Roads.

The number of people still participating in the trial by fire had already been significantly reduced. People had been eliminated consistently throughout the previous eight stages. Plus there were people like Fatty and the others who had been directly recruited and escorted away by various sects, and would not be participating in the final two stages or the arena matches.

Ling Yunzi suddenly materialized on the Ancient Road of Dao Seeking.

“The final two stages will assess the heart, and the Dao!” he said. He looked over at Meng Hao with an approving smile, and then swept his hands through the air. This caused everyone’s positions to change once again, and Meng Hao was yet again in the lead position.

“The ninth stage refines the heart! The tenth stage inquires of your Dao!

“After these two stages, seven thousand Nascent Soul competitors, two thousand Spirit Severing competitors, and one thousand Dao Seeking competitors, will be chosen to partake in the arena matches!

“I must remind you that there are many prizes available during the arena matches. However, your opponents will not just be fellow competitors in the trial by fire. You will also be up against Chosen from various sects, as well as disciples from the Three Great Daoist Societies.

“This might be a bit unfair, but there are many things under Heaven that are like that. The truly mighty will definitely rise above the others!” Ling Yunzi waved his hand again, and the altar once more began to grow hazy.

The crowds in the Ninth Mountain and Sea were gazing steadily at the screens as they waited for the final two stages. In the palace in the starry sky, the various Patriarchs were also looking on with pensive expressions. None of them asked any questions of the Three Great Daoist Societies, but instead, focused on the competitors in the trial by fire who they had taken note of earlier.

The Patriarchs from the Three Great Daoist Societies sat up front, their expressions calm. They themselves were the only ones who knew how truly excited they were.

Meanwhile, many discussions were being carried on in the outside world.

“The ninth stage tests the heart, and whether or not the contestants can be victorious over the Devil in their hearts!”

“That stage has something to do with willpower, but not a lot. The key to being victorious over the Devil in one’s heart is not just willpower, but most importantly the certitude of one’s Dao Heart. That’s why the ninth and tenth stages are conducted together.

“I wonder if Fang Mu will continue to be the center of attention in this stage. If he stays in first place like he has so far, then his glory will be completely and utterly established. After all, he’s completely surpassed tens of thousands of others in each of the various stages.”

“I’d say... not necessarily. He might have come in first in the previous stages, but now that the final two stages are here, he’s definitely exhausted. It will be difficult for him to succeed!”

As the discussions continued, the competitors in the trial by fire on the Ancient Roads were gradually being covered over by the blurriness as they were taken to a special world. This world was completely different than the others they had been to.

Meng Hao opened his eyes to see... a purgatory!

It was a world of flames. Even the sky was on fire, and what land was visible that didn’t have flames was dry and cracked, without the slightest sign of life.

Furthermore, Meng Hao quickly realized that he had been strung up, bound by an iron chain. As he looked around, he saw that there were iron chains everywhere, all of which bound people.

Among those were Nascent Soul and Spirit Severing cultivators, as well as some Dao Seeking cultivators like Meng Hao. Meng Hao saw the young man in the mask, as well as Chen Fan with his Nascent Soul cultivation base.

“What’s... what’s going on?!” Before coming into this world that tested the heart and the Dao, he had been full of confidence. After all, he had passed through all the previous levels as the center of attention.

Now, though, as he looked around at this unique world, for some unknown reason he was suddenly filled with a stifling sense of crisis.

He was not the only one to be regaining clarity. Around him, there were roughly a hundred thousand cultivators all recovering their senses. When they realized the situation they were in, they began to cry out in alarm.

“What is this place? How could the final two stages be like this!?”

“I never thought... I never thought that we would all be tested together!”

Meng Hao’s breath came in ragged pants as he tested out the chain that bound him and found that he couldn’t make it budge an inch. Also, his ability to use his cultivation base had apparently been suppressed, leaving him with nothing but the ordinary power of Dao Seeking.

Even more shocking to Meng Hao was that he could feel the iron chain that bound him swaying back and forth. Also, when he looked off into the distance, what he saw caused him to gape. In fact, there were even some people whose eyes went wide when they saw what was off in the distance, and they let out cries of shock and alarm.

Meng Hao was able to clearly see that at the very end of the iron chains that bound all the cultivators was an enormous cudgel, which was in turn slung over the shoulder of a giant!

The giant was gargantuan, and bare chested. He wore animal hide clothing, and his skin was pitch-black, with a violet tint. He moved forward at a run, which caused the iron chains to sway back and forth, making everyone attached to them feel as if the entire world was spinning.

The crowds in the outside world of the Ninth Mountain and Sea were equally shaken. They watched the vortex screens, and the gargantuan giant which had appeared.

“So the final two stages are like this!”

“What kind of test is this?”

It was at this point that a huge rift appeared in the sky of the world that Meng Hao and the others were in, out of which flew hundreds of thousands of figures.

These figures were not cultivators, but rather, winged beasts. Their appearances were savage, and they kicked up a shocking wind as they immediately began to fly toward the cultivators.

It was at this point that the giant suddenly stopped running, and then swung the huge cudgel into the air, which also swung the iron chains attached to its end. All of the cultivators were buffeted by gale force winds that made it feel as if they had been slammed into a huge cliff face. The cultivators were sent flying directly into the charging flying beasts.

The beasts' eyes were bright red, and voracious grins could be seen on their faces. They immediately pounced onto the cultivators, and in the blink of an eye, miserable screams could be heard. Many people were instantly killed in the initial salvo, completely wiped out by the beasts, who swallowed them alive.

A rain of blood fell down toward the ground, causing the sea of flames down below to dim and darken.

A vicious gleam appeared in Meng Hao's eyes as his body swung with the chain, completely out of his own control. However, he was still able to attack, and he didn't hesitate to perform an incantation with his right hand. He made a claw-like gesture, and lines of claw marks appeared, which slammed into an incoming beast's head.

A boom could be heard, and the beast shrieked, after which its head exploded. However, even as its body tumbled past Meng Hao, three more beasts appeared behind it.

More booms could be heard as Meng Hao attacked like the wind. He had a vicious personality that he now made no attempt to hide. His attacks sent blood flying through the air, and the killing intent which shone in his eyes grew more and more intense. After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, more than thirty beasts had died under his attacks.

There were many other cultivators like Meng Hao, all engaged in fierce fighting. Gradually, more and more of them died. The few people that were left behind were now facing ever greater numbers of beasts.

Furthermore, some beasts had appeared that were similar to the Dao Seeking stage in power. Within an hour, false Immortal beasts were on the scene, and one cultivator after another died around Meng Hao. After two more hours passed, there were less than a hundred people, who were surrounded and quickly being overwhelmed.

Meng Hao held on for fifteen breaths of time before his body collapsed and his head was devoured by a beast. In the last moments before his death, he was able to see that he had held out long enough to be the last person to die.

Everything went black.

When things became clear again, Meng Hao found himself in a world of flames, with a dismal sky, and swaying chains. Everything he saw was exactly the same as before. Other people began to awaken, then stare around themselves in shock.

Meng Hao was also gaping, and then his scalp went numb. Apparently, nothing had changed. The giant was still running forward, and everyone who had died was back where they had been before.

After enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, the rift opened up in the sky and the beasts poured down. It was all exactly the same as before, almost as if they had been reincarnated. Yet again the giant roared and flung the cudgel out. Meng Hao and all the other cultivators who were attached to the chains were once again thrust into battle.

Meng Hao quickly found that exactly the same beasts as before came to attack him.

After two hours passed, Meng Hao died. When he opened his eyes, the chains were still there, swinging....

Once, twice, three times.... Meng Hao quickly lost track of time and how many times he had died. Soon, people around him began to grow numb to what was happening. As soon as they were tossed out, they chose to die, then begin the cycle again.

An expression of frustration gradually appeared on Meng Hao's face. There was no way to leave this place. This was supposed to be a trial by fire, but there seemed to be no chance to live.

Die, die, and die again.

Revive, revive, and revive again.

Some people began to collapse into frenzied howls. However, that made no difference. Some people silently contemplated different methods of success, but all craftiness and plots were in vain.

Meng Hao watched as a Dao Seeking cultivator used some unknown method to try to possess one of the attacking beasts, then use it to flee. Soon, he vanished, apparently having escaped.

However, the next time Meng Hao regained consciousness, the man was still strung up on the chain, just like before.

As to what exactly had happened, the man gave no explanation.

Chapter 860: The Heart is Strong, the Dao is Unyielding!

Dying fills people with fear. Dying 100 times will make people numb. Dying 1,000 times can cause one to feel lost. Dying 10,000 times...

That can make someone feel as if they aren't even human any more.

Such an experience gave birth to pain, a pain that the competitors could only hope would just come to an end. A pain that spread into the hearts of everyone. Their hearts filled with torment to the point that their Daos were in peril of being lost.

This trial by fire was like an enormous grindstone, slowly crushing away their wills as it turned and turned.

More and more people gave up on fighting back. If fighting back 10,000 times in a row did no good, how many people were there that could persevere...?

Meng Hao persevered. Every time he woke up, he would continue to fight and kill the beasts that attacked him. 10,000 times.

As time went by, Meng Hao saw countless cultivators making various decisions. Some chose to try to flee. Some chose to attack the giant. Some chose to commit suicide.

There were even some people who attacked other cultivators.

Regardless of what they did, every time Meng Hao regained his senses, he saw the same people in the same places on the iron chains, without exception.

The audiences in the Ninth Mountain and Sea watched the screens, and their hearts and minds trembled. If you said that the spectators had been shocked by the previous eight stages, then this stage left them completely astonished.

Before, they had been envious of the competitors, and had even sighed, wishing that they could switch places. Now that they saw what was happening in the final two stages, however, they could only watch silently.

As for how many times the cultivators had actually died, nobody knew.

“Just what kind of test is this? How does dying over and over again help their hearts and their Daos?”

“These last two stages are basically Hell!” By this point, the audience members were all breathing in ragged pants.

“You can see people trying all kinds of different methods. If you add everything together, it seems they’re trying every possibility! But in the end, there’s no other result than defeat.”

“How can this test be passed? I’m afraid Fang Mu will have no way to clinch first place.”

Complete silence reigned in the starry sky palace as the Patriarchs stared wordlessly at the display screens.

The dying continued, over and over again, an endless cycle.

Meng Hao remained silent and taciturn throughout the process. However, unlike many of the people around him, he never attempted to flee, nor did he lose his desire to fight. From beginning to end, every time he regained lucidity, he would begin killing.

However, his deaths came more and more quickly. That was because more and more of the others ceased resisting. When the iron chains were flung out, they would simply close their eyes and wait to die.

Gradually, fewer and fewer people were like Meng Hao, constantly fighting back. Of the tens of thousands of people who had started out fighting, there were now only a few thousand remaining. Suddenly, Ling Yunzi's voice echoed out within the world.

"If you say 'I give up,' you can leave."

The instant these nine words spread out, among the countless cultivators who had grown numb to the constant dying and were once again on the verge of being killed, someone quaveringly spoke up.

"I give up...." As soon as he spoke the words, he vanished, leaving the world entirely.

After him, one voice after another began to ring out, and one cultivator after another began to vanish.

Without the presence of despair, if someone is given hope, they might not attach too much importance to it, especially if they have a steadfast heart and an unchangeable Dao.

However... if you torment someone to their limits and place them in the midst of despair, then give them a sudden scrap of hope, an opportunity to be extricated, then most people would not hesitate to grab that chance.

More and more people chose to give up. However, there were also others who had previously ceased resisting, who suddenly seemed to be filled with energy, and began to fight the beasts.

Time passed by. They died over and over again, and as they did, the words 'I give up' seemed to become like an inner Devil, lurking in the hearts of all the cultivators.

Simply speaking, all they had to do was say some words, and the constant torment would be over. They would be released.

“What a brutal test,” said one of the Patriarchs in the palace.

“From ancient times until now, the mark to pass this stage has been 30,000 deaths.”

“More than 50,000 marks a participant as Chosen!”

“To date, no one has exceeded 79,113. That was the mark set by Sir Fan.”

“So, he participated in this part too. Without the element of despair, perhaps many could grit their teeth and continue on. But with hope right there, so close that all they have to do is reach out and grab it, how many people will be able to persevere?”

“The ninth stage tests the heart, the tenth stage inquires of the Dao. These two stages test how strong one’s heart is and how unyielding one’s Dao is!”

“The longer they endure, the more terrifying everything becomes!” In addition to the Patriarchs in the palace who were discussing the matter, there were many outside in the Ninth Mountain and Sea who were able to piece together some clues about the nature of the two stages.

“I heard that when Sir Fan reached these last two stages, he died more than 79,000 times. He held on until he was the very last person before giving up.”

The outside world was abuzz, but their discussions could not pass into the world in which Meng Hao was continuing to persevere. Inside of him, two voices were speaking, one of them telling him to give up, the other telling him to endure.

Every time, he would die wracked with pain, and would wake up confused. It is a simple thing to describe, but it was nothing short of torture. The number of cultivators left behind continued to shrink.

The sound of the words ‘I give up’ that echoed around was like the voice of that inner Devil. It actually caused even more of the remaining cultivators to eventually decide to quit.

Time passed by. Fewer and fewer cultivators remained behind. Soon there were only a few hundred. After three days, there were only a hundred. After another three days, there were only nine.

Of those nine, there were three who were enduring, but had ceased to fight back. It was a somewhat fraudulent method, and although it initially seemed as if it would lessen their torment, in the end, it actually made things even more painful.

The other six included Meng Hao. Every time he awoke, he would begin to fight.

He had no idea how many times he had died. His eyes were bloodshot, and everywhere he looked, he saw blood. Another three days passed, and the three people who had been passively allowing themselves to be killed, finally couldn't take it any more and gave up.

Of the five people other than Meng Hao who had continued to fight, four quit.

There were now only two people left. One was Meng Hao, the other was... Chen Fan!

Chen Fan fought. Every time he regained his senses, he fought viciously, almost as if he hoped to achieve some special state amidst all the carnage.

Out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea, everyone was shocked. In the starry sky palace, the Patriarchs were watching with baited breath, closely observing Chen Fan.

Chen Fan had had his outstanding moments in the previous stages, but had not attracted much attention when creating his divine ability. Now, in these last two stages, he was suddenly rising to prominence.

“With such a heart and such a Dao, this young man has incredible good fortune!”

“He could give up at any time, but has endured all the way to this point! He's already died 70,000 times!!”

“He'll most likely be able to hold on for a while longer. In this stage, the most difficult point is when there is only one person left. At that point, first place is secured, which leads to a softening of

the heart, making it difficult to continue on. Even Sir Fan, when he reached that point, didn't last for more than a thousand deaths before giving up.

A day later, Chen Fan began to tremble, and finally chose to quit. He had endured for more than 70,000 deaths, which was second only to Sir Fan's performance all those years ago. He was now quite the center of attention, and there were several sects who were preparing to try to recruit him.

At this point in the shocking trial by fire, everyone was looking at the final remaining participant... Meng Hao.

"He took first place in the first two stages, outshone the first place winner in the middle three stages, and then in the following three stages, took first place yet again. Now in the final two stages... he actually... took first place again!"

"He's definitely going to rise to complete prominence! Nobody can get in his way. As long as he doesn't get killed, then he's going to be thoroughly famous in all the Ninth Mountain and Sea!"

"It's like we're looking at a future Paragon...." All of the cultivators who were watching the trial by fire out in the Ninth Mountain and Sea could now feel their minds spinning.

By now, especially after seeing the final two stages, they all had to admit that if they were in Meng Hao's place, they would not be able to do what he was doing.

Meng Hao was still hanging on. He knew that he was the only person left, and yet he didn't give up. A vicious, ruthless smile appeared on his face, and each time he regained consciousness, he would wade into battle with the countless beasts. It was in the middle of this carnage that he tempered his heart and his Dao.

"My Dao is the endless path of life, freedom and independence! Now, I am restrained by these chains, which is the furthest thing from freedom!"

"My heart is unconstrained. If Heaven and Earth collapse, it will not be destroyed. If all living things become ancient, it will not wither. But now, it hesitates!"

"My Dao is not free, but I desire freedom! My heart hesitates, but I wish to persist past the point of hesitation!"

“This trial by fire is testing me, and I’m using it to polish my Dao. In this way, although I might seem to be restrained, in actuality they are nothing but chains. They can’t tie me up, they can only polish my Dao!

“As for my heart, if I wish it to be unhesitating, then I need to endure. Endure to the point... where I do not feel pain in this trial by fire, but instead, happiness!

“When I pass this stage, then I will be truly free, and my heart will be incredibly strong!” Eyes shining brightly, he launched an attack.

73,000. 76,000. 79,000....

80,000!

When Meng Hao died for the 80,000th time, the audiences in the outside world roared, and the patriarchs in the starry sky palace, despite being somewhat accustomed to how Meng Hao worked wonders, were still completely shaken.

“He exceeded Sir Fan!!”

“I just added it up, and that was the 80,000th death! That puts him in first place among everyone from ancient times until now!!”

“Fang Mu. Fang Mu! This name is definitely going to shock the Heavens!”

While the audience was in an uproar, Meng Hao continued to persevere. A smile could be seen on his face, and he actually seemed to be incredibly happy. It wasn’t happiness because of dying, or killing, but rather, a happiness because of his own Dao. His heart was now growing even more resolute.

To his heart and his Dao, death... was unworthy of being anything more than a grindstone.

A few days later, he died for the 90,000th time!

A few more days, and it was... 100,000!

That 100,000th death caused universal uproar. When Meng Hao opened his eyes afterward, wild colors flashed in the sky, and a wind screamed. The giant slowly dropped to one knee and raised the cudgel aloft. The countless beasts that had poured out of the rift all dropped to the ground.

It was as if they were prostrating themselves in worship!

The stage had been cleared!