

Sect Master 121

Chapter 121: Reaction

"Enough with the nonsense. Just tell us, how did you come up with spreading these rumors, and what is your source of information?" Zhou Shengkao interrupted Meng Zhang's flattery and got straight to the point.

As Meng Zhang admitted to spreading the rumors, his brain raced, thinking about how to handle the upcoming questions.

Everything about the abandoned mine must not be revealed. He had to act as if he had no knowledge of that place whatsoever.

The thought that Twin Success Valley might be involved with Ghost Path cultivators sent shivers down Meng Zhang's spine.

Despite Twin Success Valley's appearance as a righteous sect, when it came to crucial moments, they would have no hesitation in eliminating any threats.

Meng Zhang didn't want to end up dead without any clarity surrounding his demise.

When Zhou Shengkao asked about the source of the information, Meng Zhang provided a well-prepared explanation.

"Brother Zhou, as you know, our Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family have always had conflicts. For many years, we've been secretly monitoring Zhao Family. I, being somewhat skilled in bewildering illusions, took the opportunity to deceive one of their cultivators during routine surveillance, and I extracted information from him."

According to Meng Zhang's account, he encountered an isolated Zhao Family cultivator while monitoring them and used illusions to deceive the individual, learning about the intelligence.

The information was brief, indicating that Zhao Family seemed to have accidentally obtained a batch of spirit materials and planned to exchange them for Foundation Building Pills.

Upon learning this, Meng Zhang was filled with fear. If Zhao Family managed to produce a Foundation Building cultivator, it could spell disaster for Taiyi Sect.

Feeling helpless, Meng Zhang came up with the twisted idea of spreading rumors about Zhao Family to cause trouble for them.

As for how the rumors escalated beyond his expectations, that wasn't something he could have foreseen.

During the Foundation Building Dharma meeting at Forest Mountain School, Meng Zhang had encountered Zhao Family cultivators and used his innate Divine Ability, Mind Reading, to glean information about their internal situation, giving him some insight.

So, Meng Zhang fabricated this lie on the spot, providing detailed and credible information to Zhou Shengkao.

While spinning a web of lies to deceive Zhou Shengkao, Meng Zhang secretly activated Mind Reading to probe his thoughts.

As both Zhou Shengkao and he were Refining Qilate stage cultivators, Meng Zhang couldn't access deep thoughts but could grasp surface emotions, allowing him to adjust his language accordingly, making his words more believable and in line with Zhou Shengkao's desires.

Meng Zhang spent a considerable time explaining the entire incident.

After listening attentively, Zhou Shengkao remained expressionless and didn't say much.

In his mind, Meng Zhang's explanation seemed quite plausible. After careful consideration, he couldn't find any loopholes.

Most importantly, Meng Zhang's words were music to Zhou Shengkao's ears, aligning perfectly with his thoughts and expectations.

Once Meng Zhang finished speaking, he put on an act of guilt, while secretly using Mind Reading to read Zhou Shengkao's thoughts.

Zhou Shengkao's mood was alright, and he didn't harbor any ill intentions toward Meng Zhang.

After a moment of contemplation, Zhou Shengkao asked Meng Zhang to repeat what he had just said.

Listening patiently to Meng Zhang's repetition, he asked several more questions.

Meng Zhang's answers were all on point and matched Zhou Shengkao's desires.

By this point, Zhou Shengkao finally confirmed that Meng Zhang wasn't lying.

Having believed Meng Zhang, Zhou Shengkao's expression softened.

"You little rascal, spreading rumors recklessly has caused a huge mess."

"Do you know that three days ago, our sect sent an envoy to summon Zhao Yanbei, the head of the Zhao Family? However, they responded that Zhao Yanbei had already gone on a journey and wasn't home."

"Later, the envoy investigated and found that not only Zhao Yanbei, but most of the Refining Qilate stage experts of Zhao Family had left the clan and disappeared."

Zhou Shengkao's words brought joy to Meng Zhang. It was evident that his spread of rumors had worked. Twin Success Valley sent an envoy to summon Zhao Yanbei because of the rumors.

Zhao Yanbei not being at home likely meant that he was hiding out of fear of meeting Twin Success Valley's envoy.

"Afterward, our sect found out that two of Zhao Family's flying boats headed directly east after leaving their clan." Hearing this, Meng Zhang understood. The east was Flying Swan Sect's territory, and Zhao Family cultivators were probably going there to try and exchange for Foundation Building Pills.

Regardless of whether Zhao Yanbei and the others intended to avoid Twin Success Valley's envoy, their actions had violated the taboo of Twin Success Valley.

As a vassal of Twin Success Valley, they bypassed the Valley and went directly to deal with Flying Swan Sect, which was like slapping Twin Success Valley in the face.

Regardless of whether Zhao Family could exchange for Foundation Building Pills or cultivate Foundation Building stage experts, after this incident, Twin Success Valley would never tolerate Zhao Family again.

Zhao Family was finished, and Taiyi Sect acquired a formidable enemy. Although the means were somewhat unsavory, they worked.

While feeling delighted inside, Meng Zhang maintained a calm exterior.

Seeing Meng Zhang's feigned innocence, Zhou Shengkao laughed and scolded, "You lucky brat. Spreading rumors randomly, yet it happened to uncover Zhao Family's treacherous actions."

"Hmph, these opportunistic scoundrels only think about themselves when they gain benefits. They secretly collude with outsiders without considering their home, wanting to monopolize all the gains."

As he spoke, Zhou Shengkao seemed somewhat angry.

In his eyes, Zhao Family must have struck a stroke of luck, discovering a large number of spirit materials. Rather than offering them to Twin Success Valley, they sought favor with Flying Swan Sect, which was a clear act of betrayal.

Zhou Shengkao and Meng Zhang chatted for a while before ending the conversation.

Before parting ways, Zhou Shengkao advised Meng Zhang to stay in Singing Sand City for the time being and not wander around, lest he becomes hard to find.

Exiting the courtyard, Meng Zhang finally breathed a sigh of relief. That was a close call. For now, the matter of the abandoned mine seemed unrelated to him.

After seeing Meng Zhang off, Zhou Shengkao also left the courtyard.

He circled around in the alleyways before arriving at an inconspicuous house.

Inside the room, Twin Success Valley's elders, Shan Ying and Dan Yihu, were seated cross-legged in the center. Standing nearby was a middle-aged man.

"How did it go? What did that kid say?" As soon as Zhou Shengkao entered the room, Shan Ying asked urgently.

Zhou Shengkao recounted his entire conversation with Meng Zhang, leaving nothing out.

After listening to Zhou Shengkao's account, Shan Ying and Dan Yihu exchanged glances without saying a word.

It was the middle-aged man standing at the side, Dan Yihu's confidant named Li Zhanli, who questioned doubtfully, "Can we trust that kid? Senior Brother Zhou, are you sure he didn't deceive you?"

Li Zhanli played a role similar to Zhou Shengkao by Dan Yihu's side.

There seemed to be some competitive relationship between them, as they appeared cordial on the surface but held resentment in secret.

Upon hearing the competitor's doubts about him, Zhou Shengkao responded with displeasure.

He not only tried his best to prove Meng Zhang's credibility but also defended him at every turn. He almost pledged his life to guarantee Meng Zhang's innocence.

The two argued for a while until Shan Ying became impatient. He waved his hand, silencing them, and sent them away.

Shortly after Zhou Shengkao and Li Zhanli left the room, Dan Yihu looked into the empty space of the room and asked, "What do you think?"

Suddenly, accompanied by a cold gust of wind, a person clad in a black cloak appeared, completely shrouded from head to toe.

A cold and hoarse voice echoed in the room.

"The key to this matter does not lie with that Taiyi Sect boy but with the Zhao Family."

"Four years ago, in order to evade the pursuit of the Flying Swan Sect, I had to abandon everything and flee temporarily. I couldn't spare any thought for that place."

"Unexpectedly, a few days ago, when I returned to that mine, I found the Formation I had painstakingly set up had been broken, and all the spiritual materials were looted."

As the cloaked figure spoke, their tone became even colder, and an intense killing intent was not hidden.

"At first, I thought it might be the work of Flying Swan Sect cultivators who had discovered the place. If that were the case, I would have accepted it."

"However, unexpectedly, rumors emerged at this time. The Zhao Family somehow obtained a batch of spiritual materials, which made me suspicious."

"Just yesterday, I captured a cultivator from the Zhao Family and probed their soul. It turned out that indeed, it was the Zhao Family who broke the Formation and stole the spiritual materials."

Upon hearing this, Shan Ying's face turned frosty.

"The Zhao Family deserves to die for ruining the grand plan of our two families."

"The Zhao Family does deserve to die, but Twin Success Valley is right nearby. Why didn't you take care of that place?" the cloaked person asked fiercely.

"Brother, you should know that the mine was abandoned due to the chaos caused by the sand monsters back then. It has no connection with Twin Success Valley anymore."

"Our Twin Success Valley cultivators have never approached that place. As for what happened there, we know nothing about it." Dan Yihu explained patiently.

"Cooperating secretly with us, the Ghost Path cultivators, yet fearing exposure. Always eager to distance yourselves and avoid trouble. Pretending not to know even the critical location of the Formation, showing no concern at all."

"What kind of behavior is this? Self-deception, self-doubt, simply laughable to the extreme."

Hearing the stern rebuke from the cloaked figure, Dan Yihu looked embarrassed, and Shan Ying's face showed signs of anger.

"Ghost Path cultivators are paranoid, bloodthirsty, and ruthless. They are not good partners to deal with. Who knows when they might turn against us."

Unfortunately, in the eyes of outsiders, Dan Yihu was a high-ranking elder of Twin Success Valley. However, within the sect, he didn't have the authority to make decisions. There were elders with higher status and cultivation base than him.

For now, Dan Yihu put aside the matter of the Ghost Path cultivators and discussed with Shan Ying to decide the fate of the Zhao Family.

After reaching an agreement, they called Zhou Shengkao and Li Zhanli, giving them instructions to begin their actions.

A few days later, Zhou Shengkao once again summoned Meng Zhang to his courtyard.

"Meng, I heard that the Zhao Family has repeatedly oppressed your Taiyi Sect, causing you a lot of grievances."

Meng Zhang didn't know Zhou Shengkao's intentions and casually replied, "The Zhao Family is overbearing, and my Taiyi Sect is weak. There's nothing we can do."

"Now, there is a great opportunity for revenge waiting for you."

"Meng, on the night after tomorrow, take the elite disciples of Taiyi Sect and wait outside the Zhao Family's mountain gate. There will be a chance to take revenge and settle your grievances."

As Zhou Shengkao continued speaking, his tone became more commanding.

Although Meng Zhang wanted to inquire further, Zhou Shengkao didn't answer and simply sent him away.

Meng Zhang had a feeling that he had to make this trip since Zhou Shengkao had adopted this attitude.

However, as for taking the elite disciples of Taiyi Sect, he decided against it. Taiyi Sect didn't have any capable experts other than him at the moment.

To avoid any hindrance, Meng Zhang decided to go alone.

Before setting off, Zhang Zhanlin brought him the latest news.

Rumors were spreading in the market that the Zhao Family had obtained a furnace of Foundation Building Pills. The Zhao Family's patriarch, Zhao Yanbei, was in seclusion, preparing to break through to the Foundation Building stage.

As for the surplus Foundation Building Pills, the Zhao Family intended to offer them to Twin Success Valley.

If the Foundation Building Pills fell into Twin Success Valley's hands, loose cultivators from all walks of life would never have a chance to obtain them.

Similar rumors were rampant in the market, and many cultivators, including some from prominent families and sects, believed them to be true.

Upon hearing these rumors, Meng Zhang finally understood that Twin Success Valley had started to take action. It seemed they were determined to bring the Zhao Family to its demise.

Chapter 123: Gathering

Knowing that Twin Success Valley had already taken action, Meng Zhang left Singing Sand City and hurriedly headed to the Zhao Family mountain gate.

The mountain gate of Zhao Family was located west of Taiyi Sect, more than three hundred li away. It was surrounded by a series of low hills, enclosing a large plain.

This plain was called Fuzhao Valley and was situated on top of a Second Rank lower-grade spirit vein. A Second Rank lower-grade sect-protecting great formation was built relying on the spirit vein, almost enveloping the entire plain.

In the center of the plain, numerous buildings were constructed. The core areas of Zhao Family, such as the ancestral hall, Hidden Scripture Pavilion, and the grand storage, were mostly located there.

The majority of Zhao Family cultivators also resided in these buildings year-round.

Surrounding the buildings, there were hundreds of mu of spirit fields cultivated by Zhao Family over the past three hundred years.

On the edge of the plain, many ordinary people lived. They were mostly relatives of Zhao Family cultivators.

Outside this area, within a radius of dozens of li, there were five oases where ordinary people under the rule of Zhao Family lived.

Instead of heading directly to the mountain gate of Zhao Family, Fuzhao Valley, Meng Zhang circled around within the territory of Zhao Family, familiarizing himself with the surroundings.

Compared to Taiyi Sect, the environment of Zhao Family's territory was much better. With a Second Rank spirit vein as their mountain gate and five oases within their territory, populated by many ordinary people, Meng Zhang couldn't help but envy them.

Meng Zhang couldn't help but start considering how Taiyi Sect should expand and divide Zhao Family's inheritance after their decline.

After circling outside, Meng Zhang arrived at the outskirts of the Zhao Family mountain gate, Fuzhao Valley, during the daytime.

Outside the Zhao Family mountain gate, a large number of cultivators had already gathered. These cultivators moved furtively, and it was evident that they had ill intentions.

Many of them had changed their appearances to avoid detection, and wearing masks had become the most popular disguise.

Of course, such rudimentary disguises couldn't conceal their true identities. Familiar people could still recognize them at a glance.

However, it was better than nothing, as at least it provided some sense of relief.

Meng Zhang also conformed to the local customs and casually pulled a piece of cloth to cover his face.

Among these cultivators, there were many lone travelers as well as various small groups.

Meng Zhang went to a small hill about ten li away from the Zhao Family mountain gate, where several groups of cultivators had already gathered.

Seeing Meng Zhang approaching, many people didn't pay much attention, but some came forward to greet him.

These people who greeted him were trying to recruit Meng Zhang into their group. They had already started discussing how to rush into Zhao Family and efficiently rob them.

Meng Zhang perfunctorily responded and found a corner to sit down, waiting quietly.

Meng Zhang activated the Deception Breaking Eye and surveyed the surroundings.

The number of cultivators gathered here was far beyond his expectations.

Several notorious bandit groups were also present in the vicinity.

It seemed that the news of Zhao Family possessing Foundation Building Pills not only attracted cultivators in need of Foundation Building Pills but also drew many who intended to take advantage of the situation and rob them.

For many cultivators at the Refining Qi completion stage, Foundation Building Pills were their only hope to advance to Foundation Building. Without Foundation Building Pills, they were doomed to stagnation.

Regardless of whether the news was true or false, they were willing to take a gamble.

Though Zhao Family was considered strong, without Foundation Building stage cultivators, they couldn't stop the greedy gazes of these cultivators.

As more and more cultivators gathered, Zhao Family still held their ground. Their mountain gate was protected by a Second Rank sect-protecting great formation.

For a while, many cultivators were simply watching and not daring to act rashly.

Zhao Family cultivators had already observed the situation outside.

The sect-protecting great formation had been activated, and Zhao Family cultivators were fully armed, standing on high alert.

In the afternoon, a flying ship arrived from afar.

Judging from the emblem on the ship, it belonged to Twin Success Valley.

The flying ship arrived above the Zhao Family mountain gate, and a loud voice came from inside.

"All Zhao Family cultivators below, listen carefully. We chased some bandits here, but they suddenly disappeared. Now, we will search Zhao Family to see if you are colluding with the bandits and if they are hiding among you."

After a while, a response came from within the Zhao Family sect-protecting great formation.

"This senior, Zhao Family has always been upright and will never collude with bandits..."

Before the person could finish speaking, they were interrupted by a stern shout.

"Nonsense! Whether you are innocent or not is not for you to decide."

"Quickly open the great formation and let us in for a search. Otherwise, it shows that Zhao Family is feeling guilty."

Under the pressure from Twin Success Valley cultivators, the Zhao Family cultivators couldn't afford to refuse them at the door. After hesitating for a long time, they eventually opened the sect-protecting great formation and allowed the Twin Success Valley cultivators on the flying ship to enter.

After the Twin Success Valley flying ship arrived, the surrounding cultivators, who had been watching with greedy eyes, became more restrained.

The reputation of Twin Success Valley made everyone wary, afraid that the Twin Success Valley cultivators would intervene on behalf of Zhao Family and drive them away.

Meng Zhang understood that Twin Success Valley cultivators would never side with Zhao Family; they were there to scheme against them secretly.

He couldn't help but think, "Why did these Twin Success Valley cultivators come here? Could it be that they are trying to deceive Zhao Family into opening the sect-protecting great formation, making it easier for everyone to rush in?"

However, a prestigious and orthodox sect like Twin Success Valley would care greatly about their reputation. Based on their usual conduct, they shouldn't be so direct and forceful.

As Meng Zhang pondered this, time passed. The Twin Success Valley cultivators spent a long time inside before coming out.

It seemed that they hadn't found any trace of bandits inside.

After the Twin Success Valley cultivators left Zhao Family, they immediately departed on their flying ship.

With the Twin Success Valley cultivators gone, the cultivators who had been somewhat restrained before completely lost their restraint. They stared at the Zhao Family mountain gate with greedy eyes, eager to try their luck.

If someone were to shout at this moment, it was likely that many cultivators would rush toward the Zhao Family mountain gate.

Time passed quickly, and night fell.

Although they had been vigilant for several days, Zhao Family's cultivators dared not be the slightest bit complacent.

Who knew if the daring cultivators outside would directly attack the sect-protecting great formation?

Unknowingly, several groups of cultivators gradually approached, already very close to the defensive range of the sect-protecting great formation.

"All people outside, stop immediately. If you take another step forward, you will bear the consequences." A resounding warning came from within the sect-protecting great formation.

The warning seemed to work as these groups of cultivators all stopped and did not proceed any further.

They faced the Zhao Family cultivators across the sect-protecting great formation, silently confronting each other. Neither side left nor advanced, waiting for something unknown.

Chapter 124: Breaching Zhao Family

Suddenly, several earth-shattering booms echoed within the gates of Zhao Family. Several spots of the sect-protecting great formation exploded violently, igniting towering flames.

Almost all the surrounding cultivators were startled by this commotion.

"The Zhao Family's sect-protecting great formation has been breached. Brothers, charge in and seize the Foundation Building Pills!" A loud voice resounded, clearly reaching everyone's ears.

"Charge, kill!"

Following a series of battle cries, the team leaders outside the sect-protecting great formation released numerous talismans, fiercely bombarding the front.

The various cultivators who had been watching vigilantly from the sidelines could no longer restrain themselves and rushed towards Zhao Family's gate.

Witnessing this scene, Meng Zhang knew that the hidden hands planted by Twin Success Valley cultivators had been set into motion, and Zhao Family's fate was sealed. Today, they couldn't escape their calamity.

Sighing inwardly, Meng Zhang also followed the crowd and rushed toward Zhao Family's gate.

The sect-protecting great formation of Zhao Family had already been shaky due to internal damage. Under the fierce assault of so many cultivators, it didn't hold for long and completely collapsed.

Losing the protection of the sect-protecting great formation, Zhao Family's gate was now exposed and defenseless before numerous hostile cultivators.

Countless cultivators charged in, launching a frenzy of attacks against the defending Zhao Family cultivators.

Among them were many cultivators like Meng Zhang, quietly infiltrating the inside.

When Zhao Yanbei left the Zhao Family, he took away most of the Refining Qi late-stage cultivators from the clan.

Although there were still quite a few remaining cultivators, they lacked true experts.

If the sect-protecting great formation of Zhao Family hadn't been destroyed from within, a group of Refining Qi late-stage cultivators, relying on the formation, could even contend with Foundation Building cultivators.

But now that the sect-protecting great formation had been breached, Zhao Family cultivators lost their greatest reliance.

Meng Zhang wielded his flying sword, "Soft Around The Finger," and beheaded a resisting Zhao Family cultivator with a single strike.

Huh, isn't that old guy ahead the Sect Master of Flying Eagle Sect, Chen Zhentian?

Flying Eagle Sect and Zhao Family had always had a close relationship, and the Sect Master Chen Zhentian and Zhao Family's head Zhao Yanbei were said to be sworn brothers. However, this old man didn't show any mercy while killing Zhao Family cultivators.

Indeed, in the Cultivation World, the relationships between cultivators were unreliable. They could turn hostile at the slightest provocation, without any mercy in their actions.

Upon closer observation, Meng Zhang also noticed experts from Qiaoshou Sect and Golden Blade Sect among the invaders.

Some of them wore tattered cloth on their faces, while others didn't bother disguising themselves at all, directly slashing and killing their way forward.

Truly, when disaster strikes, it's every man for himself. Zhao Family was in dire straits, and their old friends, instead of lending a helping hand, were seizing the opportunity to gain benefits.

The invading cultivators rushed from all directions towards the central area of Zhao Family - Fuzhao Valley.

Fuzhao Valley housed the relatives of Zhao Family cultivators.

Although cultivator wars generally avoided targeting ordinary mortals deliberately, these bloodthirsty cultivators showed no concern for them as they attacked, causing numerous casualties among the common folk.

Thankfully, all the cultivators were busy charging forward, not lingering here for long.

It was like a typhoon had swept through, leaving devastation behind.

In the central location of Fuzhao Valley, the residence of Zhao Family cultivators remained. All the remaining Zhao Family cultivators, including many elderly cultivators with gray hair and shaky stances, struggled to form their last line of defense, relying on this building to make their final stand.

The invading cultivators who had poured into Zhao Family had different motives, but they shared one unspoken understanding: eliminate all Zhao Family cultivators to avoid future troubles.

If any Zhao Family cultivators survived this calamity, the cultivators present wouldn't be willing to bear the consequences.

A small number of Zhao Family cultivators who sought to surrender were directly killed. Those who tried to escape were hunted down.

Meng Zhang had no interest in committing more atrocities; he came here to see if he could gain some advantages.

He knew that the rumor about Zhao Family possessing Foundation Building Pills was false, but after centuries of accumulation, they should have some savings.

The final resistance of Zhao Family was concentrated in several places: the ancestral hall, Hidden Scripture Pavilion, and the clan treasury.

These places also attracted the largest number of invaders.

Some weaker cultivators knew their limitations and didn't join the fray at these locations, choosing instead to plunder Zhao Family cultivators' residences.

Occasionally, cultivators emerged from these places with smiles on their faces, carrying their spoils.

Apart from attracting more cultivators to plunder these locations, some malicious cultivators also planned to take advantage of others.

Before coming here, Meng Zhang had made thorough preparations. He had a storage bag tied around his waist, and inside it were numerous bottles and jars.

Meng Zhang swiftly collected all the Red Feather Liquid in the pool and the dozen or so bird eggs soaked in it, storing them in the jars he had brought.

When his supply of jars ran short, he quickly carved rocks and improvised more stone containers.

After storing all the Red Feather Liquid, Meng Zhang regretfully glanced at the place before leaving immediately.

When Meng Zhang returned to the surface, it was precisely when Zhao Family's Hidden Scripture Pavilion was breached.

Zhao Family had a three-hundred-year-old legacy, and their foundation was indeed deep. These critical buildings not only had separate formation restrictions guarding them but also possessed formidable counter-attack capabilities.

Several cultivators' bodies were left on the ground before Hidden Scripture Pavilion was finally breached.

Chapter 125: Noble Sect

Arriving early is not as good as arriving opportune; the Hidden Scripture Pavilion has been breached, and Meng Zhang followed suit and rushed in.

The Zhao Family's Hidden Scripture Pavilion is divided into three layers, with many bookshelves inside, all filled with various collections.

Meng Zhang selected an area, and his flying sword, Soft Around The Finger, kept rotating around the area, clearly indicating it as his territory.

Meng Zhang moved swiftly and quickly stored all the books in this area into his storage bag.

Firstly, many cultivators were not interested in the books in the Hidden Scripture Pavilion; they were mainly here to plunder treasures. Secondly, the pavilion held numerous books, making it unnecessary to compete with such a ruthless individual.

Meng Zhang's sword technique had quite an intimidating effect on these cultivators.

Disappointingly for most cultivators, the Hidden Scripture Pavilion contained only books and no other valuable items.

Meng Zhang collected all the books from this area and moved on to compete for books in other areas.

There was a cultivator from the Flying Eagle Sect who seemed dissatisfied with Meng Zhang's domineering behavior and wanted to exchange a few moves with him.

Meng Zhang's sword technique allowed him to challenge and contend against Qi Refining cultivators easily. In just a few moves, he wounded the Flying Eagle Sect cultivator.

If Meng Zhang hadn't been in a rush to plunder the books, this Flying Eagle Sect cultivator might not have escaped with his life.

With the Hidden Scripture Pavilion looted empty, Meng Zhang took the most significant advantage and took away the most books.

Several cultivators were dissatisfied and attacked him.

The flying sword danced, and Meng Zhang slew these cultivators in a sorry state.

Meng Zhang pursued them to the entrance of the Hidden Scripture Pavilion, and from the side of the ancestral hall, came bursts of miserable screams.

The defenders of the Zhao Family's ancestral hall seemed to have used some hidden trump cards and killed a large number of attacking cultivators.

However, after using these trump cards, the Zhao Family side became completely powerless to counterattack.

Seeing the opportunity, surrounding cultivators swarmed from all sides.

Just when the Zhao Family's ancestral hall and treasury were about to be taken, a loud shout came from outside Fuzhao Valley.

"Who are these insignificant beings daring to act so recklessly here? Don't you know that Zhao Family is under the authority of our Twin Success Valley?"

"Disciples of Twin Success Valley are here. Criminals, stay where you are!"

...

Two figures flew from afar, with two flying boats trailing behind them.

"These scoundrels from Twin Success Valley truly live up to their noble sect reputation. As expected, they adhere to the ways of righteousness," Meng Zhang couldn't help but curse.

Cultivators at the Foundation Building stage from Twin Success Valley appeared, while most of the cultivators here were only at the Qi Refining stage.

Meng Zhang didn't hesitate and immediately fled from the Twin Success Valley cultivators. If they encountered him, they wouldn't show any mercy.

Behind him, he heard the desperate cries of those about to die, which only urged Meng Zhang to hasten his escape.

Fortunately, the Twin Success Valley cultivators were entangled in a chaotic situation at the Zhao Family's mountain gate. By the time they cleared it up, Meng Zhang had already disappeared without a trace.

Many clever individuals, like Meng Zhang, rushed out of the Zhao Family's mountain gate.

Living beings couldn't be stored in a storage bag; if monster eggs were left inside for too long, they would gradually lose their vitality.

Meng Zhang hurried back to Taiyi Sect and took out the Crimson Feather Liquid. After placing more than a dozen eggs safely, he began sorting through the books he looted from the Hidden Scripture Pavilion.

Zhao Family was also a family that had produced Foundation Building stage cultivators, and their collection was quite valuable. It would greatly enhance Taiyi Sect's heritage.

Meng Zhang also had high hopes for the dozen or so eggs. He had long admired the Crimson Feather Eagle from the Zhao Family.

In the inheritance obtained from the Trial Ground, there were also simple techniques for taming and hatching monster eggs.

As long as these eggs successfully hatched, Taiyi Sect would have flying mounts.

Thinking about the recent events, Meng Zhang felt some contempt towards Twin Success Valley.

It was like they wanted to act as a whore but still wanted to keep up appearances.

Clearly, they wanted to annihilate the entire Zhao Family, but they were unwilling to dirty their own hands.

They made such a simple matter so complicated.

First, they spread rumors to incite greed in many cultivators, making them attack Zhao Family. Then, they secretly sabotaged Zhao Family's protective formation, allowing many cultivators to break in.

When Zhao Family was breached, Twin Success Valley appeared like saviors and took the final spoils.

Those various cultivators who were used by Twin Success Valley not only gained nothing but might even lose their lives.

Who knows who this performance was staged for? Or perhaps this was just how Twin Success Valley habitually operated, always following these methods.

As the instigator of the rumors about Zhao Family, Meng Zhang had no sense of guilt.

Zhao Family's annihilation benefited Taiyi Sect. In the world of cultivation, being merciful to enemies was not a virtue.

A few days later, news of the Zhao Family incident spread quickly in the surrounding areas.

Li Xuan brought Meng Zhang the latest information.

According to the official statement from Twin Success Valley, the news about Zhao Family having Foundation Building Pills was entirely false.

Many deceived cultivators attacked Zhao Family in pursuit of non-existent Foundation Building Pills, resulting in the extermination of the entire Zhao Family. Even the mortals living in Fuzhao Valley were said to have been slaughtered by these crazed cultivators.

After arriving, Twin Success Valley avenged Zhao Family by retaking the mountain gate and killing many of the attackers. The mountain gate would be temporarily entrusted to Twin Success Valley's cultivators. When the Zhao Family cultivators who were traveling outside returned, the mountain gate would be returned to them.

Hearing Li Xuan's report, Meng Zhang sneered repeatedly.

Indeed, this was the style of a noble sect. Not only were all the Zhao Family cultivators killed, even their mortal relatives couldn't escape death.

As for the Zhao Family cultivators who were traveling outside, they would probably die without any explanation, with no chance to return to the Zhao Family alive.

The wealth accumulated by the Zhao Family over three hundred years, along with the Second Rank spirit vein, had all become Twin Success Valley's spoils.

Fortunately, Meng Zhang acted quickly and didn't make the trip in vain; he made quite a harvest.

The news of Zhao Family's annihilation caused a great uproar but eventually settled down after some time.

However, the rumors did not completely dissipate.

New rumors began to circulate, claiming that Twin Success Valley was the mastermind behind Zhao Family's annihilation and that all the Foundation Building Pills from Zhao Family ended up in Twin Success Valley's hands.

Once rumors spread, even the original instigator could not stop their propagation and alteration.

But Twin Success Valley was not Zhao Family; these simple rumors couldn't harm them at all.

Even if the rumors were true, so what? With ten Foundation Building cultivators, who in the surrounding areas would dare to confront them directly?

As the ruler of this region, Twin Success Valley had always been the subject of various rumors.

But had these rumors ever harmed Twin Success Valley? Had Twin Success Valley ever been afraid of such rumors?

Chapter 126: White Hidden Earth Mine

Twin Success Valley had long possessed the ability to refine Lesser Foundation Building Pills, and no one dared to snatch them from them.

In the end, it all came down to their strength.

Whether it was loose cultivators or the various sects around them, none had the capability to challenge Twin Success Valley.

In fact, when Twin Success Valley subdued the Zhao Family's mountain gate, their cultivators unleashed a massacre, killing a large number of attackers from the Zhao Family.

Afterward, in the name of avenging the Zhao Family, Twin Success Valley also dealt with many loose cultivators.

With Twin Success Valley's intervention, the Zhao Family incident came to an end.

After this event, the number of loose cultivators in the surrounding area greatly decreased. Those cultivators who weren't involved in the incident became much more cautious.

Next, Meng Zhang prepared to see if any of the junior disciples had talent in beast taming, in preparation for hatching the Crimson Feathered Eagle.

Meng Zhang didn't enjoy his leisure time for long before receiving news from Zhang Zhanlin in Singing Sand City. Zhou Shengkao had something to discuss with him.

Meng Zhang had no choice but to put aside the affairs of the sect and hurriedly rush to Singing Sand City.

Meeting Zhou Shengkao again, Meng Zhang felt somewhat uncomfortable. This damn guy had instigated him to attack the Zhao Family. Later, when the Twin Success Valley cultivators arrived, they not only took most of the spoils, but if Meng Zhang had been a little slower, his life would have been in danger.

Fortunately, the Twin Success Valley cultivators were busy cleaning up the Zhao Family's mountain gate and didn't pursue the escaping cultivators.

Of course, in Zhou Shengkao's eyes, if Meng Zhang were the kind of person who didn't know the current situation, didn't know how to retreat, and was only greedy, seeking endless benefits, then dying at the Zhao Family would be deserved.

Meng Zhang's experience at the Zhao Family was not only a test for him but also a warning.

When Zhou Shengkao saw Meng Zhang, he didn't seem to feel embarrassed at all. Skipping the pleasantries, he went straight to the point.

"Meng, my friend, we've known each other for some time and have a good rapport. Now, there's a chance to make a fortune, and I thought of you first."

Knowing Zhou Shengkao's character, Meng Zhang had no interest in whatever opportunity he was talking about. He was sure there must be a big pit hidden behind it.

Before Meng Zhang could reject him, Zhou Shengkao continued, "More than a hundred miles east of your Taiyi Sect, there used to be a white hidden earth mine. Over a decade ago, during the sand monster chaos, the mine was destroyed by sand monsters. Later, our sect was too lazy to rebuild the mine, so we just abandoned it."

Hearing Zhou Shengkao talk about the abandoned mine, Meng Zhang's heart tightened, almost thinking that Twin Success Valley had discovered he had been there.

If not for his cultivation of the Qi, Meng Zhang might have even fled immediately.

"In recent days, someone in the sect remembered that abandoned mine and thought it was a pity to let such a good mine go to waste."

"But the profit from mining white hidden earth is not high, and some in the sect believe it's a bit of a burden for us to mine it ourselves."

Zhou Shengkao didn't notice Meng Zhang's reaction and continued talking.

Meng Zhang relaxed slightly, realizing that Zhou Shengkao didn't seem to know about his connection to the abandoned mine.

"So, someone in the sect proposed to lease the white hidden earth mine to other forces for mining, and our sect will collect rent regularly."

"When I heard this news, I immediately thought of you, my friend."

"I heard that your Taiyi Sect has been a bit tight on finances. Renting the mine could bring in some extra income for the sect."

As Zhou Shengkao kept talking, Meng Zhang felt helpless. He had desperately tried to avoid that abandoned mine, but Zhou Shengkao was determined to involve him.

Meng Zhang was about to refuse when Zhou Shengkao seemed not to notice his reaction and continued speaking.

"My friend, I fought hard for this opportunity for you. It's not easy to come by, so you must seize it."

Meng Zhang knew that if he directly refused, the other party would grow suspicious.

"But Zhou, I have no experience in managing a mine. Taiyi Sect has never mined white hidden earth before."

Hearing Meng Zhang's excuse, Zhou Shengkao smiled and said, "Mining white hidden earth is the easiest kind of mining. You just need enough mortal miners, and it can be mined continuously."

"Also, I heard you have dealt with Lao Bulu from the Flying Swan Sect's peripheral merchant group quite a lot. You can seek advice from him about mining. You can also sell the mined white hidden earth to him."

"Of course, you only need to sell a small portion of the white hidden earth to him. The rest, our sect will buy at a fair price in secret."

"As for how to conceal the actual production, how to manage the accounts, and how to deceive Lao Bulu, that's your job."

Hearing this, Meng Zhang finally understood Zhou Shengkao's intentions.

He wanted Taiyi Sect to lease the white hidden earth mine as a cover. Most of the mined white hidden earth would be sold to Twin Success Valley, and a small portion would be sold to Lao Bulu, making him think it was the mine's entire output.

As far as Meng Zhang knew, white hidden earth was a low-grade material. Apart from being used to refine some magic tools, it didn't have significant uses. However, Flying Swan Sect had always been willing to buy white hidden earth in unlimited quantities. Moreover, Meng Zhang realized that many white hidden earth mines had a connection, whether obvious or subtle, with Flying Swan Sect.

The person Meng Zhang knew, Lao Bulu, was affiliated with a peripheral force of Flying Swan Sect, specifically responsible for purchasing white hidden earth on behalf of the sect, as well as supplying some white hidden earth mines.

It seemed that white hidden earth had some uses unknown to him.

Now, Twin Success Valley was secretly buying white hidden earth, undoubtedly for their own purposes.

Realizing this, Meng Zhang knew that he couldn't refuse Zhou Shengkao's request.

If he was foolish enough to know Twin Success Valley's plans and still didn't cooperate, his fate would probably be silenced by death. As a vassal force of Twin Success Valley, Taiyi Sect was naturally supposed to stand with Twin Success Valley. However, once Flying Swan Sect was involved, things became complicated.

Many thoughts flashed through Meng Zhang's mind, but not much time had passed.

His expression remained unchanged, and he quickly changed his approach, "Since Brother Zhou values me, I'll take care of this matter. I will handle it properly and to your satisfaction."

Zhou Shengkao's face revealed a satisfied smile.

"I knew it; Meng, my friend, you are someone who knows the current situation."

"You help Twin Success Valley, and we won't treat you unfairly."

"So, during the mining of the white hidden earth, Taiyi Sect's annual tribute will be waived."

With Zhou Shengkao's words, Taiyi Sect was spared a significant expense.

Chapter 127: Recruits Loose Cultivator

Since Meng Zhang knew the purpose of Twin Success Valley and Taiyi Sect had no room for refusal, they had to take on this matter. Meng Zhang began contemplating how to use this opportunity to seek greater benefits for Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang agreed to Zhou Shengkao's request and consented to exploit the white hidden earth mine. However, soon after, Meng Zhang presented several difficulties, intending to gain advantages from Zhou Shengkao.

Seeing through Meng Zhang's intentions, Zhou Shengkao didn't pay too much attention to it. Trying to make a horse run without feeding it grass, such things couldn't work out.

Taiyi Sect still held value, and it was worth investing some capital to maintain the relationship.

After some negotiation, in addition to the previous conditions, Meng Zhang made Zhou Shengkao promise to hand over one of the five oases owned by the Zhao Family to Taiyi Sect for management.

Once the agreement was reached, Meng Zhang took action.

The oasis that Zhou Shengkao agreed to give Taiyi Sect was the closest one to Taiyi Sect among the five oases owned by the Zhao Family.

Inside this oasis, there was a complete First Rank lower-grade spirit vein, and its area was even larger than the current Sweetwater Oasis.

Around 5,000 to 6,000 residents lived in this oasis.

The original Zhao Family cultivators and their families stationed in the oasis had already been secretly dealt with by Twin Success Valley.

Meng Zhang brought Li Xuan and two Taiyi Sect disciples and hurried to the oasis. After completing the handover with the cultivators stationed there by Twin Success Valley, the oasis would now completely belong to Taiyi Sect.

Though the oasis belonged to the Zhao Family, not all residents bore the Zhao surname. Even among those who shared the surname, many had no blood relation to the Zhao Family. According to the Zhao Family's rules, if an awakened person didn't carry the Zhao surname, they and their families must change their surnames to Zhao to join the Zhao Family. If they were attached to their original surnames and refused to change, they would be expelled from the oasis and left to their own fate. Their fate might be uncertain.

In the eyes of Zhao Family cultivators, not everyone was eligible to carry the Zhao surname. It was considered a great fortune to be able to adopt the Zhao surname.

Now that the oasis belonged to Taiyi Sect, those rules of the cultivation family no longer applied. Cultivation sects didn't concern themselves with such matters as surnames. From now on, for ordinary people awakened with spiritual roots in the oasis, joining Taiyi Sect would be their new choice.

Meng Zhang left Li Xuan and the two disciples behind to manage the affairs of the oasis.

Meng Zhang's pretext for obtaining control of the oasis from Zhou Shengkao was that they needed a large number of mortal miners to mine the white hidden earth, and this oasis provided a suitable source.

Li Xuan would thoroughly investigate the oasis and identify all the Die-Hard members with a strong attachment to the Zhao Family. The fate awaiting these people would be a lifetime spent working as miners in the mines.

After leaving the oasis, Meng Zhang headed to Singing Sand City.

As more and more things piled up, Meng Zhang felt that the manpower of Taiyi Sect was increasingly inadequate.

After the white hidden earth mine was exploited, it would require a considerable number of cultivators to guard and oversee it.

Originally, Meng Zhang planned to steadily recruit awakened individuals with spiritual roots from within Taiyi Sect's territory. This way, the purity of the disciples' origin could be ensured, like a blank canvas ready to be painted.

Now, due to the urgent need for manpower, some uncompromising aspects were unnecessary.

Taiyi Sect had been a long-standing force, and now it was showing signs of revival.

Meng Zhang put up a recruitment sign in Singing Sand City, inviting loose cultivators to join the sect. Many loose cultivators came to inquire and even sign up.

For accepting disciples, their Cultivation Base and aptitude were secondary. The most crucial factor was their character and loyalty to the sect.

Even if their aptitude was exceptional, possessing a Heaven Grade spiritual root, if they lacked loyalty to the sect, there was no need to invest fully in their cultivation.

Focusing solely on aptitude without considering character might lead to cultivating a group of disloyal individuals.

As disciples of a sect, they didn't necessarily have to be willing to live and die with the sect, but they should possess a minimum level of loyalty. They shouldn't abandon the sect in times of difficulty and forsake it. If the sect hadn't betrayed them, they should not betray the sect.

Meng Zhang personally spoke with the cultivators interested in joining Taiyi Sect, engaging in detailed discussions and inquiries about their backgrounds.

Of course, this was just surface work. Secretly, Meng Zhang activated the innate Divine Ability of Mind Reading, delving into their thoughts.

Among this group of cultivators, most were in the early and middle stages of the Refining Qi realm. Generally, loose cultivators didn't have the ability to block Mind Reading. Even if someone tried to resist Mind Reading, Meng Zhang could detect it immediately and wouldn't miss anyone.

As expected, Meng Zhang smoothly read the thoughts of everyone without any surprises.

After several busy days, Meng Zhang selected fifteen disciples to join Taiyi Sect.

Among them were two spies from Twin Success Valley.

It was expected since Twin Success Valley had entrusted private matters to Taiyi Sect, there would undoubtedly be surveillance measures in place; they wouldn't let Taiyi Sect act freely.

If they wanted to observe, then let them. With these two spies, Twin Success Valley would feel more at ease.

After the white hidden earth mine was exploited, Meng Zhang planned to place these two spies inside the mines.

Additionally, there was a spy from Golden Blade Sect, Qiaoshou Sect, and Forest Mountain School, who had also infiltrated Taiyi Sect among the loose cultivators they recruited. These spies thought they had deceived Meng Zhang, but they were unaware that Meng Zhang, with the Mind Reading Divine Ability, had already exposed their identities.

Meng Zhang didn't simply reject these three spies; instead, they openly accepted them into the sect.

Meng Zhang had no fear of playing a game of deception. Sometimes, these spies with revealed identities could be of use.

Meng Zhang didn't let these three return to Taiyi Sect's main mountain gate. Instead, they decided to send them to the newly acquired oasis to be responsible for guarding that area.

The remaining ten loose cultivators were the ones Meng Zhang sincerely wanted to accept into the sect.

These ten individuals had average aptitudes and low Cultivation Base, but in comparison, their character was more genuine, and they had no ulterior motives.

Of course, even if they were taken into the sect, it didn't mean they had gained Meng Zhang's complete trust. In the future, a series of tests awaited them. Only by passing these tests would they truly become members of Taiyi Sect.

After recruiting the disciples, Meng Zhang immediately found a way to contact an old acquaintance, Lao Bulu.

More than ten days later, still in Singing Sand City, Meng Zhang met with Lao Bulu.

During the meeting, Meng Zhang used the pretext provided by Zhou Shengkao.

Taiyi Sect established a connection with Zhou Shengkao and rented an abandoned white hidden earth mine from Twin Success Valley. The intention was to exploit the white hidden earth mine and provide a stable source of income for the sect.

Chapter 128: Refining Qi 8 Heavy

Lao Bulu showed great enthusiasm, not only providing Meng Zhang with many useful suggestions but also offering skilled miners. He promised to purchase all the white hidden earth mined at a fair price. Meng Zhang believed that among the miners provided by Lao Bulu, there must be his spies. This had nothing to do with their friendship; it was a necessary measure.

Flying Swan Sect's secret attention to the white hidden earth mine couldn't be avoided, so they might as well accept it openly. If only ordinary mortal miners were involved, Meng Zhang had plenty of means to deceive them and conceal the true output of the white hidden earth mine.

With Lao Bulu taken care of, the mining of the white hidden earth finally proceeded smoothly. When Meng Zhang and his men arrived at the white hidden earth mine, all traces of the ghost cultivators and the Zhao Family cultivator's battle had long disappeared.

Twin Success Valley had organized matters in a systematic and thorough manner. They dispatched two cultivators to be stationed near the mine, ostensibly to supervise Taiyi Sect's mining and ensure that the proper share of white hidden earth was handed over to Twin Success Valley. This was a common practice; all subordinate forces of Twin Success Valley were required to submit a certain proportion of their mining yield as an offering.

With this arrangement, Twin Success Valley had both overt and covert surveillance over the white hidden earth mine. The specific details of mining and other related tasks kept Meng Zhang extremely busy, despite Lao Bulu's prior guidance and reminders.

Organizing the miners, transporting supplies, and managing various tasks proved to be quite complex and chaotic. Eventually, Meng Zhang called upon Li Xuan to take charge of these affairs while he himself went to investigate the Zhao Family's oasis.

With the Divine Ability of Mind Reading, it was effortless for Meng Zhang to discern the thoughts of mortals. Nevertheless, reading their minds was still a laborious task. The minds of ordinary people were cluttered with various thoughts, and many seemingly honest individuals had remarkably dirty minds, which disgusted Meng Zhang.

Despite Meng Zhang's strong determination, these mental contaminations still made him extremely uneasy. Nonetheless, he cleared out all the Zhao Family members' thoughts related to the Taiyi Sect,

sending them to work in the mine and severing the Zhao Family's roots, eliminating any hidden dangers in the oasis.

Mining operations progressed smoothly with the help of skilled miners provided by Lao Bulu and various spells from the cultivators. In no time, the white hidden earth mine began producing a continuous stream of the valuable resource.

Lao Bulu's hidden agents among the miners were soon discovered. As these agents were covertly controlled, they had no knowledge of the true output of the white hidden earth mine, thus keeping Lao Bulu in the dark as well.

Outwardly, all the mined white hidden earth was sold to Lao Bulu, and even Twin Success Valley's share in this mine was entirely exchanged for spirit stones. However, the majority of the white hidden earth was secretly transported to Twin Success Valley.

Of course, Twin Success Valley did not mistreat Taiyi Sect either. All the white hidden earth was purchased at market prices. Unbeknownst to them, two years had already passed, and Meng Zhang had turned twenty-three.

During this year, Meng Zhang's Cultivation Base broke through to the Refining Qi 8th heavy stage. Despite the complexities of sect affairs, they did not significantly slow down his cultivation progress.

The once-sleeping Deep EarthSpirit General finally awakened. However, when Meng Zhang inquired about past events, he either remained silent or evaded the questions. Meng Zhang understood now.

Deep EarthSpirit General was loyal to Taiyi Sect, but he wasn't genuinely convinced by Meng Zhang as the Sect Master. At best, he showed surface-level obedience. This was not surprising, as Deep EarthSpirit General's memory was still incomplete, and although his Cultivation Base had not fully recovered, he was once a Gold Core Daoist Master. It was nearly impossible for Meng Zhang, a mere Refining Qi cultivator, to earn his wholehearted respect.

Deep EarthSpirit General seemed honest and simple, but his underlying arrogance couldn't be hidden. Meng Zhang, however, was not narrow-minded and intolerant. As long as Deep EarthSpirit General remained loyal to Taiyi Sect, Meng Zhang accepted him. In time, there would be opportunities to win him over gradually.

Furthermore, Deep EarthSpirit General was immensely valuable to the current Taiyi Sect. His Cultivation Base was at the Refining Qi completion stage, and his regular dharma meetings within the sect greatly benefited the disciples. Meng Zhang rarely missed these sessions and found them deeply enlightening.

Taiyi Sect's disciples were increasing in number, and over the past two years, several loose cultivators had joined the sect. Even among the ordinary mortals under their rule, there were those awakening spiritual roots and becoming Taiyi Sect disciples.

With the growing numbers, the previous organizational structure was no longer suitable. Meng Zhang decided to establish a certain hierarchical distinction. The disciples were divided into Inner-Sect Disciples and outer disciples. The Inner-Sect Disciples were selected by the Sect Master from those at the mid-Refining Qi stage and above.

Tian Li and Fang Qiansuan, whom Meng Zhang had high hopes for, reached the Refining Qi 4th stage during these two years and became Inner-Sect Disciples. Similarly, Wang Shengli, the son of Wang Shitou and a disciple of Daoist Clear Spirit, also became an Inner-Sect Disciple.

Zhang Zhanlin, who managed the grocery store in Singing Sand City, not only brought various Cultivation World information to Taiyi Sect but also earned a considerable profit, surpassing Meng Zhang's expectations. Meng Zhang promoted him to Inner-Sect Disciple and handed over most of the sect's commercial affairs to him.

Among the newly recruited loose cultivators, a female disciple named Hu Jing showed great talent in taming and nurturing spiritual beasts. Meng Zhang also promoted her to an Inner-Sect Disciple. Additionally, Zheng Chao, another disciple from a loose cultivator background, impressed Meng Zhang and was promoted as an Inner-Sect Disciple as well.

The distinction between Inner-Sect Disciples and outer disciples went beyond mere status, as there were significant differences in the sect's allowances and privileges. With this group of Inner-Sect Disciples, Taiyi Sect had a reliable middle-management backbone. These Inner-Sect Disciples were like small leaders who could effectively manage the outer disciples.

After expending all the crimson feather liquid, nine out of the over ten retrieved eggs hatched successfully, while the rest remained dormant. Among the hatched eggs, three large Crimson Feather Eagles could be tamed as flying mounts, while the other nine small ones were useful as scouts and spies.

To accommodate these living creatures, Meng Zhang purchased a batch of spirit beast bags from the Firewell Market at a high price. Each bag capable of carrying living beings cost at least thousands of top-grade spirit stones and was frequently in short supply. Meng Zhang made several trips to the Firewell Market to acquire these bags.

Chapter 129: ...

In these past two years, the development of Taiyi Sect has been remarkably rapid. Not only has the number of disciples increased significantly, but the sect's income has also been continuously rising. The spiritual flowers and herbs planted at the mountain gate have been yielding harvests one after another. The newly opened spirit fields at Morning Sun Hillside and Sweetwater Oasis are gradually becoming usable, yielding more and more spirit grains. The abundant harvest of spirit rice can basically meet the supply needs of the disciples within the sect.

With sufficient resources for cultivation, the growth speed of the sect's disciples has also started to accelerate. Just when Taiyi Sect was flourishing, Meng Zhang received a letter. It was a long-awaited letter from Jue Ying, requesting Meng Zhang to fulfill their previous agreement and help her once.

Meng Zhang values integrity greatly and would not back out of a promise without reason. After arranging the affairs within the sect, he mounted his wind chasing horse and set off. Initially, Meng Zhang had planned to ride the Crimson Feather Eagle to try riding a flying mount, but Hu Jing, who was responsible for raising the Crimson Feather Eagle, told him that the eagle was still young and not fully grown, so it was best not to ride it casually. Disappointed, Meng Zhang had no choice but to continue on horseback.

The meeting place where Meng Zhang and Jue Ying agreed to meet was a small hillside next to the Firewell Market. Jue Ying, who had been waiting there, did not exchange pleasantries upon meeting. After meeting Meng Zhang, she led him directly and set off without delay.

After several years apart, Jue Ying's cultivation base had also broken through to the Refining Qi stage. However, her temperament remained unchanged—silent and reserved, never uttering unnecessary words.

Jue Ying remained silent throughout the journey, leading Meng Zhang to a secluded and hidden valley. She lightly patted the side of the valley's cliff with her right hand, and a cave appeared soon after, just enough for one person to pass through. Jue Ying made a gesture for Meng Zhang to follow her and went straight inside.

Following behind, Meng Zhang couldn't help but ask, "Jue Ying, what do you want me to do?"

"Sect Master Meng's Lesser Yang True Fire is Very Yang and Very Hard, and it has the power to dispel evil spirits. This time it will come in handy," Jue Ying replied without directly answering, revealing only half of the reason.

Meng Zhang touched his nose and said, "Jue Ying, you don't know yet, but I have already converted my Lesser Yang True Qi into Solar True Qi and have refined the Solar True Flame."

"Solar True Flame? That's wonderful! Sect Master Meng, you've given me a great surprise," Jue Ying, who was always cold and indifferent, couldn't help but show a hint of joy in her words.

Once inside the cave, Jue Ying led Meng Zhang along a narrow passage, turning this way and that for a long time until they reached a stone chamber. In the center of the chamber, a middle-aged woman sat cross-legged with her eyes closed, appearing lifeless and gloomy, as if on the verge of death.

As soon as he entered the chamber, Meng Zhang felt an aura that made him feel disgusted and somewhat fearful.

"Demonic cultivation? Are you tainted by Demonic Cultivation?" Meng Zhang exclaimed in shock, taking a few steps back, adopting a defensive posture. The middle-aged woman opened her eyes and said, "I am not a practitioner of Demonic Cultivation. I was merely injured by a practitioner of Demonic Cultivation, and my body was tainted by demonic energy. Sect Master Meng should be able to discern the difference."

Under the effect of Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye, the demonic energy couldn't hide, confirming the woman's words. She was indeed not a practitioner of Demonic Cultivation, but her body was tainted by demonic energy.

Meng Zhang let out a sigh of relief while also figuring out what Jue Ying needed his help with. Once demonic energy infected a cultivator, it was like an intractable sore attached to the bone, extremely difficult to completely eradicate. Over time, the demonic energy could grow stronger by contaminating and devouring the cultivator's true qi. If left unchecked, the cultivator might succumb to the demonic energy, undergo a profound change in temperament, and fall into the demonic path, becoming a new demon.

Seeing Meng Zhang relax, Jue Ying informed the middle-aged woman, "Master, Sect Master Meng has already converted his Lesser Yang True Qi into Solar True Qi and refined the Solar True Flame. There is hope for your injuries to be healed."

Upon hearing Jue Ying's words, the gloomy middle-aged woman's face brightened a bit.

"My name is Luo Ye. After being injured by a demonic cultivator, I have suffered from the torment of demonic energy," she explained with few words, much like Jue Ying.

"The infamous reputation of demonic energy is well-known. I don't have complete confidence, but I will do my best to try to help," Meng Zhang politely replied.

Meng Zhang had discovered that the woman, Luo Ye, was a Foundation Building stage cultivator. Being able to remain rational and considerate despite being tainted by demonic energy made her strong among Foundation Building cultivators, with a tenacious will and a firm Dao heart.

Demonic cultivators were the common enemy of all cultivators and a major threat to this world. Exterminating demonic cultivators was every cultivator's duty. While Ghost Path cultivators had a place in the Cultivation World and could even associate with some cultivators, demonic cultivators were universally condemned and pursued.

Assisting a cultivator injured by demonic cultivators was certainly not something Meng Zhang would refuse, not to mention his agreement with Jue Ying.

Luo Ye pondered for a moment before saying, "I have held unrealistic hopes after being injured for so long. I hope my expectations won't put too much pressure on Sect Master Meng."

"Let me see how proficient Sect Master Meng's Solar True Flame is."

After speaking, Luo Ye activated her true qi and lightly tapped forward. A pitch-black gas emerged from her fingertips and lingered in front of her body, slowly swirling in the air.

Seeing the appearance of this gas, Jue Ying, like avoiding snakes and scorpions, quickly stepped back a few paces. Meng Zhang also had a serious expression, as if facing a great enemy.

Meng Zhang circulated his Solar True Qi and unleashed his diligently refined Solar True Flame. A golden flame appeared in front of him, carrying terrifying heat as it collided with the black gas.

A sizzling sound echoed, and the black gas began to dissipate gradually until it disappeared completely. However, the golden flame also dimmed.

Seeing this scene, Jue Ying, who rarely showed emotions, couldn't help but reveal a hint of joy on her face.

"Solar True Flame, Very Yang and Very Hard, magnificent and righteous, truly living up to its reputation. With the assistance of Sect Master Meng's Solar True Flame, there is hope for Master's injuries to be healed."

However, Luo Ye was not as optimistic as Jue Ying and only watched quietly as the flame burned away the demonic energy.

When the dark and demonic energy in the Solar True Flame was completely burned away, the golden flame also extinguished. There was a trace of regret in Meng Zhang's eyes, as even with his current Cultivation Base, it would still take a considerable amount of time to refine such a Solar True Flame.

Luo Ye looked at Meng Zhang and remained silent for a while before regretfully saying, "Unfortunately, your Cultivation Base at the Refining Qi stage is still too weak, and the power of the refined Solar True Flame is insufficient. To completely expel the demonic energy, much more effort is needed."

Meng Zhang felt a bit embarrassed and didn't know how to respond.

After another moment of silence, Luo Ye spoke again, "Sect Master Meng, the Cultivation Technique you practice is not just Solar True Qi; it also includes Lunar True Qi. Although I don't know the name of this Cultivation technique, I speculate that it must be a superior Cultivation method that incorporates both yin and yang."

Unexpectedly, Meng Zhang's intentionally hidden Cultivation was seen through by the woman in front of him. Her insight was truly terrifying, surpassing any Foundation Building stage cultivator Meng Zhang had encountered before.

"You are correct. The Cultivation I practice is the 'Sun-Moon Wheel Turning Sutra.' It requires simultaneous cultivation of Solar True Qi and Lunar True Qi, and eventually, they merge into Sun and Moon True Qi."

Since she already figured it out, Meng Zhang admitted it straightforwardly.

"I've heard of the 'Sun-Moon Wheel Turning Sutra.' It is indeed a rare and superior Cultivation method."

"The Taiyi Sect truly deserves to be a grand sect inherited from the Middle-Earth Continent. Although it may appear to have declined, it still possesses such an exceptional Cultivation inheritance."

Listening to Luo Ye's admiration, Meng Zhang didn't respond. He couldn't tell her that the Taiyi Sect's inheritance had long been lost and that he acquired it again from the Trial Ground.

"Sect Master Meng, you are only in your early twenties, right?" Luo Ye asked.

"I'm twenty-three this year." It was not something to hide; anyone could easily find out.

"At the age of twenty-three, you have already cultivated to the eighth level of the Refining Qi stage, and your foundation is solid, with pure true qi."

"It seems that Sect Master Meng's talent should be excellent, at least possessing a middle-grade spiritual root. Moreover, Sect Master Meng is diligent in cultivation and never slackens. Truly a promising talent."

"You flatter me," Meng Zhang said, feeling unsure of the woman's intentions.

"With your current Cultivation Base, your help is limited for me. But if you can reach the Foundation Building stage, there is hope to completely remove the demonic energy within me."

"With my current physical condition, I can hold on for at most fifteen more years. If you can reach the Foundation Building stage within these fifteen years, it won't be too late to help me then."

"Do you have the confidence to reach the Foundation Building stage within fifteen years?"

Meng Zhang initially wanted to give a casual response, but looking into Luo Ye's eyes, he found it hard to be insincere.

After careful thought, Meng Zhang replied cautiously, "Foundation Building is something no one can be one hundred percent certain about. Even legendary Heaven Grade spiritual root cultivators have a very small chance of failure during Foundation Building."

"All I can say is that I will do my best. Even if there were no such matter with Senior, I would still strive to cultivate and achieve Foundation Building as soon as possible."

"As for successfully reaching Foundation Building within fifteen years, I am quite confident."

Meng Zhang's words were still somewhat modest. With his high-grade spiritual root talent, it would only take a few years for him to complete Refining Qi. He was also highly confident that he could achieve Foundation Building without using Foundation Building Pills, which would save him time and effort.

He only needed to refine his true qi, strengthen his body, and adjust his state to make a breakthrough into the Foundation Building stage. The possibility of him succeeding within fifteen years was very high.

After hearing Meng Zhang's response, Luo Ye said, "Sect Master Meng, are you willing to make a pact with me?"

"As long as you successfully achieve Foundation Building within fifteen years and come to help me expel the demonic energy, I will grant you a tremendous benefit."

Meng Zhang didn't speak and didn't inquire about the specific benefit. Given his personality, since he had already promised to help Jue Ying once and couldn't solve the issue due to his Cultivation Base's inadequacy, he would definitely make up for it after reaching the Foundation Building stage. Of course, when facing such a favorable offer, he wouldn't falsely reject it. "I have some connection with the head of the Black Market. In the future, I can let Jue Ying provide Taiyi Sect with intelligence information for free."

Luo Ye's first condition greatly appealed to Meng Zhang. Whether it was Taiyi Sect or Meng Zhang himself, what they lacked most at the moment was channels for acquiring various types of intelligence. The grocery store Zhang Zhanlin had opened in Singing Sand City, with its connections and resources from Li Xuan, could only gather some general information. Obtaining truly secret intelligence was difficult.

Having experienced the influence of the Black Market, Meng Zhang knew how vast and rich its intelligence sources were. Acquiring information from the Black Market would undoubtedly be a great advantage.

"This is just a down payment. As for the real benefit, I will tell you when the time comes."

After hearing this, Meng Zhang felt quite excited. Luo Ye's approach had truly piqued his interest. Without mentioning the future benefits, just having access to intelligence was enough to prompt him to help.

"Senior, you are too kind. Even without discussing the benefits, since I promised Miss Jue Ying, I will absolutely not go back on my word. When I successfully achieve Foundation Building in the future, I will certainly help Senior expel the demonic energy," Meng Zhang gave his commitment.

"Good, then we have an agreement. The pact is valid for fifteen years from now," Luo Ye said loudly.

With the agreement reached, their relationship grew closer. Luo Ye didn't voluntarily reveal her background, and Meng Zhang wisely refrained from asking.

Based on Meng Zhang's impression, Luo Ye didn't appear to be a wicked person. Moreover, her background was evidently extraordinary.

Luo Ye was not one who enjoyed small talk and was about to dismiss Meng Zhang when she suddenly remembered something. She took out a map from her body and handed it to Meng Zhang.

"This is a map left behind by a senior of the Purple Gold Sect."

"This senior was broad-minded and fond of helping others. There should be many useful items in the cave he left behind."

"Originally, after obtaining this map, I intended to let Jue Ying go. As it's our first meeting, and I didn't prepare any gift, I can only make do with this."

"Sect Master Meng, why don't you and Jue Ying go together? As for the items inside, you can decide how to distribute them."

Meng Zhang accepted the map and noticed that Luo Ye seemed unwilling to say more, so he took his leave.

Meng Zhang waited outside the stone chamber for a while before Jue Ying came out from inside. The two of them left Luo Ye's residence together.