

Sect Master 101

Chapter 101: Parting Ways

Facing the fiery serpent capable of melting gold and iron, the Lion Puppet did not show any signs of retreat. It directly lunged forward and launched a fierce attack, easily dispersing all the serpents.

Almost at the same time that Meng Zhang took action, Jue Ying also moved.

She disappeared on the spot, turning into a shadow that swiftly traveled along the ground. Seizing the opportunity when the Lion Puppet dispersed the serpents, she appeared behind it and successfully attached three talismans to its body.

These three talismans were not direct offensive ones; they were gravity talismans. After sticking them on, the Lion Puppet seemed to carry a great mountain on its back, causing its massive body to slow down significantly.

Unexpectedly, Jue Ying even possessed such esoteric talismans. What's even more commendable was her combat awareness and control of the battle, both of which were exceptionally skillful.

Although there was no prior communication between Meng Zhang and Jue Ying, she clearly understood that direct attacks on the Lion Puppet would be futile. The key to victory in this battle was to deplete the puppet's spiritual stones as quickly as possible. Once its spiritual stones were depleted, no matter how fierce the Lion Puppet was, it would lose its meaning.

Meng Zhang felt a bit regretful for not bringing any summoning-type talismans this time. If he had summoned cannon fodder, the battle would have been much easier.

He once again infused True Qi into the Fire Seal, summoning nine fire serpents.

Jue Ying carried a variety of talismans. Each talisman released various summoned creatures like earth spirits and tree spirits.

Jue Ying's movements were like lightning, swift as the wind. Taking advantage of the puppet's distraction, she managed to approach the Lion Puppet multiple times and dealt it heavy blows.

Every time the Lion Puppet attacked her, she promptly reacted and disappeared like a shadow.

Although Jue Ying was only in the Mid Refining Qi stage, her combat prowess exceeded that of many cultivators in the Late Refining Qi stage.

With Jue Ying's cooperation, Meng Zhang also demonstrated his true abilities, employing all of his skills. After a bitter battle, the two of them narrowly secured victory in the end.

The Lion Puppet, which had exhausted its spiritual stones, was previously imposing but was now reduced to a lifeless clay puppet.

Meng Zhang and Jue Ying were both exhausted from the intense fight.

Looking at the pile of storage bags in the center of the hall, Meng Zhang suddenly became vigilant.

In the world of cultivation, wealth could tempt the heart. For the sake of obtaining resources for cultivation, not only strangers who cooperated occasionally but even fellow disciples and relatives could turn hostile and resort to killing for treasures.

If this treasure trove was the reason they met Jue Ying in a life-and-death battle, he would feel somewhat regretful.

Jue Ying proved to be a very insightful woman and probably guessed Meng Zhang's thoughts.

She voluntarily retreated to a corner of the hall and said, "I said I would help you for free this time as an apology. All the gains here have nothing to do with me."

Seeing the sincerity in Jue Ying's eyes, Meng Zhang felt that she was not being insincere and was not trying to use this situation to her advantage.

Meng Zhang didn't say much and went to the pile of storage bags to conduct a simple count.

There were a total of thirty-three storage bags, most of them were single spatial storage bags, but there were also four multi-dimensional storage bags.

The contents of the storage bags were mostly full. Besides three thousand low-grade spirit stones, there were various pills, talismans, magic tools, and many spiritual objects.

Meng Zhang found the most valuable to be a large pile of books.

Taiyi Sect had declined for a long time, and its heritage was almost lost. Even though Meng Zhang had gained valuable knowledge from the Trial Ground, it was still far from enough.

Among these books were the accumulated heritage of the Li family over the past three hundred years. Now, all of it belonged to Meng Zhang, and it would undoubtedly greatly enhance Taiyi Sect's foundation.

After calculating Jue Ying's contribution, Meng Zhang distributed two thousand low-grade spirit stones to her and specifically selected a pile of talismans and pills.

Jue Ying was straightforward, and Meng Zhang wasn't stingy either.

Receiving Meng Zhang's gifts, Jue Ying didn't refuse and accepted them openly.

Meng Zhang also collected the Second Rank Puppet on the ground.

He planned to take it back and study it, trying to reset its commands to make it serve him.

After clearing the scene, erasing all traces, and destroying everything, the two of them left the place.

Returning to the passage, they reunited with Li Xuan, who was carrying Zhang Zhanlin, and headed outside.

Meng Zhang, burdened with a large pile of storage bags, resembled a laborer.

Feeling quite inconvenient, he was already considering whether to find a way to obtain a larger spatial magic tool.

"This cooperation was pleasant. I hope we have the chance to continue working together next time," Meng Zhang said to Jue Ying.

Feeling that Meng Zhang was a good employer, Jue Ying took the initiative to leave her contact information.

Without saying much more, the two parted ways, going their separate paths.

Having obtained the secrets of the Li family's treasure trove, Meng Zhang didn't dare to roam outside carelessly. He quickly returned to Taiyi Sect with Li Xuan and Zhang Zhanlin.

In the meantime, Zhao Jiudou of the Zhao Family put in considerable effort and spent many resources to finally learn about Li Shengqi's movements in the Flying Swan Building.

He then contacted the supervisor of that merchant caravan and, in secret, spent a significant amount of spirit stones to find out where Li Shengqi would hand over the storage bag.

When Zhao Jiudou and the Zhao Family disciples arrived at the location, it was already empty.

Unwilling to accept defeat, Zhao Jiudou mobilized the Zhao Family disciples and conducted an extensive search of the surrounding area but found nothing.

Zhao Jiudou finally obtained the box that Li Shengqi handed to Li Nu and invited an expert in deciphering to open it.

As Zhao Jiudou expected, the box was empty.

Zhao Jiudou finally lost his patience and decided to directly deal with Li Shengqi.

After leaving Singing Sand City, Li Shengqi had been wandering nearby.

The one-month period of employment had ended, and the spies, the grey rat, and the black horse who had been secretly following him left to receive their rewards at the black market.

Only the Zhao Family disciples remained, secretly tracking Li Shengqi.

Zhao Jiudou arrived with his men and personally took action, easily killing the guards hired by Li Shengqi and capturing him.

Knowing that he couldn't escape this time, Li Shengqi took poison and killed himself before falling into Zhao Jiudou's hands.

Having spent so much effort and resources and taken so much time, Zhao Jiudou had nothing to show for it in the end, only a lifeless body.

Zhao Jiudou's frustration and anger were beyond words.

The failure of this operation dealt a significant blow to his reputation within the Zhao Family.

Meanwhile, the true beneficiary of this event, Meng Zhang, had already returned to Taiyi Sect with all his gains.

Chapter 102: Insect Taming Jar

Meng Zhang, as the biggest winner in this incident, unfortunately couldn't publicize his achievements everywhere and could only keep them hidden.

Upon returning to Taiyi Sect, he called Deep Earth Spirit General over, as he was experienced and knowledgeable, to go through their gains together.

During their time in the secret treasure vault of the Li family, Meng Zhang had only made a preliminary count. Now, upon closer inspection, he found quite a number of valuable items.

All the books were sorted individually and after the disciples transcribed them, they were placed in the Hidden Scripture Pavilion.

Although the Li family's heritage spanned over three hundred years, their collection was not exhaustive, but it still had its unique aspects.

During the process of sorting the books, Deep EarthSpirit General occasionally made remarks, which greatly benefited Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang selected some spiritual objects, pills, and talismans that he could use and carried them with him, while the ones he couldn't use immediately were placed in the sect's treasury, available for the disciples to exchange with their meritorious deeds.

He gave two thousand low-grade spiritual stones to Jue Ying and kept the remaining thousand to cover his expenses and more.

With the Fire Seal, Flying Sword Soft Around The Finger, and Soul-Stirring Bell, Meng Zhang didn't pay much attention to other magic tools. He simply placed all the magic tools they obtained this time into the sect's treasury.

While sorting the magic tools, Deep EarthSpirit General's discerning eye spotted a rare magic tool called the Insect Taming Jar.

This was a special magic tool that only certain sects proficient in the Insect Dao could refine.

The Insect Taming Jar could forcefully contain various demonic insects, allowing them to be strengthened within the jar and then thoroughly tamed.

Demonic insects usually had limited intelligence, making it almost impossible to command them to perform complex tasks.

However, once contained within the Insect Taming Jar, their intelligence and various other aspects would greatly improve.

Before, Meng Zhang had obtained a beast-controlling ring that enslaved demonic beasts. Compared to the Insect Taming Jar, the beast-controlling ring was evidently much lower in grade and far less effective.

Demonic insects controlled by the Insect Taming Jar would never harbor rebellious thoughts and would only wholeheartedly obey their master's commands.

Unfortunately, the Li family cultivators didn't recognize the value of the Insect Taming Jar. They obtained this rare magic tool but failed to recognize it, putting it among the miscellaneous items, which now became a bargain for Meng Zhang.

Cultivators who raised various demonic insects often relied on the sheer number of insects to gain an advantage.

According to what Meng Zhang knew, to the east of Green Bamboo Mountain, there was a cultivator famous for raising thousands of blood-sucking mosquitoes. When engaging in combat, a vast swarm of these mosquitoes would surge and completely engulf their enemies.

Of course, raising so many demonic insects required a considerable amount of resources, which Taiyi Sect currently lacked.

When Deep EarthSpirit General recognized the Insect Taming Jar, Meng Zhang immediately thought of how to use this magic tool.

Deep EarthSpirit General was secretly mining scarlet copper ore, but the efficiency was low, and it consumed too much of his time.

Sand worms were capable of burrowing and going underground, and they were accustomed to devouring various types of ore.

They were perfect miners.

After entering the mine, the sand worms would swallow large amounts of ore and then return to the surface. At this point, controlling the sand worms to spit out the ore would complete the mining process.

This mining method was not only stealthy and efficient, but it also didn't require employing regular miners.

In the past, Meng Zhang had considered taming sand worms for mining. However, he never had a reliable method to control them, especially since their intelligence was low. If he failed to control them properly and exposed the scarlet copper ore, it would be a loss rather than a gain.

Now, with the Insect Taming Jar, he could control the sand worms effectively.

Before using the Insect Taming Jar, there was a crucial step.

Each Insect Taming Jar had to undergo repeated refinement with Lunar True Water to fully unleash its power.

Low-quality Lunar True Water wasn't too precious, but magic tools and dual cultivation techniques that could refine Lunar True Water were relatively rare. For a while, it was not easy to find Lunar True Water on the market.

Therefore, Meng Zhang had to work hard himself.

Every night, he diligently absorbed the essence of the moon to refine Lunar True Water.

The time spent refining Lunar True Water was significant and affected his cultivation progress.

In the Cultivation World, this was a challenge faced by many cultivators.

If one focused solely on cultivating their foundation and didn't bother with various spells, their cultivation progress would naturally be faster.

However, without spells and defensive techniques, their ability to deal with enemies would be limited.

The more spells one mastered, the more versatile their combat abilities would be, but dividing attention among spells would naturally hinder cultivation progress.

Balancing the relationship between the two and making choices tested the wisdom of every cultivator.

As for magic tools, not every cultivator could obtain enough of them, and the number of magic tools a cultivator could control was limited.

For instance, Meng Zhang, with a Sevenfold Refining Qi cultivation base, already struggled to control a First Rank High-Grade Flying Sword Soft Around The Finger, First Rank High-Grade Fire Seal, and First Rank High-Grade Soul-Stirring Bell. Trying to control other magic tools was genuinely beyond his capacity.

Apart from the Insect Taming Jar, there were also three Second Rank talismans in the Li family's treasure trove.

Second Rank talismans required at least a Second Rank talisman master to create and possessed the power to deal with Foundation Building cultivators. Ordinary Refining Qi cultivators couldn't fully utilize their potential.

One talisman was the Quicksand Giant talisman, which could summon a Second Rank Quicksand Giant.

Another was the Stone Golem talisman, which could summon a Second Rank Stone Golem.

The last one was a Second Rank Earth Escape talisman, which allowed the user to execute the Second Rank Earth Escape Spell.

These were precious life-saving items that Meng Zhang cautiously stored.

As for the guardian lion puppet that watched over the treasure vault, Meng Zhang also took it out.

Within the inheritance he obtained in the Trial Ground, there were some materials related to puppetry, and surprisingly, Deep Earth Spirit General also had some knowledge of puppetry.

Together, they spent a considerable amount of effort to dismantle the Second Rank puppet and modify its preset commands to be directly controlled by Meng Zhang.

Operating the Second Rank puppet required middle-grade spiritual stones, and the consumption was enormous.

One hundred low-grade spiritual stones were said to be exchangeable for one middle-grade spiritual stone on the market. However, in reality, because middle-grade spiritual stones were rarer and had more uses, when exchanging low-grade spiritual stones for middle-grade ones, there was usually an additional twenty percent cost.

This Second Rank puppet finally gave Taiyi Sect a Foundation Building-level combat power, but this stone-eating giant could not be used frequently and could only serve as a hidden trump card.

Meng Zhang had to exert significant effort just to collect enough middle-grade spiritual stones to operate the lion puppet.

Every ten nights, Meng Zhang could only refine a single drop of Lunar True Water.

After toiling for several months, he barely managed to collect enough Lunar True Water to begin the initial refinement of the Insect Taming Jar.

After the refinement process, the Insect Taming Jar could finally be used.

The only regret was that this Insect Taming Jar was only a First Rank magic tool, capable of containing only First Rank demonic insects.

Chapter 103: Discovery

After refining the Insect-Controlling Jar, all that was left was to gather enough sand insects to start mining the mineral veins.

Sand insects usually build their nests underground and spend most of their time burrowing through the earth.

Deep Earth Spirit General, who was skilled in Earth Escapement, was the best candidate to search for sand monsters underground.

Meng Zhang handed the Insect-Controlling Jar to him and asked him to take a tour of the surroundings to collect as many sand insects as possible.

On the other side of Singing Sand City, Li Shengqi used the Li family's shop at Flying Swan Building as collateral to buy enough talismans, which he entrusted to the commercial convoy of Flying Swan Building to be delivered to Li Zhan.

Now, both Li Shengqi and Li Zhan had passed away, leaving the Li family completely shattered. Even though Flying Swan Building was still influential, it could not collect debts from the deceased.

Flying Swan Building had no interest in the Li family's shop and decided to openly transfer ownership in exchange for spirit stones.

Thanks to the three-year exemption from Twin Success Valley and the subsidies from Meng Zhang over the past two years, Taiyi Sect had managed to accumulate some savings.

Meng Zhang personally put in some effort and took over the shop that Flying Swan Building was transferring.

Zhang Zhanlin, who was saved by Li Xuan and brought back to Taiyi Sect, had recovered from his injuries after a period of rest.

After expressing his desire to join Taiyi Sect, he underwent an assessment by Meng Zhang and successfully became an entry disciple of the next generation in Taiyi Sect.

Zhang Zhanlin's aptitude had never been outstanding, and the use of life-saving secret techniques had severely damaged his vitality.

Even after his injuries had healed, it was difficult for him to make significant progress on the path of cultivation.

After Taiyi Sect took over a shop in Singing Sand City, Zhang Zhanlin, who had no interest in cultivation, volunteered to manage the store in the market.

Having spent many years in Singing Sand City and working at the Li family's shop, he was not only familiar with the surroundings but also had rich experience in running a business.

Therefore, after some consideration, Meng Zhang appointed him as the store manager of the shop.

Currently, Taiyi Sect had no special products or fixed trade routes. Meng Zhang searched through the sect's treasury and handed a pile of miscellaneous items that were temporarily not in use to Zhang Zhanlin as the capital for running the shop.

Scarlet copper, which had been refined, and spirit grain produced from the sect's spirit field were also sold in small quantities in the shop.

Especially the small amount of scarlet copper sold was inconspicuous, and it could be said that the shop purchased it for its own use. Selling it in the store not only provided an additional channel for shipments but also yielded higher profits compared to selling to Shi Weiming and others.

Zhang Zhanlin had good judgment and a keen business sense, allowing him to engage in some profitable buy-and-sell trades.

Meng Zhang did not expect this shop to earn a significant amount of spirit stones; as long as it could sustain itself, he would be satisfied.

The primary purpose of opening this shop was to establish a channel for Taiyi Sect to connect with the outside world and gather various information from the Cultivation World.

As Taiyi Sect's first external outpost, on the day the small shop opened, Sect Master Meng Zhang and General Affairs Elder Tian Zhen personally attended the grand opening in Singing Sand City.

After the battle at Forest Mountain School, Meng Zhang had gained some reputation in the surrounding area. Many cultivation forces had shops or bases in Singing Sand City.

On the day of the grand opening, representatives from these forces either arrived personally or sent congratulatory gifts.

Guests from Forest Mountain School, Qiaoshou Sect, and others were particularly warm and enthusiastic.

Lao Bulu, who had a friendship with Meng Zhang, also took the time to come over.

Since the formation of the First Rank spirit vein in Sweetwater Oasis, the oasis had been rapidly expanding in size.

According to the estimation of Deep Earth Spirit General, Sweetwater Oasis's area would at least double in size, and the expansion would gradually slow down.

In the coming decades, as long as the spiritual energy of the spirit vein was not excessively depleted or damaged, Sweetwater Oasis would continue to expand slowly into the surrounding area.

With the increase in area, Sweetwater Oasis could naturally accommodate more mortals.

Meng Zhang also gradually purchased mortals from Lao Bulu to increase the population of Sweetwater Oasis.

However, the newly expanded oasis couldn't be cultivated into farmland immediately. To support these mortals and meet their basic needs, a large quantity of supplies, including food, had to be purchased from outside. This created a lucrative business for Lao Bulu.

Amidst the sound of firecrackers, Duo Duo General Store officially opened.

The name "Duo Duo General Store" was suggested by Meng Zhang. He hoped that one day, Duo Duo General Store would expand throughout the entire Endless Sea of Sand.

Duo Duo General Store would maintain regular contact with the sect and send back various information from the outside world.

In addition to managing Duo Duo General Store, Zhang Zhanlin took over Li Xuan's network and channels, expanding his influence.

After returning to Taiyi Sect, Meng Zhang dedicated most of his time and energy to cultivation. Besides cultivating the fundamental Dual Cultivation technique, the "Sun-Moon Wheel Turning Sutra," he spent a lot of time practicing various spells and sword techniques.

This peaceful life didn't last long before it was interrupted once again.

Deep EarthSpirit General, who went out to capture sand insects, brought back important news.

While tracking a sand insect, the insect got lost and ended up entering a concealed cultivator's cave.

As soon as the sand insect entered the vicinity of the cave, it was killed by the defensive Formation.

Deep EarthSpirit General didn't rush in but observed the surroundings carefully.

As a Geomancer, Deep EarthSpirit General was proficient in geomancy. After a careful observation, he had a clear understanding of the situation around the cave.

The cultivator's cave was located underground, and beneath it was a hidden First Rank spirit vein.

The protective Formation of the cultivator's cave relied on this First Rank spirit vein.

Having a spirit vein constantly providing spiritual energy, the defensive strength of the Formation was formidable.

Moreover, Deep EarthSpirit General also noticed the existence of some malicious traps around the cave.

If anyone inadvertently triggered these traps, their fate would undoubtedly be tragic.

With Deep EarthSpirit General's strength and experience, he could slowly explore and spend more time and energy to break the Formation and safely enter the cultivator's cave.

However, at this moment, he noticed some cultivators searching the nearby ground.

They were searching in many places and were gradually getting closer to the cave.

Based on Deep EarthSpirit General's experience, these cultivators probably obtained the information about this cultivator's cave from some channel, but the information was not detailed enough. They only had a rough direction.

However, at their current speed, it was only a matter of time before they found the cave.

With his strength alone, Deep EarthSpirit General had no confidence in breaking the protective Formation and safely entering the cultivator's cave before these cultivators arrived.

Thus, he had to return with this information and seek help from Meng Zhang, the Sect Master.

Chapter 104: The Cultivator's Cave Mansion

Upon hearing the report from Deep Earth Spirit General, Meng Zhang felt delighted. The cultivator's cave mansion was a secondary concern; the main attraction was the hidden spirit vein. This was an incredibly valuable discovery.

Controlling the spirit vein would greatly strengthen Taiyi Sect, whether by selling the resources it provided for spirit stones or using it for their own cultivation and development.

Meng Zhang said, "Tell me in detail about the location of that spirit vein."

With a casual wave, Deep Earth General caused a pile of yellow sand to appear on the ground. Under his control, the sand quickly shifted and formed a large sand table, standing steadily on the ground.

On the sand table, the surrounding terrain was clearly displayed. Since awakening, Deep Earth Spirit General had been busy using his geomancy skills to survey the nearby geography during their outings.

Especially during their recent expedition to capture sand monsters, their tracks covered the surrounding area and even extended deep underground. Most of the results of Deep Earth Spirit General's survey were now shown on the sand table.

About two hundred miles west of Taiyi Sect, near the Zhao Family, there was a winding spirit vein. At the top of this spirit vein was the cultivator's cave mansion.

Seeing that the spirit vein was close to the Zhao Family's territory, Meng Zhang understood that once this hidden spirit vein was exposed, there would undoubtedly be a fierce struggle between Taiyi Sect and the Zhao Family for its ownership.

Only dozens of miles away from this spirit vein was the long-abandoned Meng Family Oasis. Over a decade ago, during the Sand Monster Incident, the Meng Family was annihilated, and the Meng Family Oasis was destroyed. The surviving members of the Meng Family were mostly taken in by Taiyi Sect.

Since joining Taiyi Sect and especially after becoming the Sect Master, Meng Zhang intentionally downplayed his identity as a member of the Meng Family. He saw himself as the leader of Taiyi Sect, not the leader of the Meng Family.

Based solely on geographical location and the conventions of the Cultivation World, if the Meng Family still existed, this spirit vein would belong to them. However, now that the Meng Family had been extinct for many years, Meng Zhang was not willing to let this spirit vein fall into the hands of the Zhao Family either.

Without any hesitation, Meng Zhang had already decided to secure this spirit vein as soon as possible.

After entrusting matters within the sect to General Affairs Elder Tian Zhen, Meng Zhang and Deep Earth General left together.

Before departing, Meng Zhang retrieved three First Rank Formation Breaking Talismans from the sect's treasury.

Formation Breaking Talismans were rare talismans, and Meng Zhang had obtained one before, finding it extremely useful. He had always wanted to buy a few more, but they were rarely available on the market.

Only during this recent visit to the secret treasury of the Li Family did Meng Zhang obtain several First Rank Formation Breaking Talismans, which he had been cherishing and had never used easily.

Meng Zhang, Deep Earth Spirit General, and Li Xuan each mounted a Wind Chasing Horse and rushed towards the location of the spirit vein.

Even before arriving at the exact location of the spirit vein, they occasionally encountered cultivators in the vicinity.

Based on Meng Zhang's observations, most of these cultivators seemed to be loose cultivators.

Li Xuan, following Meng Zhang's instructions, left the group and actively approached a group of loose cultivators.

Skilled in socializing and having an extensive network, Li Xuan quickly struck up a conversation with them, establishing a friendly relationship after just a few exchanges.

"Do you know so-and-so? Oh, yes, he's the master of my great aunt's uncle's cousin's nephew."

With a few similar sentences, the two sides, now having a common acquaintance, became intimate.

Li Xuan's skillful conversation allowed him to make everything clear in just a few rounds of talk.

After bidding farewell to the group of loose cultivators, Li Xuan returned to Meng Zhang's side.

"Sect Master, about half a month ago, a group of loose cultivators obtained a Treasure Map. They followed it and found the place a few days ago."

"Due to leaked information, more and more loose cultivators are coming here, hoping to benefit. As of now, the news hasn't spread far enough, and only nearby loose cultivators have come; no major families or sects have shown interest yet. But if we delay further, things might become unpredictable."

Meng Zhang agreed with Li Xuan's judgment. The three of them continued forward until they reached above the cultivator's cave mansion.

Meng Zhang left Li Xuan to take care of the Wind Chasing Horses, and with Deep Earth Spirit General, he looked around to confirm that nobody was paying attention to their location. They then immediately used the Earth Escape Spell to enter the ground.

Deep Earth Spirit General led the way, and they swiftly descended underground.

While Deep Earth Spirit General seemed at ease, Meng Zhang felt the strain. The pressure from the surrounding earth and stones increased, causing their speed to slow down inevitably.

As Deep Earth Spirit General's figure became increasingly distant and almost out of sight, they finally reached their destination.

Meng Zhang felt a sudden lightness and found himself in a narrow passage.

Seeing Deep Earth Spirit General advancing along the passage, Meng Zhang hurried to catch up.

They had not taken many steps before arriving in a spacious underground space.

In front of them lay a vast sandy area.

Several incomplete corpses of sand worms were scattered across the sand, barely recognizable.

Behind the sandy area, there was the entrance to a cave.

"This underground space is a natural cavity, and the owner of this cave mansion expanded it to create this scene before us."

"This is the cultivator's cave mansion left by the predecessor, and it happens to be situated at the core of the spirit vein. Judging from the arrangements left behind, this cultivator should have been in the Foundation Building stage."

Deep Earth Spirit General gave Meng Zhang a detailed introduction.

"To thoroughly occupy this spirit vein, the fastest way is to enter this cave mansion and control its core."

Meng Zhang originally intended to leave the cave mansion of this senior cultivator for later and handle the matters concerning the spirit vein first. However, after listening to Deep Earth Spirit General's words, he realized that it was unavoidable to explore this cave mansion.

Cultivator cave mansions were not always opportunities; more often, they were death traps. Some generous cultivators would indeed leave behind their treasures for future cultivators. They might even leave wills, requesting those successors to fulfill their wishes or take care of their disciples and descendants.

If those who benefited had a grateful heart, they would indeed try their best to fulfill the senior cultivator's wishes, resulting in a win-win situation.

However, there were also many narrow-minded cultivators who would set up death traps in their cave mansions before their deaths.

If they were going to die anyway, why should their treasures fall into the hands of unrelated people?

Ideally, more cultivators would come to the underground and accompany them, ensuring they wouldn't be lonely after death.

Occasionally, in the Cultivation World, there were rumors of later cultivators who had finally entered a senior cultivator's cave mansion, believing they were going to receive an inheritance and ascend to greatness. Unfortunately, they encountered a hidden, long-established, and malicious old ghost that attempted to take over their bodies.

Chapter 105: Disorderly Metal Sword Array

When encountering a cultivator's cave whose details are unknown, it's best not to casually intrude.

Loose cultivators at the bottom are so poor that they risk their lives just to obtain some cultivation resources. Although Meng Zhang was only a Sect Master of a small sect and couldn't be considered powerful, he had accumulated some assets, so there was no need to take unnecessary risks.

Meng Zhang hesitated as he looked at the cultivator's cave in front of him.

At that moment, Deep Earth Spirit General suddenly turned around and looked towards the passage behind them.

Meng Zhang reacted quickly and remained on guard.

After a while, a group of people emerged from the passage.

As they appeared in this space, they noticed Meng Zhang and Deep Earth Spirit General.

Clearly, they didn't expect that someone else would arrive here before them.

One of them stepped forward from the group and cupped his fists towards Meng Zhang's group.

"I am Han Tu. I obtained a treasure map in the market, thinking that I had hit the jackpot. Unexpectedly, when Han Tu and my brothers worked hard to find this place, you, fellow Daoists, were ahead of us."

These people should be the loose cultivators who acquired the treasure map that Li Xuan had gathered information about. Unexpectedly, their actions were swift, and they found this place so quickly.

By mentioning the treasure map in the conversation, they were trying to establish a moral high ground, indicating that they had paid a price to come here.

Despite being caught off guard, Meng Zhang disdainfully snorted, "What a load of nonsense about being ahead of you. We just arrived here and haven't even seen a single hair."

"What's the matter? Do you think that with that so-called treasure map, everything here belongs to you?"

"Everything has an order. This lord arrived here first, so everything here should belong to this lord."

Hearing Meng Zhang's arrogant words, the group of people showed anger on their faces, and some even took out magic tools, preparing to fight.

Meng Zhang remained unmoved, showing no courtesy.

"A bunch of Refining Qi minor cultivators, thinking you can defy the heavens."

"What? You want to fight? This lord just happens to need some exercise."

Han Tu waved his hand and calmed down his somewhat excited companions. Facing Meng Zhang's arrogance, he still maintained a smile on his face.

"We've been talking for so long, and yet we don't know your honorable name..."

"This lord's surname is Zhao," Meng Zhang said in a manner that resembled a spoiled child.

"Surname Zhao," Han Tu's expression slightly changed as he thought of the nearby Zhao Family, a powerful sect not too far from here.

"Are you a disciple of Zhao Family?"

Meng Zhang merely nodded, appearing indifferent to answer.

Loose cultivators were inherently at a disadvantage when facing cultivators from prominent families. Especially the formidable Zhao Family, not far from this place.

Han Tu pondered for a moment before saying, "We haven't even entered the cave, so we don't know what's inside. It would be ridiculous to fight over it without any knowledge."

"Brother Zhao, how about we work together to break the defensive formation outside the cave first? Once inside, we can see what treasures are available."

"At that time, I believe we can negotiate a satisfactory distribution plan for everyone."

Han Tu's suggestion was exactly what Meng Zhang wanted.

Since this group of cultivators appeared, Meng Zhang had a plan in mind.

With ready-made cannon fodder, he could explore the cave more easily.

Meng Zhang put on a reluctant appearance and hesitated for a while before reluctantly agreeing to Han Tu's proposal.

Seeing that both sides had agreed to explore together, Deep EarthSpirit General, who had been silent the whole time, finally spoke, "In front of the cave is an incomplete Disorderly Metal Sword Array."

"The complete Disorderly Metal Sword Array is a Second Rank Formation. It seems that the spirit vein's level here is insufficient to provide enough spiritual energy, so the formation is incomplete, revealing some flaws."

"Unexpectedly, this fellow here is actually skilled in formations," Han Tu marveled.

It was not difficult to have some understanding of formations on the surface, but to quickly analyze the formation in front of them indicated a considerable level of proficiency in the field of formations.

Deep EarthSpirit General continued to observe the formation.

Han Tu was not embarrassed by the situation but asked, "Since this fellow here is proficient in formations, we will rely on you to decipher this formation."

After a while, Deep EarthSpirit General slowly said, "It's not too difficult to break this formation."

"Due to the lack of spiritual energy supply, there are several flaws in the formation. With so many of us attacking from these specific points, we can break the formation sooner or later without expending much effort."

"Brother, your insight is commendable. Since you are so confident, we will follow your instructions and break the formation together."

Han Tu was delighted with Deep EarthSpirit General's analysis, fully believing in him.

Deep EarthSpirit General naturally cooperated with Meng Zhang's group. They selected a position and were ready to enter the formation at any time.

Seeing Deep EarthSpirit General's gaze, Han Tu understood his intentions. He divided the group of cultivators into several teams, preparing to enter the designated points separately.

Among them, some of the cultivators expressed doubts, showing their lack of trust in Deep EarthSpirit General.

However, after Han Tu persuaded them, he managed to convince everyone to cooperate.

Chapter 106: Mistake

Meng Zhang walked to Deep EarthSpirit General's side, and without saying much, they exchanged a glance and took a step forward.

As they moved, Han Tu also relaxed, urging the group of Cultivators he brought to enter the Formation. Finally, Han Tu entered a specific position alone.

Meng Zhang took a step forward, and the scene before him immediately changed.

The once empty and vast space turned into a towering mountain reaching to the clouds.

Meng Zhang and Deep EarthSpirit General stood at the foot of the mountain.

The sudden change in scenery didn't surprise Meng Zhang; instead, he grinned and said to Deep EarthSpirit General, "Unexpectedly, you, with your thick eyebrows and big eyes, are capable of playing tricks."

Deep EarthSpirit General didn't respond but continued to carefully observe the surroundings.

Knowing Deep EarthSpirit General's reticent nature, Meng Zhang didn't mind and continued, "A mere lackey of the demon race thinks he can fool us. I wonder who the real fool is."

Ever since he first saw Han Tu, Meng Zhang felt that something was off about him. Through his Deception Breaking Eye, he sensed a strange aura surrounding Han Tu.

Before Meng Zhang could react, Deep EarthSpirit General secretly transmitted a message to him. "Human Pet."

Upon hearing these two words, Meng Zhang immediately understood Han Tu's true identity.

Many Human Clan Cultivators enslaved demonic beasts as their familiars. Similarly, powerful demonic beasts would also enslave Human Clan Cultivators as their Human Pets.

However, in the Endless Sea of Sand, the demonic beast forces were not strong, and there were no significantly powerful demonic beast tribes. Without powerful demonic beasts, it was difficult for them to produce formidable demonic beasts.

If a group of demonic beasts appeared within the area controlled by Human Clan Cultivators, it would immediately attract many of them. They would slaughter the demonic beasts to obtain various materials from their bodies.

Meng Zhang had only heard rumors about the existence of Human Pets but had never seen one in person.

Deep EarthSpirit General's ability to recognize Han Tu's identity immediately put Meng Zhang on high alert.

Once Han Tu's true identity was exposed, it would draw the siege of countless Human Clan Cultivators.

This person willingly took such risks to enter this place, indicating that there must be some deep secrets involved.

As for the Treasure Map he allegedly obtained from the market that led him here, Meng Zhang didn't believe a single word of it.

Therefore, Meng Zhang and Deep EarthSpirit General put on a show together.

Meng Zhang wanted to see what this guy's real intentions were.

As a Human Clan Cultivator, Meng Zhang naturally had the duty to eliminate demons and evil spirits.

Deep EarthSpirit General, who appeared simple and honest, was quite skilled at deceiving people as well.

The so-called "Gengjin Chaotic Sword Formation" was nothing more than a made-up name. Its purpose was to trick these people into entering the formation.

While Meng Zhang had some knowledge of formations, Deep EarthSpirit General was a Geomancer with profound accomplishments in the field of formations.

After entering this Formation, Deep EarthSpirit General could fully utilize its power to cause significant harm to these people. Conversely, he could also use them to deplete the formation's power.

While Meng Zhang spoke, he advanced.

In the empty space ahead, a golden light suddenly appeared, slashing directly towards Meng Zhang.

Prepared in advance, Meng Zhang remained calm and raised his right hand, unleashing a golden flame to meet the attack.

After a series of crackling sounds, the golden light vanished, and Meng Zhang retracted his flame.

The Solar True Flame that Meng Zhang diligently cultivated was effective against the Gengjin Sword Qi accumulated within the Formation.

Having easily neutralized the killing intent within the formation, Meng Zhang turned to look at Deep EarthSpirit General beside him.

"Deep Earth, how much longer until you find the eye of this Formation?"

Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye could barely protect him within this Second Rank Formation. To break the formation, they would have to rely on Deep EarthSpirit General.

"Stop!," Deep EarthSpirit General called out in a somewhat anxious tone.

"What's wrong?" Meng Zhang stopped and looked puzzled.

"I made a mistake. I didn't see through the secrets of this Formation."

"My current strength is still too weak. While outside, I didn't notice the hidden mysteries of this Formation. It was only when we entered that I realized something was wrong."

Deep EarthSpirit General's tone carried a sense of frustration and disappointment.

Geomancers surpassed many professional Formation Masters in their understanding of formations. Only those top-tier Formation Masters could slightly outshine Geomancers in this aspect.

For a Geomancer to fail to see through the mysteries of a Formation and rashly enter it was not only a mistake but also a great humiliation.

Deep EarthSpirit General's words made Meng Zhang nervous as well.

As the Deep EarthSpirit General with the battle strength of a Gold Core Daoist Master, Meng Zhang had high expectations for him.

Unexpectedly, he encountered problems on his first attempt.

"Now what? Are we going to be trapped within the Formation?" Meng Zhang asked anxiously.

Deep EarthSpirit General didn't answer but kept scanning the surroundings while constantly manipulating his fingers as if calculating something.

After a while, Deep EarthSpirit General finally heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Fortunately, we haven't gone too deep into the Formation. If we retreat now, there should still be a glimmer of hope."

Meng Zhang also breathed a sigh of relief.

Led by Deep EarthSpirit General, they didn't continue forward but walked towards a nearby lush forest, where trees covered the area, and green leaves flourished.

"Beyond this is the Living Gate. Use all your strength and do your best to open it as quickly as possible," Deep EarthSpirit General instructed.

Without hesitation, Meng Zhang immediately unleashed all his power.

The Solar True Flame, strengthened by the Fire Seal in his hand, surged forward, turning the trees ahead into ashes.

His flying sword, Soft Around The Finger, flew forward, continuously swirling and delivering powerful strikes.

Deep EarthSpirit General's large fists emanated an earthy yellow light, fiercely pounding the ground ahead, causing it to tremble incessantly.

Meng Zhang and Deep EarthSpirit General both gave their all and attacked relentlessly.

"Not enough, it's still not enough," Deep EarthSpirit General muttered anxiously while looking at the sky.

Since awakening, Deep EarthSpirit General had always been an esteemed figure in Meng Zhang's mind. He had never seen him this anxious before.

Growing more and more frantic, Deep EarthSpirit General seemed to make a certain decision. His body emitted a series of bone-cracking sounds, and suddenly, he grew significantly taller.

Deep EarthSpirit General, who was already tall and sturdy, now looked like a small giant.

An aura significantly surpassing the strength of the Refining Qi stage emanated from his body.

"Aren't you only at the high completion of the Refining Qi stage? How can you transform and increase your strength after the transformation?" Meng Zhang was bewildered.

Deep EarthSpirit General didn't have time to explain Meng Zhang's doubts. He raised both fists as if he were beating a drum and madly pounded the void ahead.

Chapter 107: Dormancy

The attack from Deep Earth had an effect. With the sound of glass shattering, the forest in front suddenly disappeared, revealing a dark and deep crevice.

"Hurry, let's go!" Deep Earth Spirit General called out and immediately rushed into the crevice.

Meng Zhang didn't dare to slack off and followed closely, rushing in as well.

Meng Zhang felt the world spinning around him, and the space in front of his eyes kept changing. When everything stabilized, they found themselves back in their original location before entering the Formation.

"Don't stop, keep going!" Deep Earth Spirit General urged anxiously, not even sparing a glance at the surroundings.

The two of them hurriedly fled, and after leaving the area, they immediately used Earth Escape Art to escape upwards.

During their escape, Meng Zhang's true qi was insufficient, and he had to use several Earth Escape talismans in succession to barely keep up with Deep Earth Spirit General.

After reaching the surface, Deep Earth Spirit General jumped onto the Wind Chasing Horse.

"Quickly leave this place, the faster, the better."

Li Xuan, who was guarding the Wind Chasing Horse, saw the two of them in a desperate escape and didn't waste time saying anything. He immediately followed them in their escape.

Under the urging of the three, the Wind Chasing Horse ran at full speed and quickly escaped from the area.

After escaping quite a distance, Deep Earth Spirit General finally relaxed a bit.

At this moment, Meng Zhang had the chance to ask, "Deep Earth, what exactly happened?"

"And, now that we've escaped, will Han Tu and the others break the Formation and achieve their goal?"

"I've observed Han Tu, and though he doesn't show it, he must have a plan. He should have a deep understanding of the Formation."

Deep Earth Spirit General sneered disdainfully, "That guy, even if he knows the Formation well, it won't matter."

"We forcefully broke the entrance to the Formation, which will undoubtedly trigger subsequent changes."

"With their mere Refining Qi stage strength, they won't survive within the Formation."

Meng Zhang couldn't help but doubt Deep Earth's judgment after his recent mistake, "Are you sure? We made it out, after all."

"Enough, the forces involved in this matter are too high-level for you to know at the moment."

Seeing that Deep Earth Spirit General didn't seem willing to reveal more, Meng Zhang refrained from asking further.

The three of them hurried all the way back to Taiyi Sect at their fastest speed.

Once back at Taiyi Sect, Deep Earth Spirit General rushed to the underground chamber below Sect Master's quiet room.

Deep Earth Spirit General didn't delay for long before falling into another slumber near the spirit vein's eye.

Before falling asleep, Deep Earth Spirit General gave some instructions to Meng Zhang. He had used a secret technique to forcefully boost his strength in order to open the entrance to the Formation. Now he had to rest and recover from the strain, which would take at least a year and a half.

Regarding the area they had just escaped from, Deep Earth Spirit General repeatedly warned Meng Zhang.

They must never enter that place again, and they should never even mention it.

According to Deep Earth Spirit General's judgment, the layout of that area was very intricate and part of a massive system.

Such methods likely exceeded the power of a Gold Core Daoist Master.

The fact that it surpassed the level of a Gold Core Daoist Master stunned Meng Zhang. The dominant power in this region, the Flying Swan Sect, had their most powerful force limited to Gold Core Daoist Master level.

Events surpassing the Gold Core Daoist Master level left Meng Zhang utterly terrified.

Looking at the sleeping Deep Earth Spirit General, Meng Zhang couldn't help but curse, "You just go ahead and sleep, leaving behind such a mess. You should have explained things more clearly. What exactly is going on here?"

Meng Zhang hated Deep Earth's evasive, half-hearted way of speaking, pretending that Meng Zhang wasn't qualified to know, all for his own good.

This Guardian Spirit General had just awakened, and Meng Zhang had thought he would be useful, but now, this mess happened, which was truly infuriating.

With Deep Earth Spirit General asleep, Taiyi Sect lost another important card.

"You can sleep as much as you want. Stay here, nourish yourself in the spirit vein's eye, and recover slowly." Meng Zhang sighed helplessly.

However, there were still many troublesome matters ahead.

Fortunately, the spirit vein on the Sweetwater Oasis side had stabilized, and there was no need for Deep Earth Spirit General to continue its adjustments.

Meng Zhang took out the insect-controlling jar from Deep Earth Spirit General's storage bag and checked its contents. There were already seven sandworms inside, which should be enough, though it would be better to collect a few more.

After arranging everything for Deep Earth Spirit General, when Meng Zhang returned to Sect Master's quiet room, he felt a violent shaking from the ground.

The tremors calmed down for a moment but resumed even more violently after a while. Even various buildings in Taiyi Sect began to shake.

Was it an earthquake?

Meng Zhang rushed outside. The strong earthquakes caused panic throughout Taiyi Sect. Houses shook, and disciples started to panic. The more timid ones were running around in confusion.

Meng Zhang couldn't care about all that and quickly placed his hands on the ground, forming a hand seal to sense the direction of the earthquake.

Faintly, Meng Zhang sensed that the direction of the earthquake was where they had just escaped from.

The earthquake came on strongly but ended quickly, and soon, everything settled down.

After the earthquake subsided, they carefully checked and found that no one was injured in the sect, and there were no substantial losses or damages. Only two old and dilapidated rooms had some cracks on their walls.

Since they were far from the epicenter, the earthquake didn't cause significant damage.

Having remembered Deep Earth Spirit General's instructions, Meng Zhang restrained his curiosity and firmly decided not to go to the area where the earthquake happened.

This earthquake attracted the attention of many cultivation forces in the vicinity. They sent people to investigate, and curious loose cultivators also rushed to the area to see if there was anything valuable to pick up.

Meng Zhang and Li Xuan stayed obediently inside Taiyi Sect, not leaving a single step.

After several days, Meng Zhang and Li Xuan went to Singing Sand City together to inquire about the earthquake-related news.

As expected, the earthquake occurred in the same area where Meng Zhang and Deep Earth Spirit General had been.

After the earthquake, a large portion of the area collapsed, revealing a deep and bottomless pit.

The earthquake didn't last long, and its scope wasn't extensive. So the surrounding cultivation forces were mostly just frightened, without any substantial losses or casualties.

Even the loose cultivators who were searching in that area at the time suffered few casualties. Only a few unlucky ones were buried by sand dunes or injured by falling rocks.

On a flat desert plain, even during an earthquake, it was challenging to cause significant harm to people.

However, the appearance of the enormous pit attracted many cultivators who went there to explore. Some even claimed to have seen the appearance of a cultivator's cave-dwelling.

Chapter 108: Spirit Vein

On this evening, Meng Zhang secretly arrived at the location of the Scarlet Copper Mine. He took out the Spirit Beast Jar, infused it with True Qi, and gently activated it.

After a while, the ground started to tremble, and large holes appeared in front of him. Nine sandworms, each of them now grown in number, emerged from the ground.

Previously unruly, these sandworms now behaved obediently like children, automatically forming several rows in front of Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang used the Deception Breaking Eye to carefully examine the bellies of the sandworms in front of him. Their large bodies had become swollen, obviously filled with Scarlet Copper ores.

Through repeated attempts, Meng Zhang discovered that approximately every ten days, the sandworms' bellies would be nearly full. Controlled and tamed by the Spirit Beast Jar, they overcame their natural instincts and reduced their sleep time.

Once released by Meng Zhang, they would automatically burrow into the ground, not wandering around aimlessly but directly entering the veins of the Scarlet Copper Mine to devour its ores. After consuming for a certain period, the sandworms would rest for a while before resuming their feeding.

In this way, the diligent workers continued their mining work until their bellies were full.

After collecting all the sandworms back into the Spirit Beast Jar, under the cover of night, Meng Zhang returned to Taiyi Sect.

Once back at Taiyi Sect, Meng Zhang released all the sandworms and forcefully made them spit out all the ores they had consumed. Disciples from the sect were responsible for cleaning up the Scarlet Copper ores spat out.

After taking out the specially purchased food for feeding the demonic insects, Meng Zhang fed all the sandworms and then stored them back in the Spirit Beast Jar.

The sandworms needed to rest inside the jar for a few days to recover their expended strength and energy.

The Scarlet Copper ores cleaned by the disciples would be sent to the Refining Room.

The so-called Refining Room was nothing but a recently constructed separate hall. Inside, there was a First Rank Lower Grade refining furnace and numerous spirit woods used as fuel.

Most of the time, Tian Li would be presiding in the Refining Room. By now, Tian Li had become a qualified apprentice tool refiner.

He made use of all his spare time from cultivation to refine the Scarlet Copper ores.

In fact, despite Meng Zhang also spending considerable time refining the ores, he could not match the speed at which the sandworms mined them.

Seeing the Scarlet Copper ores piling up in the storage room, yet unable to refine them all in time, it was a happy dilemma.

Meng Zhang was not in a hurry. He planned to refine them slowly and sell them over time; it was not a bad idea.

Directly selling the Scarlet Copper ores would not only result in a significant loss of profit but could also expose the existence of the Scarlet Copper Mine.

Deep Earth Spirit General's initial speculation was correct. This Scarlet Copper Mine contained several associated minerals.

These associated minerals, the Flame Crystals, and Profound Gold, were much more precious than Scarlet Copper.

Meng Zhang separated these associated minerals with care and refined them separately.

The income from this Scarlet Copper Mine had become the most stable source of wealth for Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang was considering whether to cultivate several more apprentice tool refiners among the disciples. The cost of training them was not high, and for those with poor aptitude, learning an additional skill would be beneficial.

With more apprentice tool refiners, the speed of refining the Scarlet Copper ores could be greatly accelerated.

However, this matter was not urgent and could be set aside for the time being.

Currently, there were only about ten disciples in the sect, and not many of them practiced Fire-attribute Cultivation.

At this point, it had been almost two months since Deep Earth Spirit General fell into slumber.

After the earthquake, cultivators from all over rushed to the area, turning it upside down. Even the seemingly bottomless pit was thoroughly explored.

However, none of the cultivators found any valuable clues in the area. The legendary cultivator's cave was nowhere to be found.

Even after hearing this news, Meng Zhang found it quite strange.

He had clearly discovered the cultivator's cave and the protective formation outside it, not to mention the trapped cultivators within the formation.

How could they all disappear without a trace, leaving no clues behind?

Nevertheless, regardless of his curiosity, Meng Zhang firmly remembered Deep Earth Spirit General's instructions never to enter that area again and to stay as far away as possible.

The popularity of the Cultivation World came and went quickly.

The cultivators who found nothing of value in the area soon lost their patience and dispersed.

The Cultivation World had many places worth exploring, so there was no need to waste time in a place with no value.

With the matter settled, Meng Zhang also relaxed. He instructed Li Xuan to keep the secret of their exploration deep in their hearts and not let it leak.

After that incident, Meng Zhang learned from Deep Earth Spirit General and occasionally patrolled around Taiyi Sect.

If he found any issues, he could deal with them promptly.

Taking advantage of the sandworms resting in the Spirit Beast Jar, Meng Zhang decided to go a little further away.

As if guided by a whim, Meng Zhang rode his Wind Chasing Horse and ended up at the abandoned Meng Family Oasis.

More than ten years ago, the Meng Family Oasis was breached by Sand Monsters during the chaos. Like all other oases attacked by Sand Monsters, the Spirit Vein inside the Meng Family Oasis was destroyed, and the oasis rapidly degenerated into a desert.

What was once a thriving oasis had now turned into a complete ruin.

Meng Zhang circled around the Meng Family Oasis before heading north, where the earthquake had occurred, and where they had escaped from initially.

Meng Zhang didn't dare to enter that area actively and changed his direction, continuing to ride his Wind Chasing Horse forward.

Meng Zhang headed south, and after riding for about fifty miles, he slowed down his pace.

Ahead, there were a series of hills surrounding a valley of about a hundred acres.

Meng Zhang carefully sensed the spiritual energy from the hilltop. Indeed, there was a relatively concentrated aura here.

Using the Deception Breaking Eye, he carefully surveyed the surroundings.

Then, he employed the Earth Escape Spell and directly burrowed underground.

After a good half day, Meng Zhang finally emerged from the ground.

He hadn't been mistaken; a brand new Spirit Vein had appeared here somehow.

Meng Zhang had passed through this area before, and it was clearly just barren hills and wilderness with no Spirit Vein in sight.

Meng Zhang had a basic understanding of geomancy and conducted a detailed survey around the area.

Afterward, he had a rough guess in his mind.

Chapter 109: Spiritual Eye

This spirit vein was originally buried deep underground, so its spiritual energy was also locked underground, and no one had discovered any clues until recently.

The recent earthquake may have shaken the surrounding earth veins, causing this spirit vein to rise closer to the surface. Consequently, the trapped spiritual energy beneath the ground leaked out at this time.

Thinking about the earthquake, Meng Zhang felt a bit guilty. If it weren't for his connection with Deep EarthSpirit General and their opening of the Formation gate, that earthquake probably wouldn't have happened.

Looking at it this way, the appearance of this spirit vein seems to be related to him. It's quite a coincidence.

The spirit vein that Deep Earth Spirit General initially discovered disappeared with the Formation. Yet, here he was, discovering a completely new spirit vein. It seemed like a case of losing one thing but gaining another. Was this heaven's compensation for him?

The saying "heaven gives not what is not taken" rang in his mind. Since this spirit vein was fated to be connected to him, he should firmly occupy it.

Meng Zhang surveyed his surroundings; the location was indeed a bit awkward.

If the Meng family were still around, this spirit vein would belong to them, and there would likely be little dispute.

However, the Meng family was no longer present, and the land that used to belong to them had become a buffer zone between Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family.

A spirit vein was a strategic treasure, and Zhao Family would definitely not sit idly by while Taiyi Sect took it.

It seemed that a direct conflict between Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family was unavoidable.

For now, all Meng Zhang could do was to delay the exposure of this spirit vein for as long as possible, dragging it out as much as he could.

Meng Zhang carefully inspected his surroundings again, even delving deep underground to sense the density of spiritual energy.

This was a First Rank high-grade spirit vein, and its distribution was extensive. With proper management, he could develop several dozen acres of spirit fields.

After conducting his survey, Meng Zhang chose a location and once again went underground.

After a while, he arrived at a special place.

The density of spiritual energy here was much higher than in other areas, and the rich spiritual energy seemed almost tangible.

This was the core of the spirit vein, the location of the spiritual eye.

Most newly formed spirit veins' spiritual eyes, apart from having slightly denser spiritual energy, didn't possess any other special features. For example, the spirit vein at Sweetwater Oasis was like that.

The spirit vein at Taiyi Sect's mountain gate, although not long in existence, had some unique qualities within its spiritual eye.

It had a special nourishing effect that could nurture the soul and enrich the spirit.

The spirit vein in front of him was not newly formed; it had been underground for who knows how many years before surfacing. In spirit veins that had existed for a longer time, there were often associated spiritual creatures within the spiritual eye.

As Meng Zhang entered the location of the spiritual eye, he immediately saw the associated spiritual creature inside. It turned out to be the Divine Ability's peculiar spiritual creature, the Black Oil Spirit Earth.

Although the Black Oil Spirit Earth was a spirit creature without a grade, its effect surpassed many Yellow-ranked spiritual creatures.

The Black Oil Spirit Earth was a type of soil rich in spiritual energy and special components, named for its smooth and shiny texture.

Its main function was to replenish the earth's strength within the spirit field.

Previously, Taiyi Sect's spirit fields mainly cultivated spirit grain, not only because it required the lowest level of Spirit Plant Technique, but also because the spirit fields lacked sufficient accumulation of earth's strength. To conserve this strength and prevent the spirit fields from deteriorating, they didn't dare to plant a large number of spirit flowers and grasses that consumed the earth's strength.

Looking at the large pile of Black Oil Spirit Earth on the ground, he wondered how many years of accumulation it took to gather such a quantity.

This only strengthened Meng Zhang's determination to occupy this spirit vein. Even if he had to go to war with Zhao Family for it, he wouldn't hesitate.

Taiyi Sect's Daoist Clear Spirit had already improved in Spirit Plant Technique, with the help of the Wang father and son. With a large quantity of Black Oil Spirit Earth, they could cultivate more profitable spirit flowers and grasses.

Meng Zhang spent some time wandering around the area. At the current rate of spiritual energy leakage, it would take a long time before any anomalies appeared in the vicinity.

He filled all his storage bags with as much Black Oil Spirit Earth as he could carry before leaving the place.

Although it was only a First Rank spirit vein, the rate at which the Black Oil Spirit Earth was produced was not slow.

Riding his wind chasing horse, Meng Zhang hurriedly returned to Taiyi Sect. After handing over all the Black Oil Spirit Earth to Daoist Clear Spirit, he left again and rushed to Singing Sand City.

Despite carefully searching in Singing Sand City, he couldn't find the Formation he desired.

Unable to leave, Meng Zhang had to ask Shi Weiming to run to Firewell Market and buy a set of First Rank high-grade protective Formation for him.

Next, Meng Zhang became a porter, repeatedly transporting the Black Oil Spirit Earth from the newly discovered spirit vein back to Taiyi Sect.

Years ago, he brought back a batch of white hidden earth crystals from the abandoned mine occupied by Ghost Path cultivators. He had the disciples polish them and sold them at Flying Swan Building, increasing the sect's and the disciples' income.

Now, all those white hidden earth crystals had been polished and sold.

Except for Tian Li, most of the disciples in the sect had relatively little to do.

With this batch of Black Oil Spirit Earth, most of the disciples were mobilized to help Daoist Clear Spirit and others reorganize the spirit fields.

In less than half a month, Shi Weiming brought a set of excellent protective Formation - the Chaotic Stone Sand Formation, a First Rank high-grade Formation. Apart from its conventional functions of sealing and gathering spiritual energy, it had quite good defensive power and a certain counterattack capability.

Once the Formation was obtained, Meng Zhang immediately summoned Wen Qiansun and together they went to the newly discovered spirit vein.

In just half a month, the spiritual energy leakage had become very severe. Due to the large amount of spiritual energy seeping out, the originally cold and desolate area now displayed hints of greenery. The surrounding desert was slowly and steadfastly transforming into an oasis.

Wen Qiansun had been studying Formation for a long time, and Meng Zhang took this opportunity to test his practical abilities.

The two clearly divided their roles and jointly arranged the First Rank high-grade Chaotic Stone Sand Formation.

They chose several hills to place the formation discs, conveniently encompassing the entire valley within the Formation's range.

Although Wen Qiansun only had a Cultivation Base of Refining Qi Triple, his speed in setting up the Formation was no slower than Meng Zhang's.

In the end, Wen Qiansun even completed his work before Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang only had a slight understanding of Formation; his talent in this area was not particularly strong.

However, it was different for Wen Qiansun, who dedicated all his time and energy to studying Formation.

His talent in Formation was extremely high, and combined with his diligence, he had already surpassed many Formation Master apprentices.

Wen Qiansun's arrangements were flawless, whereas Meng Zhang had one or two imperfections.

After correcting these shortcomings, Wen Qiansun activated the Formation.

The Formation successfully connected with the spirit vein, absorbing a large amount of spiritual energy.

Chapter 110: Battle Invitation

Once the Formation was activated, a layer of fine sand, like mist, immediately rose within this hilly area, shrouding the surroundings in a blurry haze that made it difficult to see clearly.

Under the cover of the fine sand, the surrounding scenery became indistinct and hard to discern. Several hills surrounded the central valley, and on the outskirts of these hills, various-sized stones began to appear.

These stones were formed from the spiritual energy of the spirit vein. As the Formation remained in place for a longer time, the accumulation of these stones increased.

Once enemies intruded into the formation, these stones would become both defensive and offensive weapons.

Although the spiritual energy of the spirit vein was mostly locked within the Formation, it was impossible to prevent any leakage.

Nourished by the spiritual energy, various vegetation began to slowly appear in the surroundings, turning the desert into an oasis.

Meng Zhang named this slope where the spirit vein resided "Morning Sun Hillside."

With the successful establishment of the protective Formation, Meng Zhang felt relieved. With this First Rank top-grade stone maze Formation as a reliance, Taiyi Sect could easily achieve victory despite being weaker in strength and fewer in number.

Wen Qiansun's proficiency in formations gained Meng Zhang's approval. He decided to keep Wen Qiansun behind to familiarize himself with the control of the stone maze Formation.

There was a significant difference in power between a Formation controlled by someone and one without anyone to control it.

After the disciples of the sect were done with their tasks in the spirit field, Meng Zhang gathered them together for various drills.

As time passed, the changes outside Morning Sun Hillside became more and more evident. The area covered by the stone maze Formation was limited and could only encompass the surroundings of a few hills. Beyond that, they were powerless.

Gradually, the hills in the vicinity began to turn green. The once desolate desert was now giving rise to various types of vegetation.

Finally, a loose cultivator passing by accidentally discovered these changes in the Endless Sea of Sand. When large amounts of vegetation appeared on the original desert, the most plausible explanation was the emergence of a new spirit vein in the vicinity.

The loose cultivator wanted to come over and take advantage of the situation, thinking they might find something beneficial. However, Meng Zhang discovered them and drove them away.

Meng Zhang didn't kill them because there was no need to. People constantly came and went in this place, and it was impossible to kill every cultivator who noticed the changes.

As expected, the next day, two cultivators from Twin Success Valley also passed by.

They approached and discovered the new spirit vein and the protective Formation, so they inquired about the situation. For cultivators from Twin Success Valley, Meng Zhang couldn't simply drive them away.

Meng Zhang personally received them and explained the situation with a respectful attitude.

These two Twin Success Valley cultivators just asked out of routine and to keep the sect informed about the various situations in the vicinity. The appearance of a new First Rank spirit vein wasn't a big deal to them, and after asking, they left.

Before leaving, they reminded Meng Zhang that the newly opened spirit field had a three-year exemption period. After three years, depending on the number of spirit fields, they would have to offer tributes to Twin Success Valley.

After these two Twin Success Valley cultivators left, more cultivators passing by gradually noticed the situation here.

Half a month later, Zhao Family finally learned about the appearance of a brand new spirit vein at the boundary with Taiyi Sect.

Shortly afterward, an envoy from Zhao Family arrived outside Morning Sun Hillside. The envoy was Zhao Dong, an old acquaintance of Meng Zhang. Upon seeing the situation at Morning Sun Hillside, he felt quite frustrated.

Taiyi Sect's luck was too good. They actually managed to discover a completely new spirit vein. Even if it was just a First Rank spirit vein, it was worth Zhao Family's effort to seize it. Meng Zhang didn't invite Zhao Dong inside and instead kept him outside the protective Formation. Standing outside the Formation, Zhao Dong looked coldly at Meng Zhang.

Though both sides knew that their words were futile and that a battle was inevitable, they had to go through the motions since they were both considered reputable sects and were affiliated with Twin Success Valley. They had to show courtesy and save face.

Thus, they engaged in a verbal exchange, debating each other's claims.

Zhao Family's tone was simple: This area belonged to Zhao Family's territory, and they were unjustly invaded by Taiyi Sect. Taiyi Sect must immediately withdraw and apologize to Zhao Family.

Meng Zhang's argument was equally straightforward: This place had always been the sacred and inseparable territory of Taiyi Sect, and Taiyi Sect would not retreat even half a step.

After going back and forth with their futile exchange, the negotiations officially collapsed.

Zhao Dong left after throwing a few harsh words.

The next day, Zhao Dong sent a challenge letter.

In fifteen days, Zhao Family and Taiyi Sect would have a battle here to determine the ownership of this spirit vein.

Meng Zhang accepted the challenge letter and agreed to the battle.

This kind of approach aligned with the rules of Twin Success Valley and was a common method for affiliated factions to resolve disputes within the valley.

This kind of open battle had certain rules and limitations. No matter how devious their actions might have been in secret, such as killing for treasures or oppressing the weak with force, during this public battle, they had to act with integrity. They couldn't tarnish the image of reputable sects, especially not in front of Twin Success Valley, which valued face greatly.

Many malicious methods were forbidden in this kind of battle, and it was best to end the fight quickly, avoiding causing a large number of casualties.

Meng Zhang considered the situation. Deep Earth Spirit General was currently in deep slumber, and there weren't many Taiyi Sect disciples, and their cultivation bases were weaker.

Although Meng Zhang had some secret cards like Second Rank talismans obtained from the Li family's secret treasury and Second Rank puppets, he couldn't use them easily. Zhao Family was also a family that had produced cultivators at the Foundation Building stage, and they must have some secret cards as well.

If they didn't want the battle to escalate easily, they couldn't use these methods.

The real deciding factor would be the Taiyi Sect disciples.

Meng Zhang had been the Sect Master of Taiyi Sect for more than four years and had gradually recruited some disciples. At this point, there were at least a dozen Taiyi Sect disciples.

Apart from two disciples who had just joined and were still at the early stage of cultivation, not even having stabilized their Refining Qi First Layer, all the other Taiyi Sect members, including Daoist Clear Spirit and the Wang father and son, were called to Morning Sun Hillside by Meng Zhang.

Apart from Meng Zhang, there were a total of fifteen members.

Among them, the highest cultivation base belonged to Tian Zhen and Daoist Clear Spirit, both at the Refining Qi Sixth Layer.

As the main strategy was to rely on the stone maze Formation for defense, Meng Zhang assigned the task of commanding everyone to Wen Qiansun, who was proficient in formations.

Everyone started to busy themselves, practicing how to cooperate and control the Formation.

Meng Zhang also didn't idle around. Besides completing Wen Qiansun's assignment, he had to seek help outside.

The reason why Zhao Family had scheduled the battle for fifteen days later was to give both sides enough time to find qualified witnesses.

This was another significant characteristic of this kind of battle.

The outcome of the battle not only depended on the fighting on the battlefield but also on the off-battlefield efforts.