

## Sect Master 111

### Chapter 111: Running Around

Both sides relied on their respective networks to find witnesses. Although they would generally maintain impartiality, there would inevitably be some bias during critical moments.

Taiyi Sect had only been established for less than a hundred years and had limited external interactions. On the other hand, Zhao Family, as a local power rooted in the area for three hundred years, undoubtedly had a far-reaching network surpassing that of Taiyi Sect.

Thinking of this, Meng Zhang felt a bit troubled.

As a transmigrator, Meng Zhang had always harbored an inexplicable sense of superiority. Moreover, due to possessing exceptional spiritual roots, he had been highly regarded by Taiyi Sect's previous Sect Master, Daoist Profound Spirit, since he was young.

Therefore, Meng Zhang was very proud in his heart. Even if he didn't show it on the surface, he didn't really hold the so-called Foundation Building sects in high regard.

With Meng Zhang's aptitude, achieving the Foundation Building Cultivation Base was only a matter of time. Even glimpsing the Gold Core realm was not an impossible task.

Now, Meng Zhang reflected on himself and realized that his mindset was not in the right place.

No matter what, he was currently just a Refining Qi stage cultivator, overseeing a small sect.

Since he belonged to a small sect, there were many limitations and compromises he had to make. When he should be humble, he should be humble. When he should act as if he were naive, he should play that role.

It was foolish to hold on to a high and mighty attitude, refusing to humble oneself.

Small forces needed to possess the wisdom to survive in difficult circumstances, struggling to survive in the cracks. It was never an easy task.

Not to mention acting with elegance and grace, at the very least, one should be kind to others and make more friends.

Even if it went against one's heart and caused some grievances, one should endure it honestly.

The pretentious and self-righteous behavior of a teenager who daydreamed about being in the center of the world would never qualify as a competent Sect Master.

Having realized this, Meng Zhang finally let go of many unnecessary burdens in his heart.

Now, the most important thing was to put aside his pride and find witnesses with enough weight.

First, Meng Zhang rushed to Singing Sand City and pestered Shi Weiming, asking him to find a credible witness for him.

Shi Weiming still maintained the same excuses, claiming they were only engaged in small-scale business and would not get involved in the conflicts between local families and sects.

However, this time, Meng Zhang wouldn't easily let him off. He was determined to make him help.

Meng Zhang was persuasive, stressing that he wasn't asking Shi Weiming to meddle in the disputes between Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family. He just needed help finding a witness.

Meng Zhang grabbed onto Shi Weiming, acting as if they had a long-standing friendship, implying that he wouldn't leave until he got the favor.

Finally, what moved Shi Weiming wasn't their years of trading relationship. It was when Meng Zhang revealed that Taiyi Sect's spiritual field had greatly improved, and they were preparing to use all of it for cultivating spirit flowers and herbs.

With this, Shi Weiming finally relented and agreed to find a credible witness.

With the information obtained from Shi Weiming, Meng Zhang immediately rushed to Forest Mountain School.

Xu Chengxian, the Sect Master of Forest Mountain School, was perhaps the most amiable senior cultivator that Meng Zhang knew. He didn't carry the air of a Sect Master and treated junior cultivators with respect, even showing fairness to small sects like Taiyi Sect.

Upon arriving at Forest Mountain School, Meng Zhang smoothly met with Xu Chengxian, who warmly received him with a friendly attitude.

However, when Meng Zhang asked Xu Chengxian to be a witness for the upcoming battle, Xu Chengxian surprisingly declined in a tactful manner.

Meng Zhang had thought Xu Chengxian would be the most likely to be persuaded, but he unexpectedly hit a roadblock.

Meng Zhang even lowered his pride and pleaded softly, but Xu Chengxian remained polite yet firm in his refusal.

Realizing that he couldn't convince Xu Chengxian, Meng Zhang felt disappointed. Before leaving, he couldn't help but say, "Since Senior is unwilling to help, then I'll try my luck at Qiaoshou Sect."

Xu Chengxian burst into laughter upon hearing this. "Junior Sect Master Meng, if you trust this old man, then don't go to Qiaoshou Sect and face rejection."

"Qiaoshou Sect's relationship with Zhao Family runs much deeper than you know. Not to mention, Zhao Family's Zhao Yang's wife is from Qiaoshou Sect."

"Furthermore, Jin Qigu of Twin Success Valley has already intended to betroth his niece to Zhao Jiudou."

"If it weren't for Zhao Jiudou's desire to break through to the Foundation Building stage and reluctance to deplete his essence, they might have already been married."

Forest Mountain School had a long history and influence that far surpassed Zhao Family's, so its information network was undoubtedly well-informed. Xu Chengxian had no reason to deceive Meng Zhang on this matter.

Hearing Xu Chengxian's words, Meng Zhang felt a coldness in his heart. With Qiaoshou Sect, a Foundation Building sect, assisting Zhao Family, even if he managed to win against Zhao Family in the upcoming battle, there was no guarantee he could keep that spiritual vein.

What should he do? Should he give up on the spiritual vein now?

The relationships between these cultivation forces were indeed complex.

Feeling utterly disappointed, Meng Zhang suddenly felt a stroke of luck and prostrated himself on the ground.

"Senior, please instruct me on what I should do. I will never forget your great kindness."

Xu Chengxian waved his hand. "As this old man said before, I shouldn't interfere in the grudges between Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family."

"Speaking of which, I have known your Taiyi Sect's previous Sect Master, Daoist Profound Spirit, for many years."

"By the way, do you remember Shan Ying, the senior from Twin Success Valley?"

Xu Chengxian changed the subject and asked an unrelated question.

## Chapter 112: Seeking Help

Elder Shan Ying from Twin Success Valley and Meng Zhang had some dealings in the past. When Twin Success Valley called for its subordinate forces to besiege the sand monsters, Meng Zhang was the first to discover the nest of the sand monsters and reported it to Xiao Shenqiang and Shan Ying.

After Xiao Shenqiang's death, Twin Success Valley still kept its promise and exempted Taiyi Sect from offerings for three years.

Later, when Meng Zhang attended Forest Mountain School's Foundation Building dharma meeting, Shan Ying and Dan Yihu appeared, and Meng Zhang glanced at them from afar.

As for any deeper relationship, there wasn't any.

The Foundation Building cultivator from Twin Success Valley was a prominent figure in the area, but Meng Zhang had no interest in currying favor with him.

Now, when Xu Chengxian mentioned Shan Ying, Meng Zhang was unsure of his intentions.

While contemplating Xu Chengxian's motives, Meng Zhang honestly replied, "Elder Shan Ying may seem cold, but he actually values nurturing younger disciples."

"Back then, the Zhao Family cultivator was not honest and dared to take Twin Success Valley's Lesser Foundation Building Pill, which angered the Twin Success Valley Sect Master. This incident is still fresh in the minds of many in Twin Success Valley."

"For the past few years, Elder Shan Ying has been tirelessly investigating the killing of Elder Xiao Shenqiang. Recently, I heard that some people saw him in Singing Sand City."

Meng Zhang had been the one responsible for Xiao Shenqiang's death. Now, hearing Xu Chengxian mention those past events, Meng Zhang felt somewhat uneasy.

After listening to Xu Chengxian's words, Meng Zhang carefully pondered and understood the implication.

Although he didn't know why Xu Chengxian pointed him to seek help from Elder Shan Ying, Meng Zhang expressed his gratitude with a bow. "Thank you for your guidance, Senior. I will keep it in mind."

"I haven't given you any guidance. These are all your own thoughts," Xu Chengxian chuckled. "Remember, I'm not being polite with you. I really didn't teach you anything, and you must remember that."

Xu Chengxian's tone became stern. "If you speak casually about this after leaving, I won't remember any friendship between us."

Now Meng Zhang completely understood.

Xu Chengxian had directed him to seek help from Elder Shan Ying at Twin Success Valley, but he must not reveal that it came from Xu Chengxian. There was some hidden significance behind this, but Meng Zhang didn't have the time to dwell on it now.

Since Xu Chengxian had shown him a clear path, he would act accordingly.

Meng Zhang couldn't help but slap himself on the head. How could he be so foolish? When the Zhao Family offended Twin Success Valley in the past, he had witnessed it firsthand. How could he have overlooked the possibility of leveraging Twin Success Valley's power to suppress the Zhao Family?

Of course, Meng Zhang understood that due to killing Elder Xiao Shenqiang, he always felt a bit uneasy when facing Twin Success Valley cultivators. Thus, he had always kept his distance from them.

As for secretly mining scarlet copper without Twin Success Valley's knowledge, Meng Zhang wasn't too worried. Among Twin Success Valley's subordinate forces, not everyone was willing to be exploited by the sect.

According to Li Xuan, many forces had concealed their income and reduced their offerings to Twin Success Valley. As long as they weren't too obvious about it, Twin Success Valley would often overlook such matters.

After leaving Linshan, Meng Zhang rushed to Singing Sand City at the fastest speed.

Li Xuan, who was familiar with Singing Sand City, put aside his formation practice and came over when Meng Zhang called him.

Through Li Xuan's connections, Meng Zhang finally learned where Elder Shan Ying lived.

Shan Ying didn't reside in Twin Success Valley's territory but lived with a friend on the west side of Singing Sand City in a secluded and rarely visited location.

Armed with gifts, Meng Zhang visited Elder Shan Ying alone.

It was a secluded courtyard, and an inconspicuous old man guarded the entrance. The old man was quite old, only at the Refining Qi Triple realm of cultivation.

Meng Zhang skillfully handed him a few low-grade spirit stones and presented his gifts, stating his purpose to meet Twin Success Valley's Elder Shan Ying.

Having received the benefits, the old man was not difficult to talk to. He asked Meng Zhang to wait for a moment and then went inside to announce his arrival.

The wait took quite some time. Meng Zhang didn't show any impatience and continued waiting patiently.

After more than half an hour, the old man came out from the courtyard and said coldly, "Elder Shan Ying asked you to come in."

The old man led the way, guiding Meng Zhang to meet Shan Ying.

Shan Ying was sitting on a reclining chair in the garden, seemingly half-asleep with his eyes closed.

Meng Zhang entered, and Shan Ying still didn't open his eyes or make any gesture to welcome him.

Meng Zhang didn't dare to be negligent and immediately paid his respects.

"Junior Meng Zhang from Taiyi Sect pays respects to the Senior."

Shan Ying made a faint hum as a response.

Seeing that Shan Ying didn't speak, Meng Zhang hesitated for a moment before deciding to employ his acting skills to the fullest.

With an extremely aggrieved tone, Meng Zhang began to plead his case to Shan Ying.

He narrated how domineering the Zhao Family was and how they oppressed Taiyi Sect, and how helpless he felt in the face of such injustice.

As he continued, Meng Zhang's tone became more emotional, and he even shed tears, delivering a heart-wrenching performance.

The sorrow and helplessness in his words were enough to evoke sympathy and tears from the listeners.

Meng Zhang secretly admired himself. He couldn't believe he could put on such a convincing act. If he had entered the entertainment industry before transmigrating, he might have become a renowned actor.

Still, Shan Ying remained unmoved, and Meng Zhang had to keep up his act, even though he had a feeling that Shan Ying had seen through his act from the beginning.

"Your petty affairs between Taiyi Sect and the Zhao Family hold no interest for me. I, as a member of Twin Success Valley, won't get involved in your disputes," Shan Ying finally spoke.

"The most important thing for Twin Success Valley is to ensure fairness and justice, which allows us to govern so many forces."

Shan Ying's words disappointed Meng Zhang. Was his trip all in vain?

Just then, a middle-aged man entered the garden.

Pointing to the man, Shan Ying said to Meng Zhang, "This kid is Zhou Shengkao, a descendant of an old friend of mine. He is always meddling in other people's business without anything better to do."

"Whatever you have to talk about, go talk to him. I'm too lazy to listen, and I don't want to meddle either."

With that, Shan Ying waved his hand, dismissing Meng Zhang.

Zhou Shengkao led Meng Zhang out, but instead of leading him outside, he took him to a nearby room.

### Chapter 113: Secret Transaction

"In the presence of Sect Master Meng, I am Zhou Shengkao. This is our first meeting, and I hope Sect Master Meng will offer me guidance in the future."

"I dare not, I dare not. As a junior, I should be seeking advice from seniors like you."

After exchanging pleasantries, Zhou Shengkao and Meng Zhang finally got to the main topic.

"We are aware of Sect Master Meng's intentions. The war with the Zhao Family is imminent, and you need to find an intermediary."

"With Elder Shan's character, he will definitely not involve himself in such matters."

"However, I've always enjoyed watching excitement. I happen to have some free time now, so I can make a trip."

Seeing Meng Zhang's skeptical gaze, Zhou Shengkao continued without displeasure, "You can rest assured. I am just a Refining Qi cultivator, but it's because of Elder Shan's face that even a Foundation Building cultivator within this domain would have to show me some respect."

"As long as I intervene personally, I can't guarantee anything else, but I can ensure fairness and prevent Sect Master Meng from being bullied."

After speaking for a while, Meng Zhang finally understood his intention.

As a Foundation Building elder of Twin Success Valley, Elder Shan Ying's identity was not suitable for meddling in such matters. However, Zhou Shengkao, being his close nephew, could step in and act as the witness for the upcoming battle on behalf of Taiyi Sect.

Of course, nothing comes for free. Zhou Shengkao wouldn't help without compensation. He named his price: four thousand low-grade spirit stones.

A newly formed First Rank spirit vein would usually be sold for around three to five thousand low-grade spirit stones.

To develop a new spirit vein, cultivate the spirit field, and manage it diligently, it would take at least ten to eight years to break even.

The price of four thousand low-grade spirit stones offered by Zhou Shengkao was not cheap.

Meng Zhang silently rejoiced that Zhou Shengkao didn't know the spirit vein was not newly formed but had risen from the ground and existed for a long time. Especially if Zhou Shengkao learned about the Black Oil Spirit Soil found within it, he might not hesitate to snatch the spirit vein openly, regardless of face.

Despite Zhou Shengkao's ambitious demands, Meng Zhang didn't feel annoyed. If the other party named a price, it meant they were willing to negotiate. Since it was open for negotiation, everything could be discussed.

Meng Zhang acted hesitant and began to bargain with Zhou Shengkao, who, in turn, portrayed himself as a shrewd businessman and haggled with Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang kept lowering his stance, revealing his hardships, and eventually, Zhou Shengkao relented.

In the end, they settled the deal at a price of three thousand six hundred low-grade spirit stones.

Of course, Meng Zhang informed Zhou Shengkao that he couldn't produce so many spirit stones at once and needed time to gather them slowly. Zhou Shengkao didn't press him and gave him a month to arrange the payment.

Before receiving the spirit stones, Zhou Shengkao would go to witness the battle. After all, Meng Zhang didn't dare to renege on the agreement with Taiyi Sect.

After finalizing the deal, Meng Zhang took his leave. Before departing, he tentatively asked if they could cancel the battle with the Zhao Family now that he had already paid a substantial sum of spirit stones, and directly claim ownership of the spirit vein for Taiyi Sect.

Without hesitation, Zhou Shengkao rejected Meng Zhang's proposal.

The three thousand five hundred low-grade spirit stones were his appearance fee as a witness, not the price to completely subdue the Zhao Family.

Given his identity and position, he could lean towards Taiyi Sect in the dispute, but at least he needed to maintain some face and not fully side with them.

After hearing Zhou Shengkao's response, Meng Zhang gave up the idea of winning without fighting and left the place.

Back at Taiyi Sect's stronghold in Singing Sand City, Meng Zhang asked Li Xuan about Zhou Shengkao's background and if he could be trusted.

Li Xuan was well-informed and directly revealed Zhou Shengkao's background.

Indeed, Zhou Shengkao was Shan Ying's relative and a puppet for Shan Ying's money-making schemes.

Don't think that Foundation Building elders of Twin Success Valley are immortal beings untouched by worldly matters; they also had a great need for spirit stones.

However, Twin Success Valley was a self-proclaimed righteous sect and had relatively strict internal regulations.

Shan Ying couldn't personally intervene, so he let Zhou Shengkao act on his behalf. Even if something went wrong, he could easily distance himself, claiming ignorance of his relative's actions.

In this particular incident, Zhou Shengkao could be trusted. Representing Shan Ying, he would ensure that other witnesses wouldn't openly trouble Taiyi Sect.

Hearing Li Xuan's words, Meng Zhang completely relaxed.

He understood that Xu Chengxian from Forest Mountain School, who had directed him to find Shan Ying, must know the specific situation. Moreover, when Twin Success Valley had shifted the blame to the Zhao Family in the past, Shan Ying was also involved.

From Shan Ying's perspective, this situation was a double advantage. He could suppress the Zhao Family, disliked by Twin Success Valley, while also earning spirit stones for himself.

Meng Zhang became more alert; until his wings were fully developed, he couldn't afford to make Twin Success Valley harbor ill feelings towards him.

The gifts prepared for Shan Ying had already cost hundreds of low-grade spirit stones, and now he had to pay another three thousand five hundred low-grade spirit stones within a month, which was a considerable burden.

Originally, Meng Zhang had asked Shi Weiming to find a suitable witness for him. However, now that Zhou Shengkao was available, it seemed unnecessary.

But Meng Zhang felt a bit frustrated because Shi Weiming was unexpectedly efficient and had already found a suitable candidate.

The person was Gu Dashan, the nephew of the renowned Foundation Building cultivator among the loose cultivators, Gu Tanghai.

Loose cultivators faced numerous difficulties in their cultivation. Achieving Foundation Building was even more challenging, like reaching the heavens. Gu Tanghai succeeded in Foundation Building through great perseverance and some fortuitous encounters.

Gu Tanghai had a respectable reputation among the loose cultivators and was considered a spiritual leader and role model.

After reaching Foundation Building, Gu Tanghai didn't forget his roots and took care of many loose cultivators he knew.

Twin Success Valley had tried to recruit Gu Tanghai in the past to serve as their guest elder, but he politely declined, stating that he preferred being a carefree lone cultivator.

Gu Tanghai had a formidable cultivation base and was known to be a tough opponent even among Foundation Building cultivators. Thus, Twin Success Valley's affiliated forces didn't dare to provoke him easily.

Gu Dashan, in his seventies, had only reached the mid-stage of Refining Qi cultivation base. However, he enjoyed a good reputation in the Cultivation World due to his uncle's fame, Gu Tanghai.

He had experience in mediating disputes, acting as a guarantor, mediating between parties, and other such matters. Gu Dashan's previous clients spoke well of him, and no one had anything bad to say.

As Taiyi Sect's witness, he was trustworthy.

## Chapter 114: Witness

Having Zhou Shengkao as a witness, it seemed that Gu Dashan's presence was unnecessary.



However, this time, due to Meng Zhang's earnest request and Shi Weiming's wholehearted help, Gu Dashan was still employed. If they changed their minds midway, it would not only damage the relationship between the two sides but also harm Meng Zhang's credibility.

Thus, Meng Zhang decided to use Gu Dashan as a witness.

Fortunately, Gu Dashan offered a friendly price, asking for just two hundred pieces of low-grade spirit stones for his appearance. Compared to the three thousand five hundred spirit stones charged by Zhou Shengkao, this price was quite reasonable.

Shi Weiming arranged for the two to meet.

Gu Dashan was a tall, amiable-looking old man. After Meng Zhang interacted with him, he found him easy to get along with.

When he had discussed with Zhou Shengkao earlier, Meng Zhang had contemplated using Mind Reading to understand his thoughts. However, both Zhou Shengkao and he were Refining Qi Late stage cultivators, making it difficult to read detailed information.

Furthermore, they were at Shan Ying's residence at the time, and Meng Zhang was unsure if Shan Ying was observing them from behind.

Therefore, Meng Zhang forcefully suppressed his curiosity and refrained from reading Zhou Shengkao's thoughts.

Now, facing Gu Dashan, Meng Zhang couldn't resist using Mind Reading to glean some insights from him.

The results were satisfactory; Gu Dashan had good integrity and would handle things properly after receiving the spirit stones.

Additionally, Meng Zhang discovered something in Gu Dashan's mind related to Gu Tanghai. He silently noted this down, planning to exploit it for potential benefits in the future.

After leaving Singing Sand City, Meng Zhang rushed back to Morning Sun Hillside with Li Xuan and Zhang Zhanlin without stopping.

Upon their return, Meng Zhang handed over the items he had entrusted Wen Qiansun to purchase, and then everyone immersed themselves in intense practice.

Time passed quickly, and fifteen days flew by.

On the day of the scheduled battle with Zhao Family and Taiyi Sect, a large crowd of onlookers had gathered around Morning Sun Hillside early in the morning.

These spectators came from all directions, including members of nearby cultivation forces, loose cultivators who frequently operated in the area, and even tourists from more distant places.

The surrounding areas of the highest hills were almost completely packed with people.

An open challenge between two cultivation forces was indeed quite an exciting spectacle.

The spectators were practically sitting on the edge of their seats, munching on sunflower seeds as they watched the drama unfold.

Meng Zhang and the disciples of Taiyi Sect stood guard behind the protective formation, ready and waiting.

A flying ship appeared in the sky, accompanied by several Crimson Feathered Eagles.

The flying ship and the Crimson Feathered Eagles landed on a hill not far away.

Zhao Family's disciples had arrived early, occupying a designated spot to wait for the arrival of the main party.

Zhao Jiudou, accompanied by Zhao Dong and a group of Zhao Family members, appeared on the hill.

This hill had been predetermined as the location for the witnesses from both sides to observe the battle.

Shortly after Zhao Jiudou and his group appeared, Meng Zhang, with a cold expression, arrived on the hill as well, waiting for the witnesses from both sides to arrive.

The first to arrive were the Sect Master of the Flying Eagle Sect, Chen Zhentian, and the Sect Masters of several smaller forces in the vicinity.

They rode on demonic beasts and went directly to stand behind Zhao Jiudou.

Zhao Dong glanced smugly at Meng Zhang, thinking to himself, "Even if Meng Zhang's swordsmanship is good, so what? Taiyi Sect is too weak and lacks the connections that Zhao Family possesses."

"Sect Master Meng, where are the witnesses that Taiyi Sect invited? Did you fail to find anyone?" Chen Zhentian asked, but Meng Zhang couldn't be bothered to respond to such a petty person, lest he lower his own status for no reason.

After a while, Gu Dashan hurriedly rushed up the hill on a demonic beast.

"My apologies, Sect Master Meng. I ran into some old friends on the way and chatted for a bit, almost causing a delay," Gu Dashan said.

"It's still early; Senior Gu's timing is perfect," Meng Zhang replied with a smile.

Gu Dashan was somewhat famous in the nearby area, and many people recognized him upon his arrival.

After exchanging greetings with some acquaintances, Gu Dashan came to Meng Zhang's side.

With a Foundation Building stage cultivator like Gu Dashan backing him up, the witnesses Zhao Family had invited felt a bit awkward. If there were any disputes later on, it might not be worth clashing with a Foundation Building stage cultivator's nephew just for the sake of maintaining a bit of rapport with Zhao Family.

Of course, even if Gu Tanghai was overbearing, he wouldn't directly trouble these forces over his nephew's grievances. However, if they truly offended a Foundation Building stage cultivator, he could easily make them suffer a great deal of discomfort.

Zhao Jiudou maintained his composure and politely greeted Gu Dashan.

A clear and melodious crane's cry came from the sky, and a cyan crane and a yellow crane flew to the top of the hill and quickly landed.

Meng Zhang had previously seen Jin Qigu, the Sect Master of Qiaoshou Sect, and Ruan Yuan, the Sect Master of Golden Blade Sect, during his time at the Forest Mountain School. They disembarked from the immortal cranes and approached the crowd.

Immortal cranes were flying demonic beasts often ridden by human cultivators. In the resource-poor Endless Sea of Sand, those who could raise flying demonic beasts were at least considered well-off.

Meng Zhang felt envious; riding a flying demonic beast was not only stylish but also highly practical. He secretly wished he had one for himself.

Lost in his thoughts, Meng Zhang, like Zhao Jiudou, exchanged greetings with the two Sect Masters.

Jin Qigu still had that gossipy grandmother-like personality and warmly greeted the people around her.

Upon seeing Gu Dashan beside Meng Zhang, she smiled mischievously and said, "Old Gu, you're at it again, taking money to help others. You really love earning these small sums; you're too shortsighted."

"Come on, how much spirit stones did you swindle from Little Sect Master Meng this time?"

Before Jin Qigu could finish her sentence, a cold hum echoed.

"Hmph."

"Who dares to earn such money? Aren't you afraid of getting into big trouble and losing everything?"

Ruan Yuan of Golden Blade Sect spoke in a neither yin nor yang manner.

Both Qiaoshou Sect and Golden Blade Sect had Foundation Building stage cultivators in their sects, so they didn't care much about Gu Tanghai, a loose cultivator. If Gu Tanghai were present, Jin Qigu and Ruan Yuan might still give him some face. However, Gu Dashan was just Gu Tanghai's nephew, and they didn't even consider him worth their attention.

Gu Dashan's expression turned unsightly, regretting his decision to get involved in this mess.

Jin Qigu looked at Meng Zhang directly and said in a candid tone, "Little Sect Master Meng, this old woman had high hopes for you. But why did you do such a foolish thing and forcefully occupy Zhao Family's spirit vein?"

"Let's make a deal; return the spirit vein to Zhao Family and apologize. In consideration of this old woman's face, I believe Zhao Family won't pursue the matter further."

"If it weren't for this old woman finding you somewhat agreeable, I wouldn't have helped you like this."

"What do you think? Do you find my suggestion reasonable?"

Jin Qigu's biased support for the Zhao Family, without distinguishing right from wrong, ignited Meng Zhang's anger. He found it frustrating how fickle Jin Qigu could be. Last time they met at Forest Mountain School, Jin Qigu was not like this at all.

Suppressing his anger, Meng Zhang coldly said, "This is a feud between the younger generation and Zhao Family. Senior, you need not concern yourself with it."

"Stay on the sidelines and watch the battle, there's no need to ask about anything else."

"Those who don't know any better won't even appreciate a senior's kindness. Nowadays, young people are simply ignorant of the world. They'll only understand the need to beg for mercy after they've tasted hardship."

Sect Master Ruan Yuan of the Golden Blade Sect spoke harshly.

Meng Zhang didn't bother arguing with them. Their stance was clear; impartiality was out of the question.

"Now that both sides' witnesses are here, you can begin your battle," Ruan Yuan announced.

"Please wait a moment, Senior. One of my witnesses has yet to arrive," Meng Zhang requested.

"Why play tricks? We don't care who you're bringing in. Making us wait for one person," Jin Qigu asked.

"Once this person arrives, Senior will naturally recognize him," Meng Zhang replied casually.

"Don't be so mysterious, it's meaningless," Ruan Yuan said with some disdain.

After a while, when Ruan Yuan was starting to get impatient, a crane's cry came from the sky, and a blue crane flew in from a distance.

The blue crane's speed was extremely fast, and it quickly landed on the hillside. A person stepped down from the crane.

As soon as this person appeared, Zhao Jiudou's expression changed drastically, even showing some panic.

Jin Qigu and Ruan Yuan also had unpleasant expressions.

"Junior Sect Master Meng, I'm sorry for being a step late," the person said. "No problem, Brother Zhou, your arrival is perfect," Meng Zhang hurriedly greeted Zhou Shengkao.

"Everyone, I apologize for the delay. I was about to leave, but Brother Shan insisted on stopping me, saying there was something he needed to discuss. I chatted with him for a while before coming here," Zhou Shengkao said, nodding to those around him.

"Brother Zhou, it's truly fortunate that you can frequently receive Elder Shan's guidance. Such an opportunity is beyond the reach of many. In comparison, other trivial matters are of no importance," Ruan Yuan said with a smile.

Jin Qigu smiled and said, "If we could receive Elder Shan's guidance regularly, even if it means we'll live a few years less, we'd be willing."

Despite his high status, Zhou Shengkao didn't act haughty. Instead, he warmly chatted with those around him, indicating that his relationship with Shan Ying was not a secret.

Many cultivators gathered around and warmly conversed with Zhou Shengkao. When Zhao Jiudou took the initiative to greet Zhou Shengkao, he responded very coldly and refused to engage with him any further.

Seeing this scene, the surrounding cultivators immediately made judgments.

Zhao Jiudou felt a chill in his heart. After the Zhao Family and others were punished by Twin Success Valley, they were now subjected to such an attitude from Zhou Shengkao. The days ahead for the Zhao Family would be difficult.

After talking for a while, Zhou Shengkao said, "It's getting late; let Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family settle their grievances."

"Let's begin now."

After Zhou Shengkao's announcement, Meng Zhang immediately left and returned to the Taiyi Sect's camp.

Zhao Jiudou suppressed his unease and gathered the Zhao Family cultivators to head towards Taiyi Sect's camp.

Among the Zhao Family cultivators, there were whispers of unease due to Zhou Shengkao's attitude towards them.

"Alright, now is not the time to be lost in thoughts. Focus on the battle at hand, and we can discuss other matters after the fight," Zhao Jiudou reassured them.

Zhao Jiudou was the first to charge toward the front of the formation. With his Refining Qi completion cultivation base, if no one stopped him, he would bring tremendous impact to the First Rank Formation.

Meng Zhang leaped out of the formation and took the initiative to confront Zhao Jiudou.

Blade against blade, battle against battle—this was exactly what Zhao Jiudou wanted.

During their last encounter at the Forest Mountain, they didn't determine a winner. Instead of teaching Meng Zhang a lesson, Zhao Jiudou had inadvertently helped Meng Zhang gain fame.

Today, Zhao Jiudou wanted to use his flying sword to properly teach this lucky kid and restore his reputation.

Their flying swords danced in the air, and then quickly approached each other, launching a series of intense collisions.

Both Meng Zhang and Zhao Jiudou were not true Sword Cultivators; apart from their flying swords, they didn't hesitate to use other magic tools.

Meng Zhang raised his Fire Seal, and several fire snakes formed by Solar True Flame rushed towards Zhao Jiudou.

Zhao Jiudou wielded a stone stick, and the ground condensed into two earthen dragons that directly confronted the fire snakes, engaging in a fierce battle.

Meng Zhang lightly shook the Soul Shocking Bell, but the jade pendant Zhao Jiudou wore spontaneously emitted a warm flow, keeping him alert and unaffected by the bell's sound.

While Meng Zhang and Zhao Jiudou fought fiercely, the others were not idle.

Apart from Zhao Jiudou, the Zhao Family had sent fifteen cultivators to this battle. It wasn't that Zhao Family could only spare this many, but according to Zhao Jiudou's plan, they wanted to defeat Taiyi Sect head-on with an equal number of people to demonstrate Zhao Family's might.

Leading the Zhao Family cultivators was Zhao Dong, who was at the Refining Qi Seventh Level. There were also two Refining Qi late-stage cultivators and the rest were all at the Refining Qi middle-stage.

On Taiyi Sect's side, apart from Tian Zhen and Daoist Clear Spirit at the Refining Qi Sixth Level, Li Xuan, Zhang Zhanlin, and the father-son pair from the Wang family were at the Refining Qi middle-stage. The rest of the disciples were all rookie cultivators at the Refining Qi initial stage.

In the Cultivation World, major forces tried to avoid sending Refining Qi rookies into battle.

Although the numbers were equal between Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family, the difference in cultivation base was vast. The only thing Taiyi Sect could rely on was the First Rank Formation, the Chaotic Sand and Stone Formation.

Although this was their first actual battle, Wen Qiansun was not flustered. He calmly directed the disciples into position and started to control the formation.

Zhao Dong and the others charged towards the formation, and without needing any orders, they unleashed various techniques to attack the formation in front of them.

It was only a First Rank Formation, how much defensive power could it have to withstand their attacks?

After a series of bright talisman lights and a barrage of spells such as Fireball Art, Earth Dragon Art, and Golden Blade Art, the formation was almost completely enveloped.

The flying sand and chaotic stones outside the formation proactively countered these spells.

After a series of loud explosions, the sand dissipated, revealing the situation inside the formation.

The attack didn't stop; even more talismans were released, and an increasing number of spells rained down on the formation from all directions.

## Chapter 116: Formation

Within the chaotic stone maze, the spiritual energy transformed into giant stones moved on their own, actively facing the countless spells that came crashing towards them.

The giant stones were shattered and disappeared as they were bombarded by the spells, and the incoming spells vanished as well.

Formation controlled by someone and an uncontrolled Formation were completely different.

Although Wen Qiansun was engaging in combat and manipulating the Formation for the first time, he remained calm. He always managed to identify the weak points of the Formation and promptly adjusted the forces to compensate for them.

Once the disciples of Taiyi Sect took their positions within the Formation, they were each stationed at critical points. They infused their true qi into the Formation to help it operate.

No matter how the Zhao Family cultivators attacked, their various attacks were successfully blocked by the Formation.

For a while, both the attackers and defenders were locked in a stalemate.

On the other side, Meng Zhang and Zhao Jiudou were also locked in a fierce battle that seemed hard to resolve.

Meng Zhang knew that the gap in Cultivation Base between Taiyi Sect disciples and the Zhao Family cultivators was too significant. Although they could barely hold on for a short time, they would gradually lose their strength if the battle dragged on.

Meng Zhang needed to deal with his opponent first before having the energy to consider the battlefield on the other side.

Zhao Jiudou was feeling even more frustrated. He knew his Cultivation Base was stronger than his opponent's, but whenever he attacked, he felt restrained and gave the opponent the upper hand.

Flying swords danced in the air, clashing and assassinating each other; fire serpents and earth dragons fought desperately on the ground, not yielding to one another.

The sound of bells occasionally rang out, and while most of the attacks were blocked by Zhao Jiudou's protective jade pendant, they still caused him some annoyance and distraction.

Zhao Dong led his clan members in the attack for a long time, but they couldn't shake the enemy's Formation, which began to worry him.

Originally, they thought that their Cultivation Base far exceeded their opponents, and they could easily achieve an overwhelming victory. However, the enemy relied on a First Rank Formation and managed to resist them.

Zhao Dong took out a Formation Breaking Talisman and signaled two other Refining Qi stage cultivators of the same clan.

Although Formation Breaking Talismans were rare and not easily found in the market, Zhao Family's background allowed them to produce several First Rank Formation Breaking Talismans with relative ease.

"Release!" As Zhao Dong gave the order, including himself, three Zhao Family cultivators each activated a First Rank Formation Breaking Talisman.

The previously rapidly moving chaotic stone maze suddenly froze and stopped operating.

Although three First Rank Formation Breaking Talismans couldn't completely break the Formation, they easily halted its operation temporarily.

"Attack!" Zhao Dong shouted and rushed into the Formation at the forefront.

"We don't have much time, hurry!" someone reminded their fellow clan members.

Zhao Family members rushed into the Formation, taking out their trump cards, preparing to attack the Taiyi Sect disciples with all their might. They wanted to take down as many Taiyi Sect disciples as possible before the Formation resumed its operation, rendering them defenseless.

With no Formation to shield them, all the Taiyi Sect disciples were exposed to the enemy. Given the vast disparity in Cultivation Base between the two sides, the Taiyi Sect disciples would be unable to resist for long.

All the Taiyi Sect disciples began to panic, except for Wen Qiansun, who remained calm and composed.

Seeing Zhao Family disciples rushing into the Formation, he took out a stack of talismans and tossed them into the air.

The talismans transformed into streams of light, flying towards different positions.

After the light returned to its original form, it turned into gigantic trees, rapidly moving and colliding chaotically, enveloping all the Zhao Family members within.

When Zhao Dong entered the Formation, he noticed Wen Qiansun, the one controlling the Formation. Without hesitation, he used his flying sword to attack Wen Qiansun.

Fortunately, Wen Qiansun acted swiftly and released the stack of talismans.

The gigantic trees quickly moved and blocked the flying sword released by Zhao Dong.

All the Zhao Family disciples found themselves surrounded by the gigantic trees.

Facing the trees that were charging at them from all directions, they couldn't continue their attacks and instead started resisting and evading the trees.

Zhao Dong used his flying sword to cut through one of the trees, but more trees immediately came crashing towards him.

"A Formation, it's actually a Formation!" Zhao Dong exclaimed in frustration.

A Formation was designed by a Formation Master, with talismans drawn by a talismanist and then combined by the Formation Master.

A Formation was a simplified version of a regular Formation, with less power and a shorter duration.

Formations did not rely on spirit veins; their power primarily depended on talismans.

Formations were advantageous in terms of ease of activation and simplicity. They were particularly useful during unexpected encounters in the wild.

Formations of various types were available in Singing Sand City, but high-quality ones were relatively rare.

Wen Qiansun had reminded Meng Zhang during their Formation practice that acquiring rare talismans like Formation Breaking Talismans was not difficult for the Zhao Family given their background.

After releasing the Formation Breaking Talisman, the Formation would be temporarily immobilized, creating a major vulnerability.

During this time, it was best to find a way to hold back the enemy and wait for the Formation to resume its operation.



Wen Qiansun suggested obtaining a set of Formation, as it would not only be easy to activate but also helpful for him to display his expertise in Formations.

Meng Zhang agreed with Wen Qiansun's suggestion and specially tasked Shi Weiming with helping to purchase a high-quality set of Formation.

The set of Formation Wen Qiansun released now was still a First Rank Formation, but its power was enormous, trapping the Zhao Family members while inflicting damage on them.

Unexpectedly, under the sudden attack of the Formation, the Zhao Family cultivators, who had thought victory was within reach, were all caught in the Formation.

Zhao Dong, as a cultivator from a well-established family, was not an ignorant loose cultivator. He knew that the power of the Formation was not lasting, and once the power in the talismans was exhausted, the Formation would collapse on its own.

Unfortunately, Wen Qiansun's proficiency in Formations was indeed extraordinary, and he played with a set of ordinary Formation in various ways.

The charging trees disrupted the Zhao Family disciples, making it difficult for them to concentrate.

All the Zhao Family disciples were running for their lives, too occupied to focus on anything else.

Taking advantage of the fact that the Formation had only recently resumed operation, they had some opportunities to break through the chaotic stones by fiercely cutting them apart. They rushed out of the Formation.

However, not all the Zhao Family disciples could escape in time.

## Chapter 117: Conclusion

Two disciples of the Zhao Family were left behind because of their slow actions.

When Zhao Dong and the others broke out of the formation, these two were a step too slow and got trapped in it.

Breaking through a properly functioning formation is not an easy task.

The dense sand confused their senses. Carelessly, they were hit by the scattered stones within the formation, falling to the ground, losing all resistance.

Knowing that this occasion wasn't suitable for causing casualties, Wen Qiansun resisted the urge to kill and just restrained the two Zhao Family members.

Losing two members didn't greatly affect Zhao Dong's confidence, even though he was somewhat angered.

The difference in Cultivation Base between the two sides was too significant, and their temporary setback was due to carelessness.

As long as they calmed down, abandoned the idea of a quick victory, and slowly wore down the formation, breaking through would only be a matter of time.

The momentary defeat actually made Zhao Dong more composed, leading to the right decision.

However, just as Zhao Dong was organizing the Zhao Family members to continue attacking the formation, a loud shout came from above.

"Enough, stop!"

Zhou Shengkao, riding a blue crane, had somehow flown above the battlefield.

Jin Qigu and Ruan Yuan followed him, each on their own immortal cranes.

"The outcome of this battle has been decided. Cease your actions," Zhou Shengkao began giving orders.

After Zhou Shengkao's loud shout, the Zhao Family members, feeling the pressure, stopped their actions. However, they were all filled with confusion.

When was the victory or defeat determined? Why are we, the participants, unaware of it? Zhao Dong was puzzled and couldn't help asking, "How was the victory or defeat determined? Who won?"

Zhou Shengkao disdainfully glanced at him. "What nonsense. Of course, your Zhao Family lost." Zhao Family had lost, and even Jin Qigu and Ruan Yuan were perplexed.

Considering the close relationship between Qiaoshou Sect and the Zhao Family, Jin Qigu couldn't help but ask, "Zhao Family clearly had the upper hand, so when did they lose?"

"You're all blind and can't see? Zhao Family had the upper hand? What a joke!"

"A bunch of people fell for a trap and got trapped in the formation. Taiyi Sect only allowed them to escape with leniency. Within moments, two Zhao Family members were captured. If Taiyi Sect hadn't shown mercy, there would have been no survivors."

"What? Do you wish for all the Zhao Family members to die here?"

Zhou Shengkao's words widened everyone's perspective. It turned out the battle could be interpreted this way.

The usually domineering Zhao Family members now understood what it meant to distort facts and abuse power.

On the other side of the battlefield, Zhao Jiudou, who was fighting fiercely with Meng Zhang, was still keeping an eye on the situation here. When he saw what was happening, he retreated from the battle with Meng Zhang and hurried over.

When Zhao Jiudou arrived, he overheard Zhou Shengkao's words and was almost infuriated.

Zhao Jiudou was about to argue back when Zhou Shengkao suddenly got angry and reprimanded him relentlessly.

"You're old, with a Refining Qi completion Cultivation Base, and yet you were forced into a disadvantage by a Refining Qi seventh stage young man."

"If I hadn't stopped it, you would have been killed by him sooner or later."

Zhao Jiudou was trembling with anger and, if not for his rationality, he would have wanted to slay the guy spewing nonsense right before him.

Behind Zhou Shengkao was Shan Ying, the Elder Enforcer of Twin Success Valley.

It was unclear whether this was solely Taiyi Sect's bias or Twin Success Valley's intention to suppress the Zhao Family.

Regardless, the Zhao Family couldn't resist.

"The heavens have shown you mercy, sparing the lives of your clan members. Don't be ungrateful; you must not continue to cause trouble."

"Today's battle ends here. You all disperse."

According to Twin Success Valley's rules for subordinate forces, as a witness, Zhou Shengkao indeed had the authority to declare the outcome.

This was also the reason why Meng Zhang had gone to great lengths to find reliable witnesses, even resorting to lowly behavior.

The other two witnesses, Jin Qigu and Ruan Yuan, remained silent at this moment.

As for Gu Dashan, he arrived at the battlefield only now and, upon hearing Zhou Shengkao's words, immediately agreed loudly.

Zhao Jiudou looked to Ruan Yuan for help, but Ruan Yuan avoided eye contact and didn't dare to meet Zhao Jiudou's gaze.

Then, Zhao Jiudou looked at Jin Qigu. Leaving aside their close relationship, Qiaoshou Sect had benefited greatly from the Zhao Family on ordinary days.

"Zhao, my friend, just accept defeat this time. There will be other opportunities for the Zhao Family to challenge Taiyi Sect in the future," Jin Qigu persuaded helplessly.

Before Zhao Jiudou could respond, Zhou Shengkao erupted in anger.

"Is there going to be another time? What do you people want?"

"Twin Success Valley has always been peaceful and harmonious, an idyllic place. Your battle this time has been unjust. Are you planning to continue causing chaos and disrupting the order under Twin Success Valley's jurisdiction?"

"After this battle, the matter is settled, and you are not allowed to pursue it any further."

"If you don't heed my well-intentioned advice, I'm not afraid, but I worry that Mr. Shan might not be pleased."

Zhou Shengkao directly brought up Shan Ying, making Jin Qigu too scared to continue speaking.

Zhou Shengkao's naked favoritism toward Taiyi Sect left the Zhao Family members deeply humiliated.

But no matter what, the Zhao Family couldn't resist on the spot.

Zhao Jiudou suppressed his humiliation and anger, taking back the two Zhao Family members Taiyi Sect had captured, and led everyone away, dejectedly.

Jin Qigu and Ruan Yuan, feeling uninterested, didn't stay any longer. After bidding farewell to Zhou Shengkao, they departed separately.

Meng Zhang sincerely thanked Zhou Shengkao, "Thanks to Brother Zhou's help, our sect achieved victory this time."

Zhou Shengkao waved his hand, "We made a fair trade; I took your spirit stones, so naturally, you won't suffer a loss."

Meng Zhang felt that the 3,500 low-grade spirit stones he spent this time were truly worthwhile.

Zhou Shengkao, looking at the retreating Zhao Family members, scornfully cursed, "A bunch of ingrates, unable to distinguish masters from servants, not knowing their place. They dared to see the opportunity to steal our Lesser Foundation Building Pills."

Meng Zhang's heart trembled, as Twin Success Valley had been holding a grudge against this matter for almost three years. He wondered if Zhou Shengkao's words were also meant as a warning to him.

Swallowing his pride, Meng Zhang praised Zhou Shengkao. He patted his chest, expressing his loyalty to Twin Success Valley and Taiyi Sect. He loudly praised Twin Success Valley, declaring that Taiyi Sect would forever be a devoted subordinate to Twin Success Valley.

Zhou Shengkao smiled at Meng Zhang's performance. After exchanging a few words, he left on his own accord.

## Chapter 118: Loan

The decisive battle had determined the victor, and the onlookers who hadn't had enough of the excitement gradually dispersed.

Some daring individuals still muttered curses in secret, claiming that Zhao Family was too timid; they surrendered without shedding a drop of blood, leaving the audience dissatisfied. They believed that Zhao Family and Taiyi Sect should have suffered heavy casualties, with blood flowing everywhere, for it to be truly thrilling.

As the crowd dispersed, the disciples of Taiyi Sect began to celebrate. It was the first time since Meng Zhang took over as Taiyi Sect's Sect Master that they organized an external battle. This low-intensity fight served to train the disciples without causing any casualties.

If it were possible, Meng Zhang would have wanted to engage in such battles every once in a while.

However, even though Taiyi Sect emerged victorious, they suffered considerable losses in terms of spirit stones. Apart from the expenses for witnesses, the cost of purchasing the array formation was not insignificant.

At this moment, Jin Qigu and Ruan Yuan, who had previously left on their crane, had somehow made a big circle and returned to Morning Sun Hillside.

Meng Zhang was still savoring the battle outside when the two of them landed in front of him on their crane.

"Do you two have any business with me?" Meng Zhang asked without courtesy.

Ruan Yuan almost lost her temper when she heard Meng Zhang refer to himself as ben zuo, which was an honorific term used by a superior or a high-ranking person. She couldn't believe this young man, who hadn't even grown a full beard, dared to call himself ben zuo.

When Meng Zhang addressed them earlier as seniors and himself as a junior, it was because they were on Zhao Family's side. However, now that the battle was over, Meng Zhang was no longer willing to be polite with them.

Jin Qigu's skin was thicker, seemingly forgetting that he had sided with Zhao Family and paid no attention to Meng Zhang's form of address. Instead, he continued to chat amiably with Meng Zhang.

After listening to them for a while, Meng Zhang understood the purpose of their return. They wanted to inquire about his relationship with Zhou Shengkao, how he had connected with Elder Shan Ying, and why Elder Shan Ying had intervened in the conflict between Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family.

Meng Zhang was not foolish enough to reveal the truth in front of these two.

He obfuscated the matter with vague words, neither confirming nor denying anything. He spoke of visiting Elder Shan Ying and receiving encouragement, as well as ancestral connections between Twin Success Valley and Taiyi Sect.

Jin Qigu chatted with Meng Zhang for a long time but didn't get any useful information. However, he had a faint feeling that Meng Zhang must have some connection with Elder Shan Ying.

With this thought in mind, Jin Qigu became more polite towards Meng Zhang. Even Ruan Yuan, who had been looking coldly at Meng Zhang, softened her expression.

After entertaining the two old women for a while, Meng Zhang finally managed to get rid of them.

He found this kind of scheming and maneuvering more exhausting than battling powerful foes. He would rather fight a strong opponent than deal with these two old women.

After this battle, the ownership of the spirit vein at Morning Sun Hillside was no longer disputed, and Taiyi Sect had firmly established its position there.

With three First Rank spirit veins under its control, Taiyi Sect needed to plan its future development carefully.

The spirit fields within the sect were mature and had been cultivated for many years. After being nourished by the black oil spiritual soil during this period, their power had continuously increased. Among the First Rank spirit fields, they were already considered rare high-quality ones.

Meng Zhang planned to use all of these spirit fields to cultivate spirit flowers and herbs, preferably high-tier ones that could bring substantial profits.

The newly opened spirit fields at Sweetwater Oasis would be dedicated solely to cultivating spirit grains.

As for Morning Sun Hillside, they were preparing to begin cultivating spirit fields as well.

The newly opened spirit fields there would also be used for cultivating spirit grains. Once the fields stabilized, they would be strengthened with black oil spiritual soil.

After discussing with Daoist Clear Spirit, Meng Zhang decided on the crops to be planted in the spirit fields.

He sent most of the disciples back to the sect and personally went to Singing Sand City to begin purchasing the necessary materials for cultivating the spirit fields. This required a significant amount of spirit stones.

He also needed to quickly gather 3,500 lower-grade spirit stones to repay Zhou Shengkao. He couldn't afford to delay the debt.

Meng Zhang suddenly realized that Taiyi Sect was facing a shortage of spirit stones.

Of course, it was only a temporary lack of cash. The assets within the sect had long surpassed their external debts. Besides the piled-up scarlet copper ore, even the Second Rank lion puppet could be sold for a substantial amount of spirit stones if Meng Zhang decided to part with it.

Now, lacking spirit stones, Meng Zhang turned to his old friend Shi Weiming, seeking a loan to resolve the issue.

He informed Shi Weiming that Taiyi Sect had discovered new spirit veins and needed a large amount of spirit stones to cultivate the new spirit fields for growing spirit flowers and herbs.

Meng Zhang estimated that there must be more than one wild Alchemist supporting Shi Weiming, given his insatiable demand for various spirit flowers and herbs.

Taiyi Sect could supply as much as Shi Weiming required.

After some hesitation, Shi Weiming finally agreed to lend Meng Zhang 8,000 lower-grade spirit stones at a very low interest rate. The only condition was that the spirit flowers and herbs cultivated by Taiyi Sect would be prioritized for supply to Shi Weiming in the future.

Meng Zhang agreed, and they reached an agreement.

He first repaid the owed spirit stones to Zhou Shengkao, seizing the opportunity to establish a relationship with him. Then, he went on a shopping spree in Singing Sand City.

He purchased various seeds of spirit flowers and herbs, horned oxen for farming, and six-legged camels for transportation.

After the purchased items were brought back to Taiyi Sect, they immediately started the process of cultivating the spirit fields. The sect became busy, and even Meng Zhang, as the Sect Master, had to temporarily set aside his cultivation to help out with his half-baked Spirit Plant Technique in the spirit fields.

Of course, Meng Zhang didn't stop his secret mining of scarlet copper ore.

After the appearance of the spirit vein at Morning Sun Hillside, the surrounding environment began to undergo significant changes. A lush oasis was gradually taking shape.

With the oasis, it meant that ordinary people could live there. Taiyi Sect began to move some mortals in small numbers to the An Family's area in Morning Sun Hillside.

As time passed, three years flew by in the blink of an eye. Zhao Yanbei, the head of Zhao Family, and the experts who had been serving hard labor in Singing Sand Mountain had completed their sentence and returned to their family with a rather bleak demeanor.

Upon receiving this news, Meng Zhang felt a bit nervous.

Zhao Yanbei's return meant that Zhao Family's strength had increased significantly. In their last confrontation, Zhao Family had shown signs of discontent, and if they decided to target Taiyi Sect covertly, it could become a big problem.

Meng Zhang temporarily put aside internal affairs and began to keep an eye on Zhao Family's movements, ready to respond at any time.

## Chapter 119: Clearing the Mine

While Meng Zhang was worried about the cultivators of Zhao Family making trouble, Zhao Family had their own troubles to deal with.

The cultivators of Zhao Family, including their patriarch Zhao Yanbei, suffered greatly while serving their sentence at Singing Sand Mountain. They endured hardship, working tirelessly under the watchful eyes of Twin Success Valley's supervising cultivators, who intentionally made things difficult for them. All the arduous tasks and heavy labor fell upon their shoulders.

Exposed to harsh winds, scorching sun, and drenching rain, they toiled day after day, leaving them with no time for cultivation and insufficient spiritual energy to meditate and recover.

After enduring three years of suffering, their first priority upon returning to the family was to quickly enter seclusion and restore their vitality. If they didn't attend to their physical well-being promptly, it could harm their foundation and severely damage their Cultivation Base.

It took over two months for Zhao Yanbei and the others to begin feeling revived after their return.

Upon their return, Zhao Dong suggested whether they should secretly cause some trouble for Taiyi Sect. They could send some skilled Refining Qilate stage experts from their family to constantly harass Taiyi Sect, making it difficult for them to focus on their cultivation and farming. They might even go further and hire assassins to secretly kill Taiyi Sect's disciples.

However, as soon as Zhao Dong made these suggestions, he was severely scolded by Zhao Yanbei, the patriarch of Zhao Family. Having suffered greatly during their time at Singing Sand Mountain, Zhao Yanbei had developed a deep fear of Twin Success Valley. It was evident that Taiyi Sect had the support of Twin Success Valley's Law Enforcement Elder, Shan Ying, which helped them win the battle and secure the spirit vein.

At this point, Zhao Family not only couldn't cause trouble for Taiyi Sect but also had to secretly pray that nothing would happen to Taiyi Sect's disciples. Regardless of any evidence, if any mishap befell Taiyi Sect's disciples, Zhao Family would be considered the culprits. If Shan Ying felt that Zhao Family opposed his actions, he could easily find various means to make life difficult for them.

After admonishing Zhao Dong, Zhao Yanbei announced the next step of their plan to the high-ranking members of the family. The family would concentrate all their efforts on taking over the abandoned mine as soon as possible.

During these three years, due to Zhao Yanbei and the others serving their sentence at Singing Sand Mountain, no one in the family actively pursued clearing the abandoned mine. However, they

maintained constant surveillance around the mine, with Zhao Family disciples secretly observing its surroundings at all times.

For three years, there were no unusual incidents around the abandoned mine, and no one entered or exited it.

Having heard the reports from the disciples responsible for monitoring the mine, Zhao Yanbei felt relieved. It seemed that after the ghost cultivator who was once here had been relentlessly pursued by Flying Swan Sect cultivators, they had either been completely eliminated or had fled and never returned.

Regardless of the situation, Zhao Yanbei no longer needed to worry about that ghost cultivator.

Under Zhao Yanbei's strong leadership, the family mobilized a large number of experts and prepared numerous items to restrain ghosts. They began the process of clearing the abandoned mine.

The Yin Yang Reversal Formation within the mine had already been neglected for some time and had developed some flaws. After Meng Zhang's previous actions, the vulnerabilities had increased.

More and more Yin Qi leaked out, turning the interior of the abandoned mine into a veritable ghost domain.

When Meng Zhang had secretly entered the mine before, he had not encountered many corpses. This was because the bodies had been hidden deep within the mine, nourished slowly by Yin Qi. But now, with a large amount of Yin Qi leaking out, all the bodies had transformed into zombies and started roaming the mine.

As soon as Zhao Family cultivators entered the mine, it was as if their presence had attracted countless ghosts, who eagerly sought the flesh and blood of the living.

Led by Zhao Yanbei himself, the group consisted of elite cultivators from Zhao Family. These Refining Qilate stage cultivators had made thorough preparations and faced the multitude of ghosts fearlessly.

Unlike Meng Zhang, who could directly locate the Yin Yang Reversal Formation, Zhao Family cultivators had to clear the mine step by step, gradually exploring its depths.

After a considerable amount of time, the group finally reached the Yin Yang Reversal Formation.

With Zhao Family's deep background and great efforts, they managed to break the great formation.

During the past three years, the Yin Yang Reversal Formation had naturally operated and generated two drops of Jade Soul Fluid. Moreover, there were still many precious materials inside the formation that had been used to maintain the formation and convert into Jade Soul Fluid, many of which remained unused.

Zhao Yanbei, with his discerning eye, knew that this was a substantial gain. With these treasures, Zhao Family could secure the much-needed Foundation Building Pills.

After securing the gains, Zhao Yanbei and the Zhao Family cultivators left the mine and joined forces to use the earthshaking technique, causing the entire mine to collapse, erasing any traces.



Ever since Zhao Yanbei's return, Meng Zhang had been closely monitoring the movements of Zhao Family. Zhang Zhanlin, who had opened a store in Singing Sand City, brought him some news: several Zhao Family cultivators had purchased a batch of talismans to restrain ghosts in the market.

Meng Zhang immediately realized that Zhao Family had their sights on the abandoned mine.

After secretly infiltrating the mine and obtaining Jade Soul Fluid years ago, Meng Zhang had refrained from entering it again to avoid attracting attention from Ghost Path cultivators. He had even kept the information strictly confidential and hadn't revealed it to any disciples.

Now, Zhao Family intended to forcefully clear the mine.

As Zhao Family cultivators set out, Meng Zhang secretly followed behind. Having reached the Refining Qilate stage and mastered the Earth Escape Spell, he could track them without leaving a trace.

From a distance, Meng Zhang kept a close eye on the direction of the abandoned mine.

After a long time, Zhao Family cultivators began to leave the mine. Shortly after, there was a violent tremor, as if the earth itself was shaking.

Using the Deception Breaking Eye from a distance, Meng Zhang could tell that the interior of the mine had collapsed.

It seemed that Zhao Family had made significant gains inside the mine and decided to destroy it to eliminate any traces.

A strong sense of regret suddenly overwhelmed Meng Zhang.

Had he been too cautious and overly afraid of Ghost Path cultivators?

Despite the commotion caused by Zhao Family, no Ghost Path cultivators had appeared. Could it be that they had given up on this place?

If he had been bolder and entered the mine before Deep Earth Spirit General fell into slumber, he might have broken the Yin Yang Reversal Formation early on and obtained all the treasures inside.

His cautiousness had inadvertently allowed Zhao Family to reap the benefits. With the gains they made, they likely had the capital to acquire Foundation Building Pills. Once Zhao Family obtained those pills and cultivated Foundation Building stage cultivators, it would be an unstoppable and seamless process.

## Chapter 120: Spreading Rumors

Once Zhao Family cultivates their own Foundation Building stage cultivator, they will immediately make up for their biggest shortcoming as a family.

By then, facing Zhao Family with a Foundation Building stage cultivator, Taiyi Sect will have little resistance.

Taiyi Sect cannot hope to once again use spirit stones to move Shan Ying and have him lend a hand to Taiyi Sect.

Even though Twin Success Valley might not like Zhao Family, they will not trouble Zhao Family for the sake of Taiyi Sect.

For Twin Success Valley, a Foundation Building stage cultivator holds a certain value in terms of recruitment.

Meng Zhang knows he absolutely cannot allow Zhao Family to nurture a Foundation Building stage cultivator. He must do everything in his power to disrupt Zhao Family's plans.

But how should he go about it? Meng Zhang was lost in thought.

Given the current relationship between Zhao Family and Twin Success Valley, Zhao Family probably won't trust Twin Success Valley and won't trade for a Lesser Foundation Building Pill from them.

When Meng Zhang had a glimpse in that abandoned mine, he noticed that the precious materials within the Yin Yang Reversal Formation could be used to exchange for a Foundation Building Pill, not far off in value.

Within this area, only Flying Swan Sect possesses the ability to refine Foundation Building Pills. For Zhao Family to acquire Foundation Building Pills, they must deal with Flying Swan Sect.

Zhao Family is a vassal of Twin Success Valley, but if they bypass Twin Success Valley to directly trade with Flying Swan Sect, it would surely cause Twin Success Valley's dissatisfaction, and they wouldn't make things easy for Zhao Family.

Moreover, in the Cultivation World, there are countless Refining Qi completion cultivators who are stuck and unable to break through to the Foundation Building stage due to the lack of Foundation Building Pills.

For these cultivators, they would be willing to pay any price to obtain a Foundation Building Pill.

Once news spreads that Zhao Family possesses Foundation Building Pills, numerous cultivators will rush to compete for them.

Understanding this point, Meng Zhang came up with an idea.

He returned to Taiyi Sect and called Li Xuan to accompany him to Singing Sand City.

Meng Zhang assigned a task to Li Xuan, instructing him to spread rumors in Singing Sand City. The rumors should claim that Zhao Family cultivators obtained a treasure from some hidden cave and intend to present this treasure to Flying Swan Sect in exchange for a Foundation Building Pill.

When spreading the rumors, Li Xuan must hide his identity well, making sure no one suspects he is behind them, and that the rumors have nothing to do with Taiyi Sect.

Spreading rumors and inciting commotion like this was something Li Xuan had done before when he was with the Li family.

Having accepted Meng Zhang's task, Li Xuan immediately began to act proficiently.

Soon, various rumors emerged in Singing Sand City. Rumors, however, tend to grow more and more exaggerated. Eventually, the rumors said that Zhao Family had discovered an Alchemist's cave and obtained a furnace of Foundation Building Pills.

Another version claimed that Zhao Family had found a Gold Core Daoist Master's cave and offered the information to Flying Swan Sect in exchange for becoming their vassal, and Flying Swan Sect had agreed and gifted Foundation Building Pills to Zhao Family.

All sorts of strange and even contradictory rumors spread rapidly from Singing Sand City to all directions.

Regardless of the specific content of the rumors, they all had one thing in common - Zhao Family had acquired Foundation Building Pills.

Due to the special status of Foundation Building Pills in the Cultivation World, even though many people knew the rumors were likely false, they still paid attention.

Most people tend to believe what they want to believe.

Many Refining Qi completion cultivators, who had been stuck for a long time, were willing to believe that Zhao Family possessed Foundation Building Pills.

If Zhao Family currently had a Foundation Building stage cultivator, those Refining Qi cultivators wouldn't dare to act rashly. But unfortunately, even with Zhao Family's deep background, without a Foundation Building stage cultivator at present, they couldn't stop others from coveting their treasures.

Soon, many cultivators passed by Zhao Family's mountain gate, and some even lingered nearby, secretly inquiring about Zhao Family's situation.

The rumors had spread, but Meng Zhang didn't know how the situation would develop in the end.

From the current situation, the effect of the rumors seemed quite good.

But he didn't know when Twin Success Valley would pay attention to this matter.

In fact, Twin Success Valley's response was much faster than Meng Zhang had imagined.

After giving Li Xuan the order to spread the rumors, Meng Zhang returned to Morning Sun Hillside.

As Meng Zhang's cultivation base grew increasingly profound, he absorbed spiritual energy at a faster rate, placing a certain burden on Taiyi Sect's spirit vein at the mountain gate.

With Morning Sun Hillside's spirit vein, and not just a newly born one, but a fully matured spirit vein, Meng Zhang decided to stay there for an extended period, directly absorbing the spiritual energy.

Besides Meng Zhang, other Taiyi Sect disciples also took turns to stay there and alleviate the pressure on the sect's spirit vein.

Not even half a month had passed since Meng Zhang's return to Singing Sand City when he received a letter from Zhang Zhanlin. Zhou Shengkao left a message at the Duoduo Grocery Store, asking Meng Zhang to meet him as soon as possible.

Meng Zhang didn't dare to be negligent upon receiving the message and hurried to Singing Sand City.

In the courtyard where they last met, Meng Zhang saw Zhou Shengkao again. However, Shan Ying wasn't here; he had gone somewhere else.

Without any small talk, Zhou Shengkao got straight to the point and asked, "Meng, is it your Taiyi Sect that's behind the rumors about Zhao Family?"

"What rumors? I'm not sure what you're talking about, Brother Zhou. Tell me more."

Meng Zhang's immediate reaction was to deny it outright and feign ignorance.

After all, there was no evidence, and even if they killed him, he wouldn't admit it.

Zhou Shengkao stared at Meng Zhang without speaking, creating immense pressure on him. For a while, he didn't know what to say.

Suddenly, a thought occurred to Meng Zhang. Am I a fool? Why do I need evidence for this kind of thing? Taiyi Sect had just had a dispute with Zhao Family not long ago, and now rumors unfavorable to Zhao Family emerged. Naturally, Taiyi Sect would be the prime suspect. Besides, did Twin Success Valley need evidence to believe something they were convinced of?

Once this realization struck him, Meng Zhang immediately changed his tune and tried to remedy the situation.

"Well, it's just that this kind of thing isn't very honorable. How could I easily admit to it in front of others? Brother Zhou, please forgive my earlier denial."

"In front of others, I will definitely not admit to anything. But in front of Brother Zhou, I'll be honest."

"Yes, the rumors about Zhao Family recently were spread by our disciples under my instruction."

Hearing Meng Zhang's words, Zhou Shengkao's expression eased, and he coldly said, "You're smart enough not to be stubborn to the end."

"If it weren't for our past acquaintance and some camaraderie, I wouldn't have taken the initiative to handle this matter."

"Yes, yes, of course," Meng Zhang nodded repeatedly and offered a flurry of flattery.