

Sect Master 151

Chapter 151: Mystical Place News

Meng Zhang's peaceful days didn't last long before his old friend Shi Weiming paid him a visit again. After a few pleasantries, Shi Weiming went straight to the point, saying, "Sect Master Meng, my brother, I've brought you a fantastic opportunity to make a fortune."

Upon hearing the words "make a fortune," Meng Zhang couldn't help but feel interested. Indeed, Taiyi Sect had been facing financial difficulties lately. Although Twin Success Valley supported Taiyi Sect, it wasn't just because of their affiliation. Meng Zhang had spent a considerable amount of spiritual stones to appease several elders of Twin Success Valley. The valley was benefiting from the profits of Taiyi Sect's white hidden earth mining while the sect was struggling financially.

Additionally, there were significant expenses on the black market. Meng Zhang had borrowed a substantial amount of spiritual stones from Jue Ying to fill that hole. Although Jue Ying never pressed him for repayment or mentioned interest, Meng Zhang couldn't bear owing a girl money for an extended period.

If it weren't for secretly selling scarlet copper ore to Earthfire Sect, Taiyi Sect would have been in even more dire straits. Both Taiyi Sect's treasury and Meng Zhang's personal pocket were in desperate need of spiritual stone replenishment.

The so-called "opportunity" Shi Weiming mentioned piqued Meng Zhang's interest, but he quickly realized that Taiyi Sect had recently attracted considerable attention by humiliating Green Bamboo Mountain. It would be wiser to remain low-key and avoid further trouble.

Meng Zhang didn't want to get entangled in overly complicated matters. Shi Weiming saw that Meng Zhang wasn't very enthusiastic about the opportunity and proceeded to explain it in detail.

The opportunity was about the upcoming opening of the Mirage Secret Realm, which would happen in a little over two years. The secret realm was generally a completely independent space, not on the same level as the mortal world.

When Purple Gold Sect ruled the Endless Sea of Sand, the Primordial Spirit True Monarch in the sect had expended considerable effort to open this secret realm as a trial ground for Refining Qi stage disciples.

The secret realm, known as the Mirage Secret Realm, was situated at the center of the Mirage Desert.

After the fall of Purple Gold Sect and the rise of Flying Swan Sect, the sect lacked the Primordial Spirit True Monarch's ability to fully control the Mirage Secret Realm.

As a trial ground for Refining Qi stage disciples, only those at the Refining Qi stage could enter the Mirage Secret Realm. Inside, countless treasures and precious herbs could be found, serving as rewards for disciples who passed the trial.

Although most of the precious treasures within the secret realm had been depleted since the fall of Purple Gold Sect without any external replenishment, the various spiritual herbs inside had thrived with time and ample nourishment.

Shi Weiming handed Meng Zhang a book containing detailed information on various spiritual herbs required for crafting the Foundation Building Pill. The book was well-illustrated and provided thorough explanations, including the herbs' growth environment and harvesting methods.

The Foundation Building Pill had two common recipes. One required four primary herbs and eight auxiliary herbs, all of which could be found in the Mirage Secret Realm. The other recipe demanded the inner core of a Third Rank demon beast as the main ingredient and four spiritual herbs as auxiliary ingredients.

Third Rank demon beasts represented a substantial leap in strength from Second Rank ones. They possessed the combat power of Gold Core stage Daoist Masters and had intelligence comparable to humans, making them challenging to hunt. Moreover, Third Rank demon beasts were quite rare in the Endless Sea of Sand.

Flying Swan Sect used the first recipe to craft Foundation Building Pills.

The Mirage Secret Realm opened approximately once every hundred years. During this time, Flying Swan Sect would send many elite Refining Qi stage disciples inside and allow disciples from affiliated forces, and even external forces, to enter as well.

Flying Swan Sect would purchase all kinds of spiritual herbs collected inside the secret realm at a price higher than the one offered by the cultivators. If anyone could collect the primary herbs for crafting the Foundation Building Pill or three auxiliary herbs, they could exchange them for a Foundation Building Pill at Flying Swan Sect, following their conditions. Additionally, there would be a generous supply of extra spiritual stones.

Over the years, Flying Swan Sect had earned a reputable standing in this matter, and its credibility was well-established. During each opening of the secret realm, the entering cultivators, both human and demon beasts, engaged in bloody battles, resulting in significant casualties on both sides.

After explaining the general situation of the Mirage Secret Realm, Shi Weiming stated his purpose. He hoped that when the secret realm opened, Meng Zhang would lead the disciples of Taiyi Sect inside to collect various spiritual herbs. Shi Weiming offered a price more than double the Flying Swan Sect's rate for any herbs collected.

If Taiyi Sect managed to gather the ingredients for crafting the Foundation Building Pill, Shi Weiming would exchange them for a Foundation Building Pill according to Flying Swan Sect's conditions, along with additional spiritual stone subsidies.

Although Meng Zhang trusted Shi Weiming's credibility after years of dealing with him, he was still hesitant about sending Taiyi Sect's disciples into the Mirage Secret Realm. The sect's disciples were currently in a period of rapid growth and couldn't be risked in such a perilous place.

Meng Zhang himself had no strong motivation to venture inside the secret realm. He possessed a top-quality spiritual root, and Foundation Building was only a matter of time for him; he didn't need the Foundation Building Pill. Moreover, with the sect's development on the right track, though facing some financial issues now, Meng Zhang believed they could be resolved within a few years as various industries flourished.

As for seeking fortunes within the Mirage Secret Realm, Meng Zhang had no interest. No matter what opportunities might lie there, his own life was more important. The danger posed by rampant

demon beasts and numerous hostile cultivators was considerable. Unless someone had the protection of fate or an invincible body, no one could guarantee they would come out unscathed.

Now, Taiyi Sect was no longer in its early struggling phase. With some accumulation, they needed to prioritize stability and avoid risks that didn't match the rewards.

With this in mind, Meng Zhang politely declined Shi Weiming's request, stating that he had no interest in the Mirage Secret Realm whatsoever.

Chapter 152: Refining Qi Ninth Stage

No matter how Shi Weiming tried to persuade or tempt Meng Zhang, he never relented to wade into that muddy water. Seeing that he couldn't convince Meng Zhang, Shi Weiming left disappointed. Before departing, he hoped that Meng Zhang would reconsider and left behind a book containing detailed information about the Mirage Secret Realm.

After seeing Shi Weiming off, Meng Zhang casually opened the book and started reading. The information recorded inside regarding the Mirage Secret Realm was indeed very comprehensive. It provided detailed descriptions of places suitable for spiritual medicine growth and warned about the various dangers within the secret realm.

With the information from the book as a guide, one could undoubtedly achieve great gains in the Mirage Secret Realm if lucky. However, Meng Zhang remained unmoved and had no intention of entering that place. He had previously entered Taiyi Sect's Trial Ground and obtained significant benefits. As a disciple of Taiyi Sect, he felt at home there and had divine assistance. Not only did he successfully avoid various dangers, but he also obtained precious legacies.

The Mirage Secret Realm was a treasure left behind by the Purple Gold Sect. For cultivators from the Flying Swan Sect and other forces, it was an intrusion into foreign territory. After Flying Swan Sect took over the Endless Sea of Sand, the Mirage Secret Realm had been opened several times. Each opening caused bloodshed and numerous casualties among cultivators.

The widely acknowledged reasons for the heavy casualties were twofold. First, Flying Swan Sect couldn't control the secret realm, leading to increased danger. Second, various cultivators engaged in infighting and mutual struggle, resulting in killings and treacherous acts. However, after understanding this history, Meng Zhang felt that the reasons were not that simple; there were other factors at play.

Purple Gold Sect was, after all, a righteous sect that wouldn't cultivate disciples through harmful means and let them kill each other. The purpose of setting up a trial ground was to train and improve disciples, not to send them to their deaths. The situation in the Mirage Secret Realm was entirely contrary to Purple Gold Sect's original intentions.

Based on his own experiences in the Trial Ground, Meng Zhang couldn't shake the feeling that there were significant mysteries within the Mirage Secret Realm. To be cautious, he decided to keep his distance from that place.

With his mind made up, Meng Zhang set aside this matter entirely and devoted himself wholeheartedly to cultivation. Two years later, Meng Zhang was already twenty-seven years old.

On this night, following his usual routine, Meng Zhang absorbed the Yin energy from a high place, refining his true qi within his body. Suddenly, he sensed a change in the qi and immediately activated the techniques from the "Sun-Moon Wheel Turning Sutra" to guide a strand of extremely pure Yin energy into his body.

With the assistance of this strand of Yin energy, Meng Zhang finally broke through the last bottleneck within his body, and his true qi circulated smoothly without any hindrance. As he expelled the strand of Yin energy from his body, Meng Zhang's Cultivation Base finally reached the Ninth Stage of Refining Qi, taking another step closer to the Foundation Building stage. The next step for him would be to spend some time refining his true qi and adjusting his physical and mental state before attempting Foundation Building.

With his eyes tightly closed, Meng Zhang carefully sensed the state within his body before opening his eyes. However, what he saw startled him.

The strand of Yin energy he had expelled, tainted with a mysterious aura from his breakthrough, underwent some mutation when it encountered the moonlight from the high and unreachable moon above the Morning Sun Hillside.

The two combined, and a peculiar transformation occurred. A small, palm-sized ball of cold light, resembling the moon, appeared in the air not far from the ground.

Before he could react, a small milk cat, of unknown origin, ran to the ball of light. It was only slightly larger than a mouse and seemed to be still nursing. With surprising strength, it pounced on the ball of light and vigorously started tearing it apart with its adorable little milk teeth.

The ball of light was torn in half by the milk cat, and the remaining half slowly floated up into the air. While munching on the half it had torn off, the milk cat looked at the other half and emitted dissatisfied cries.

At this moment, a fist-sized little bird swooped down from the sky like lightning. It flew beside the remaining half of the ball of light and quickly pecked at it.

In a moment, the ball of light was divided into two parts, and each was swallowed by the little milk cat and the little bird, respectively. Both of them fell into a deep slumber after consuming their share of the light.

Meng Zhang waved his hand, and the two sleeping animals were instantly summoned into his hand. After careful examination, Meng Zhang finally understood what had just happened.

The strand of extremely pure Yin energy he had absorbed and released had come into contact with the moonlight, causing a strange mutation. The ball of light was, in fact, some kind of spiritual creature similar to the Emperor's Flowing Nectar.

Both the small milk cat and the little bird had amazingly coincidental encounters, which drew them to this place. The Emperor's Flowing Nectar possessed the ability to enhance the spiritual intelligence and potential of various beasts, plants, and creatures. It was highly attractive to them, and driven by their instincts, they disregarded all dangers to devour it.

The two small creatures, each having swallowed a part of the ball of light, fell into a deep slumber as they absorbed the benefits they had just gained. Lately, it was the time when spirit grains ripened, attracting numerous birds and beasts to feed. Although the spirit field was guarded by a formation,

the formation was not fully active all the time, leaving some gaps for these clever birds to secretly feast on the spirit grains.

The little bird that managed to avoid the hunting of the Scarlet Feathered Eagles and entered this place through a gap in the formation had shown a bit of ability.

Chapter 153: Spirit Pet

As for that little milk cat, it is Hu Jing's hidden trump card. Back then, Meng Zhang bought several pairs of mountain patrol dogs from Singing Sand City and gave them to Hu Jing to practice the art of controlling beasts. After Hu Jing tamed these pairs of mountain patrol dogs, they were used to guard and patrol the mountain gate, proving to be very useful.

Encouraged by this success, Hu Jing bought several pairs of demon cats from the market. Although the shop selling the demon cats boasted about their extraordinary bloodlines, including the heritage of the Shadow Fiend Cat and the Shape-Shifting Demon Cat, in reality, these demon cats were just the most basic demon beasts with unremarkable bloodlines. In terms of combat power, they were only slightly stronger than ordinary mortals.

Hu Jing domesticated these demon cats and placed them in the spirit field to hunt mice and other small pests, saving the spirit farmers a lot of effort. The little milk cat is one of the offspring of a female cat among them. For some unknown reason, it happened to appear here at this time.

Meng Zhang couldn't help but feel a bit amazed. Emperor's Flowing Elixir was a spiritual object that even great demons fought for incessantly. However, the result of his creation of that thing, which had some of the effects of Emperor's Flowing Elixir, ended up in the bellies of these two little creatures. It was truly a strange twist of fate.

Meng Zhang had always wanted to raise a spirit pet. Spirit pets had various wonderful uses for cultivators and often proved to be of great assistance. However, Meng Zhang had high standards, and many demon beasts that seemed good enough didn't meet his criteria.

After all these years, he had not found a spirit pet that satisfied him. But now, as he looked at these two little beings, he felt a hint of temptation.

A cultivator could only keep a limited number of spirit pets. Rationally speaking, Meng Zhang shouldn't waste valuable spirit pet slots on these two useless and weak creatures. However, the usually clever and rational Meng Zhang was feeling a bit sentimental at this moment. He considered this night's events as fate and a fortunate chance.

Since embarking on the cultivation path, Meng Zhang increasingly understood the meaning of "Obeying Heaven to Suit Humans." Now, he was determined to follow his inner desire and be a bit impulsive for once.

Meng Zhang activated the Deception Breaking Eye and carefully observed the two little creatures once again. The little milk cat remained just a little milk cat, cute but essentially useless. Unfortunately, it was not born in a world where cuteness was justice.

As for the little bird, it seemed to be a type of bird similar to a hummingbird. Its most significant feature was its lightning-fast flight speed and incredibly agile movements. In the air, even a

Foundation Building stage cultivator would find it difficult to catch without special magic tools or techniques.

Originally, Meng Zhang wanted to give them nice names, but due to his difficulty in naming things, he thought for a while and couldn't unexpectedly come up with a satisfactory name. He temporarily set the problem aside, as the two little creatures wouldn't wake up for a while anyway.

In the following days, Meng Zhang familiarized himself with his new cultivation realm and practiced various spells, such as refining the Solar True Flame and condensing the Lunar True Water, which he hadn't stopped working on.

Shortly after Meng Zhang broke through to the ninth level of Refining Qi, Yang Xueyi also successfully reached the seventh level of Refining Qi, becoming a Refining Qi late stage cultivator.

After observing and interacting with Yang Xueyi over the past two years, Meng Zhang felt that she was actively integrating herself into Taiyi Sect, and her performance was satisfactory, making her a trustworthy candidate for important tasks.

After discussing with Tian Zhen and Daoist Clear Spirit, Meng Zhang appointed Yang Xueyi as the Elder of the Talisman Hall, responsible for matters related to creating talismans in the sect. The Talisman Hall, which only existed in Meng Zhang's imagination, was waiting for Yang Xueyi to establish it.

In addition, after experiencing Yang Xueyi's culinary skills, the members of Taiyi Sect appointed her as the overall manager of the sect's kitchen.

As Yang Xueyi gradually integrated into Taiyi Sect and demonstrated her abilities, she gained higher authority within the sect. The various texts in the Hidden Scripture Pavilion would gradually be made available to her.

Over these two years, Taiyi Sect's affairs ran smoothly, and all its industries operated in an orderly manner. Most mundane tasks were handled by General Affairs Elder Tian Zhen, allowing Meng Zhang to focus on his cultivation undisturbed.

In a good mood, Meng Zhang's cultivation base steadily improved. He hoped that these peaceful days would continue indefinitely, allowing him to quietly cultivate within the sect without wandering outside.

However, peace and tranquility were not destined to last forever, as the world is full of unexpected events. Even if one tries to avoid trouble, it may still find them.

Just two days before the regular preaching of Deep Earth Spirit General, Jue Ying arrived at Taiyi Sect.

Over the years, Jue Ying had visited Taiyi Sect several times and had become well acquainted with its members. Especially during the time of Deep Earth Spirit General's regular preaching, she often appeared without an invitation.

This time, Jue Ying came to Taiyi Sect not to listen to Deep Earth Spirit General's preaching but to address an urgent matter.

After meeting with Meng Zhang, she explained her purpose in a secluded room at a slow pace. Recently, the Green Bamboo Mountain sect had approached the black market to hire experts and annihilate Taiyi Sect completely.

Due to Jue Ying's connection, the black market politely refused Green Bamboo Mountain's request. After investigating the matter, they found out that Meng Zhang had hired Foundation Building stage experts from the black market to block Old Man Bamboo Stick and Elder Bamboo Spear during their last confrontation.

While unaware in the past, Green Bamboo Mountain now knew about this matter, and they had the means to influence the black market. They officially informed the black market not to continue providing assistance to Taiyi Sect in the conflict with Green Bamboo Mountain.

As a chaotic organization like the black market, its internal affairs were extremely complex. Relying on Luo Ye's influence, Jue Ying had a considerable amount of power inside, but she was still far from being able to manipulate everything in secret.

Although the black market appeared to operate in the shadows and stay aloof, many forces in the Cultivation World had ties to it, including Green Bamboo Mountain. There were hidden connections and secrets unknown to the public.

Green Bamboo Mountain was a powerful force with several Foundation Building stage cultivators, capable of rivaling Twin Success Valley. In contrast, Taiyi Sect was a small faction without even one Foundation Building stage cultivator.

Considering the situation, it was evident that the black market would lean toward Green Bamboo Mountain. Consequently, Jue Ying managed to secure an agreement from the black market to remain neutral in the upcoming conflict between Taiyi Sect and Green Bamboo Mountain.

Given Green Bamboo Mountain's strength, even without the support of the black market, they could easily wipe out Taiyi Sect. Without being able to hire reinforcements from the black market, Taiyi Sect's survival was uncertain.

Green Bamboo Mountain was already organizing their forces to launch a secret attack on Taiyi Sect.

Chapter 154: Warning

When Meng Zhang heard this news, his first reaction was to seek help from Twin Success Valley. However, he quickly realized that it wouldn't be of much use. Green Bamboo Mountain attacked Taiyi Sect more than two years after the incident, which was already giving Twin Success Valley some face. They clearly didn't want a large-scale conflict with Green Bamboo Mountain.

In warfare, one can only be a thief for a thousand days, but cannot guard against thieves for a thousand days. Even if Meng Zhang managed to get Twin Success Valley involved this time and stop Green Bamboo Mountain's actions, what about the next time? Twin Success Valley wouldn't keep obstructing Green Bamboo Mountain for the sake of Taiyi Sect forever. Sooner or later, Taiyi Sect would fall prey to Green Bamboo Mountain's sneak attack.

The initiative was in Green Bamboo Mountain's hands, and they would strike whenever they pleased. Meng Zhang regretted underestimating Green Bamboo Mountain's strength and leaving too

many loose ends. The vengeful nature of Green Bamboo Mountain far exceeded his expectations, and he had overestimated Twin Success Valley's deterrence.

If Green Bamboo Mountain truly destroyed Taiyi Sect, would Twin Success Valley risk a large-scale war over just one Taiyi Sect? Even if Twin Success Valley wanted to do so, Flying Swan Sect would never allow them to act recklessly.

Meng Zhang realized that he had underestimated the power and methods of these major forces in the Cultivation World and failed to understand the true relationships between various cultivation forces under Flying Swan Sect's rule.

If it weren't for Jue Ying's timely warning, Taiyi Sect might have suffered annihilation. After Jue Ying analyzed the situation for Meng Zhang, he discovered his previous oversights. However, Meng Zhang still believed that recruiting Yang Family cultivators, especially talents like Yang Xueyi, was the right decision, even if it came with great risks.

His only mistake was underestimating Green Bamboo Mountain and not employing more secure means to rescue the Yang Family members.

Currently, Green Bamboo Mountain was planning to destroy Taiyi Sect, but for them, the Mirage Secret Realm was even more critical. The realm would open in a little over a month, much earlier than usual due to recent changes. Consequently, Green Bamboo Mountain was too preoccupied to deal with Taiyi Sect immediately.

With this buffer of time, Meng Zhang had more opportunities to prepare. After much contemplation and discussion with Jue Ying, he decided to take the initiative and disrupt Green Bamboo Mountain's arrangements.

Meng Zhang had formulated a plan, but it required a formidable fighting force, at least two cultivators at the Foundation Building level. Hiring Foundation Building cultivators from the black market was no longer an option, and Jue Ying's master, Luo Ye, couldn't move freely due to the demonic aura's influence.

As for Twin Success Valley, aside from the uncertainty of obtaining Foundation Building-level cultivators from them, Meng Zhang needed to keep his actions highly confidential to prevent any leaks.

Meng Zhang summoned Deep Earth, the Spirit General, and asked, "Deep Earth, you have displayed Foundation Building-level combat power before. If I provide you with enough stone stalactites, what level of strength can you reach?"

Deep Earth Spirit General pondered briefly before answering, "Suppressing ordinary early-stage Foundation Building cultivators shouldn't be a problem. However, it's best not to engage in prolonged battles."

Satisfied with Deep Earth's response, Meng Zhang still needed another Foundation Building-level combatant. When devising the plan, he had already considered this and decided to ask Shi Weiming for help.

Leaving Jue Ying at Taiyi Sect, Meng Zhang hurried to Singing Sand City to meet Shi Weiming.

Seeing Meng Zhang, Shi Weiming's face lit up with delight. "Sect Master Meng, have you changed your mind? Are you ready to enter the Mirage Secret Realm?"

Over the past two years, Shi Weiming had visited Taiyi Sect several times, trying to persuade Meng Zhang to change his mind and enter the Mirage Secret Realm to gather spiritual herbs. However, Meng Zhang had politely declined each time. With the opening of the Mirage Secret Realm approaching, Shi Weiming had become increasingly anxious. So when Meng Zhang appeared before him, he thought that Meng Zhang had changed his mind.

Meng Zhang shook his head slowly and said, "Brother Shi, I'm still firm in my decision not to enter the Mirage Secret Realm. I have come here this time with an urgent request for your help."

Shi Weiming looked disappointed and asked listlessly, "What do you need, Sect Master Meng? Please speak freely. As long as I can do it, there will be no ambiguity."

"I want to borrow someone from you to keep a Foundation Building-level elder from Green Bamboo Mountain occupied," Meng Zhang directly stated his purpose without any ambiguity.

"No, no, absolutely not. I've said it before; we only want to do business peacefully and won't get involved in the disputes between your local sects," Shi Weiming kept shaking his head at Meng Zhang's request.

"And besides, our people are too weak; how could they contend with a Foundation Building-level elder from Green Bamboo Mountain?"

Meng Zhang smiled and said, "Let's be straightforward. I came here to ask for the help of Senior Gu Tanghai."

"With your intimate relationship, this request shouldn't be difficult for you to fulfill."

"How do you know about Gu Tanghai's connection with us?" Shi Weiming's expression immediately darkened.

Meng Zhang remained silent and maintained a mysterious demeanor. During the last encounter, when Shi Weiming introduced Gu Dashan, Gu Tanghai's nephew, as a witness to the conflict between Taiyi Sect and Zhao Family, Meng Zhang used Mind Reading to gather information from Gu Dashan without his guard up.

He discovered that Gu Dashan's family and Shi Weiming's group were closely related and belonged to the same secret faction. Although Meng Zhang couldn't unearth the deepest secrets of this faction from Gu Dashan's mind, he was now employing Mind Reading again to read Shi Weiming's thoughts. While he couldn't access deeply buried information, he could glean some surface thoughts that Shi Weiming couldn't hide from him.

Seeing Meng Zhang's enigmatic expression, Shi Weiming fell silent for a moment before saying, "I don't know how Sect Master Meng found out about this matter, but please keep it a secret for us."

"If Sect Master Meng intends to use this matter to threaten us, then you've made a mistake."

"I assume Sect Master Meng wouldn't want to gain another enemy, right?"

Meng Zhang replied with a serious tone, "I have no intention of threatening you, Brother Shi. I simply seek a fair trade."

While talking with Shi Weiming, Meng Zhang took out a profound ginseng from the spirit box he carried with him. This profound ginseng had been cultivated for over five hundred years, making it extremely rare. What's even more crucial was that in the book Shi Weiming gave Meng Zhang about the Foundation Building Pill formula, it explicitly stated that a profound ginseng of over five hundred years of cultivation was an essential auxiliary ingredient for refining the Foundation Building Pill.

Previously, Meng Zhang and Jue Ying had gathered a large amount of profound ginseng from the Purple Gold Sect cultivator's cave. Since Jue Ying found it troublesome and neither she nor her master, Luo Ye, understood the Spirit Plant Technique and alchemy technique, they handed all the profound ginseng over to Meng Zhang.

After returning to Taiyi Sect, Meng Zhang transplanted all the profound ginseng there. Over the years, these profound ginseng had been quietly growing in the spirit field. Except for occasionally being taken by Yang Xueyi for making soup, those with shallower cultivation time, they had hardly been used.

It was only after reading the book Shi Weiming brought that Meng Zhang learned about the significance of profound ginseng aged over five hundred years in refining the Foundation Building Pill.

Upon seeing Meng Zhang take out the profound ginseng, Shi Weiming's expression changed drastically. The previously cold look vanished, replaced by excitement. Meng Zhang noticed this and handed the profound ginseng to him.

Shi Weiming carefully received the profound ginseng and inspected it thoroughly. "Excellent, it's naturally grown and not forcibly ripened with spiritual energy. It can be used for refining the Foundation Building Pill."

"How many of these profound ginseng do you have? I'll buy all you have at a high price," Shi Weiming said eagerly.

Meng Zhang didn't answer but smiled and remained silent.

Seeing this, Shi Weiming calmed down and asked, "What conditions do you have for the trade?"

"I'll trade two profound ginseng aged over five hundred years in exchange for Senior Gu Tanghai's help to entangle the Foundation Building stage elder of Green Bamboo Mountain," Meng Zhang proposed.

"Two profound ginseng won't be nearly enough. Senior Gu Tanghai is a mid-Foundation Building stage expert, and he'll be dealing with Green Bamboo Mountain," Shi Weiming shook his head.

They engaged in a fierce bargaining session, going back and forth for quite a while before finally reaching an agreement. Meng Zhang would provide four profound ginseng aged over five hundred years in exchange for Gu Tanghai's assistance in confronting the Foundation Building stage elder of Green Bamboo Mountain.

Once the deal was settled, Shi Weiming wore a flattering smile and kept probing to find out how many other spiritual herbs Meng Zhang possessed.

Meng Zhang didn't have many profound ginseng that he gathered from the Purple Gold Sect cultivator's cave, especially those aged over five hundred years, which were quite rare. He wouldn't

have traded them if he wasn't left with no choice. He casually responded to Shi Weiming and then changed the subject.

After agreeing on the means of contact, Meng Zhang returned to Taiyi Sect and began preparing for their upcoming actions against Green Bamboo Mountain.

Over a month later, the Mirage Desert, located over four thousand miles east of Firewell Market, had become bustling. The Mirage Desert was a peculiar desert within the Endless Sea of Sand. Its weather was unpredictable, and the dunes frequently shifted, making the terrain unstable. Moreover, illusions like mirages often appeared within the desert.

Approximately every hundred years, these illusions became more frequent in the Mirage Desert, especially when enormous palace complexes started appearing in the central area of the desert. This signified that the Mirage Secret Realm was about to open.

Initially, these palace complexes were entirely illusory, composed of clouds and smoke. Their shapes kept changing, and their locations constantly shifted. As time passed, these illusions gradually turned real. Everything inside the palaces became tangible, and halls, pavilions, flowers, and trees appeared lifelike. Ordinary Refining Qi stage cultivators couldn't tell the difference between reality and illusion.

The process of turning illusions into reality varied in time, sometimes taking only one to two months, while in other instances, it might take three to five months, or even longer. Thus, when the hundred-year mark approached, major forces in the Endless Sea of Sand would dispatch cultivators to camp near the Mirage Desert. As soon as the enormous palace complexes began to appear, they would immediately inform all parties, to avoid missing the opening of the Mirage Secret Realm.

Over a month ago, Green Bamboo Mountain had planned to attack Taiyi Sect, but then the enormous palace complexes suddenly emerged in the Mirage Desert. Experienced cultivators estimated that these palaces would become real relatively quickly, likely in just over a month. Consequently, Green Bamboo Mountain had to temporarily abandon their assault on Taiyi Sect and focus their attention on the Mirage Secret Realm. They figured they could deal with Taiyi Sect later, as it couldn't escape from there anyway. First, they had to handle the matters related to the secret realm since Mirage Secret Realm was crucial to Green Bamboo Mountain, leaving no room for distraction.

Suddenly, thunderous roars echoed through the sky of Mirage Desert. The enormous palace complexes in the center became even more realistic. Eventually, the roaring subsided, and the palace complexes stopped changing and shifting, stabilizing completely. The grand structures no longer appeared illusory but solid and lifelike.

Foundation Building stage cultivators led teams from various major forces, and numerous groups of cultivators moved from the edges of the Mirage Desert toward the central palace complexes. As they neared the palaces, all Foundation Building stage cultivators halted their steps, while Refining Qi stage cultivators continued to advance.

No Foundation Building stage cultivators dared to get too close to the palace complexes because of the Divine Ability's power, which actively repelled them. As for Gold Core stage Daoist Masters, Flying Swan Sect's Gold Core Daoist Master had never approached the Mirage Desert, for reasons unknown.

Once inside the palace complexes, all Refining Qi stage cultivators would enter the Mirage Secret Realm through the portals within. Apart from the Refining Qi stage cultivators of various major forces, many disguised and sly cultivators infiltrated from different directions.

Flying Swan Sect's Foundation Building stage cultivators paid no attention to those people. The more human cultivators entered the Mirage Secret Realm, the more dangerous it became for the demonic beasts. Eventually, the majority of the gathered spiritual herbs ended up in the hands of Flying Swan Sect through various means.

The Refining Qi stage cultivators could stay in the Mirage Secret Realm for a month. If they didn't leave within that time, they would have to wait until the next hundred years when the Mirage Secret Realm opened again. Whether Refining Qi stage cultivators could survive until then was uncertain. Theoretically, the longest lifespan of a Refining Qi stage cultivator was two cycles, or one hundred and twenty years, but most couldn't live past a hundred years.

Chapter 156: Preemptive

The two Foundation Building cultivators leading the team from Green Bamboo Mountain happened to be Elder Bamboo Stick and Elder Bamboo Spear. Originally, such an important matter should have been led by the top expert of Green Bamboo Mountain, Elder Bamboo Sword. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, Elder Bamboo Sword couldn't make it.

After all the Refining Qi disciples entered the palace complex, Elder Bamboo Stick and Elder Bamboo Spear casually found a spot on top of a sand dune and sat down, closing their eyes to rest, quietly waiting for a month to pass.

Within the Mirage Secret Realm, during that month, countless bloody battles and cruel stories unfolded, but no one knew exactly how many.

As the sun rose and set, and the moon went through its phases, the month quickly passed.

One by one, the surviving Refining Qi cultivators rushed out of the palace complex. Those belonging to sects or clans quickly gathered with their own people, while the loose cultivators hurriedly left the area.

Despite their swift actions and reactions, they were not fast enough. Just as they emerged from the palace complex, numerous cultivators who had been lying in ambush around the area appeared from all directions, surrounding them.

Every time the Mirage Secret Realm opened, it became a feast for desperate individuals. Those with enough courage and confidence in their abilities would venture into the Mirage Secret Realm.

For those lacking courage, they would instead lay in ambush outside, specifically targeting the cultivators coming out of the secret realm, planning to rob them. After all, once the Mirage Secret Realm closed, the palace complex would disappear along with it. Those who came out of the secret realm had to leave before the palace complex vanished, or they would disappear with it.

The Mirage Desert was too vast, and even the Flying Swan Sect couldn't completely seal it off, preventing all cultivators from entering or leaving. Those cultivators who stealthily entered the Mirage Desert from various directions had long ago laid ambushes near the palace complex.

The Flying Swan Sect couldn't fully control the Mirage Secret Realm, let alone the situation around the palace complex. Especially with the Foundation Building cultivators unable to get too close, chaos continued, and they lacked the power to stop it.

Many of the cultivators who had just experienced life-and-death struggles within the Mirage Secret Realm were now entangled in bloody battles again. Among these cultivators, many returned with significant gains, with some even carrying materials for refining Foundation Building Pills.

In the eyes of the cultivators outside, these people were like moving treasure troves. Especially for many Refining Qi cultivators who had completed their cultivation, this place represented their only hope of obtaining Foundation Building Pills.

The bloody battles and chaotic fights raged on around them. Those from the same faction could organize and fight together, supporting each other. However, the lone cultivators became targets for countless hunters.

The Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators who entered the Mirage Secret Realm had planned to gather inside the palace complex and then rush out together to meet the elder reinforcements. Thanks to the experience imparted by the senior cultivators in their sect, they could handle themselves well inside the secret realm and were prepared for the situation outside.

Over twenty Refining Qi cultivators from Green Bamboo Mountain formed a simple formation, cooperating and covering each other as they rushed outward.

With such a large force, they were a difficult bone to gnaw on. The ambushers outside prioritized targeting lone cultivators or smaller groups.

Fortunately, the Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators were lucky, encountering no overly strong resistance and suffering minimal casualties. They only expended some pills and talismans to successfully break out of the encirclement and get closer to the two Foundation Building elders from Green Bamboo Mountain.

Elder Bamboo Stick and Elder Bamboo Spear had long spotted their disciples and stood up from the ground, observing their movements.

"Our luck is not bad this time; less than half of them suffered casualties, and so many disciples made it out alive. I wonder what gains they made," Elder Bamboo Stick said casually.

Looking at the unfortunate factions with too many casualties, resulting in a lack of deterrence from the remaining few disciples, they fell into the encirclement of desperate individuals, and a malicious smile appeared on Elder Bamboo Stick's face.

However, the sudden change that followed froze the smile on Elder Bamboo Stick's face.

The group of Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators, about to meet with the elder reinforcements, had relaxed their guard.

Two cultivators who had been sneakily following behind them suddenly had to stop their tracks as they saw the disciples were about to meet with the reinforcements.

Elder Bamboo Stick, standing on the sand dune, cast a fierce glance at the two cultivators. If it were elsewhere, he would have slapped these audacious thieves to death long ago.

Perhaps intimidated by Elder Bamboo Stick, the two cultivators, who had intended to leave, suddenly stood still. And then, they took out a talisman and activated it together.

The two cultivators were none other than Meng Zhang and Jue Ying, who had disguised themselves and had been lurking nearby for over a month, waiting quietly for the Mirage Secret Realm to close and the cultivators to come out.

Their long-awaited opportunity had finally arrived.

The talisman they activated was a Second Rank talisman named Ghostfire Yin Wind Talisman.

A series of Yin Winds swept toward the group of Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators, and green flames appeared in the air, mixed with the Yin Winds.

After experiencing life-and-death battles for a month and multiple exhausting fights, the Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators were physically and mentally fatigued. They were about to meet with their Foundation Building elders, finally letting their guard down completely and losing their last bit of vigilance.

The Second Rank Ghostfire Yin Wind Talisman caught the unprepared Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators off guard, throwing them into chaos and claiming the lives of many cultivators.

Meng Zhang and Jue Ying each consumed a few drops of Stone Stalactite to quickly replenish their spent mana.

Almost simultaneously, the ground shook violently, and ten huge sandworms suddenly emerged from the ground, rushing toward the panicked Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators.

As Hu Jing's proficiency in the Beast Taming Art improved, Meng Zhang had long entrusted her with the unique magic tool, the Beast Control Jar. She controlled the sandworms inside.

These sandworms, strengthened by the Beast Control Jar, not only could be used for mining and fighting enemies but were also powerful weapons.

Hu Jing, who had been disguised and hidden on the side, controlled the sandworms and charged into the group of Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators, completely disrupting their formation.

Chapter 157: The Attack is Unprepared

A massive ten-headed sandworm roamed freely among the Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators. In an instant, no one could withstand its might.

After Meng Zhang and Jue Ying had consumed the Stone Stalactite elixir to recover most of their powers, they once again unleashed a Second Rank talisman.

Four sharp swords hovered in mid-air, positioned in the four cardinal directions, enclosing all the Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators in the center. These swords, colored black, green, red, and yellow, were under Meng Zhang's control, spinning rapidly and moving towards the central group of Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators.

Even a slight graze from these four swords would cause bloody chaos, limbs severed in an instant.

Among all the Second Rank talismans possessed by Taiyi Sect, the Four Polar Radiant Swords talisman was the most powerful. Even with Meng Zhang's current Cultivation Base, controlling it was quite strenuous.

For this ambush on Green Bamboo Mountain, Meng Zhang had almost depleted Taiyi Sect's resources, bringing out all their trump cards. A mighty lion puppet charged into the crowd, initiating a slaughter.

Second Rank puppets required a constant consumption of middle-grade spirit stones to remain active, but their combat prowess justified the expense.

Before entering the Mirage Secret Realm, the Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators had concealed numerous powerful techniques on their persons. Some were provided by their sect, while others were prepared individually. They had a good number of Second Rank talismans, various Yin and Thunder techniques, and even Second Rank puppets.

Facing formidable enemies from various factions and experiencing life-and-death battles within the Mirage Secret Realm for a month, these resources were exhausted. In their pursuit of more spiritual medicines, they had used up all their trump cards.

Worn down by prolonged battles, they encountered a well-prepared ambush and suffered heavy losses. In a fair fight, the twenty or so Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators would easily overwhelm Taiyi Sect. However, the absence of favorable conditions led to their inevitable defeat.

Jue Ying, using the shadows of the crowd for cover, appeared and disappeared within the group, seizing every opportunity for sneak attacks. Each successful strike left another corpse on the ground.

Zheng Chao, a loose cultivator who joined Taiyi Sect and caught Meng Zhang's attention, was entrusted with a crucial role in this ambush on Green Bamboo Mountain. Despite his rough exterior, he was always brave and valiant. Now, his actions seemed somewhat lascivious.

Silently lurking in the vicinity, Zheng Chao held a long rope. Whenever a Green Bamboo Mountain disciple fell, the rope, like a spirit snake, would deftly coil around his waist, taking away all the storage bags hanging there. In no time, Zheng Chao collected numerous storage bags marked with the emblem of Green Bamboo Mountain.

Whether Taiyi Sect would profit or lose from this ambush on Green Bamboo Mountain depended entirely on Zheng Chao's abilities.

Witnessing his disciples falling one by one before him while being powerless to stop it, the two Foundation Building elders from Green Bamboo Mountain turned red-eyed with anger, trembling with fury.

Prior to their actions, Jue Ying had employed a unique technique to disguise the Taiyi Sect members, concealing their distinct Cultivation Technique and spells. The two Foundation Building elders from Green Bamboo Mountain naturally could not recognize their true identities.

As for Jue Ying herself, she rarely revealed her true appearance and showed no fear of Green Bamboo Mountain's retaliation.

This sudden appearance of a mysterious enemy caught them off guard, and taking advantage of vulnerabilities, they ambushed the Refining Qi stage disciples, resulting in heavy losses for the Green Bamboo Mountain disciples.

Old Man Bamboo Stick and Bamboo Spear Elder felt both anger and bewilderment. When did Green Bamboo Mountain provoke such mysterious enemies?

The battle raged on, but the resistance from the Green Bamboo Mountain disciples was not strong. With each falling body, the number of survivors dwindled.

One Green Bamboo Mountain disciple managed to break through and run towards their two Foundation Building elders, hoping to reach safety and receive their protection. However, just a short distance away from the safety zone, he met a tragic end.

Jue Ying emerged from his shadow, wielding a pitch-black dagger, and swiftly slit his throat. Blood sprayed like a fountain, and the disciple fell helplessly.

Jue Ying, after killing the disciple, provocatively gestured towards the two Foundation Building elders from Green Bamboo Mountain.

Old Man Bamboo Stick, witnessing his disciple falling before him while being unable to touch the corpse, had become furious beyond reason. Jue Ying's taunting caused him to lose all sense of rationality.

"Damn you!" Old Man Bamboo Stick roared like a mad tiger and pounced towards Jue Ying.

"Don't act impulsively," warned Bamboo Spear Elder, but he was unable to stop the enraged Old Man Bamboo Stick.

However, at that moment, a figure emerged from the ground and fiercely lunged at Old Man Bamboo Stick.

Deep Earth Spirit General, utilizing the Earth Escape Spell, had been hiding in the earth, waiting for this rare opportunity.

He burst forth with the peak power of an early Foundation Building stage, but he had a limited time to act. He had to finish the fight quickly, engaging in dangerous close combat to defeat his opponent within the shortest time possible.

Deep Earth Spirit General was clad in thick stone armor from head to toe. His massive fists swung powerfully towards Old Man Bamboo Stick, who had just been sent flying.

Bamboo Spear Elder had prepared to intercept Deep Earth Spirit General when he appeared. However, at the same time, a figure descended from the sky, launching several fierce spells towards Bamboo Spear Elder.

Bamboo Spear Elder was too occupied with dealing with these attacks, leaving him no time to focus on the battle with Deep Earth Spirit General.

Taking advantage of this unexpected opportunity, Gu Tanghai, who had also been hiding his identity, launched a series of spells that made Bamboo Spear Elder struggle to keep up.

Gu Tanghai lucked out this time. Originally, his opponent should have been Green Bamboo Mountain's top expert, Elder Bamboo Sword. However, due to some last-minute circumstances, Elder Bamboo Spear led the team instead.

After advancing to the Foundation Building stage, cultivation became even more difficult, and the disparities between each realm became more pronounced. Challenging opponents of higher realms became increasingly rare.

The gap between mid-Foundation Building and early Foundation Building was so significant that an ordinary cultivator like Bamboo Spear Elder felt despair, unable to overcome it.

Chapter 158: The Serious Loss

Gu Tanghai possessed a mid-level Foundation Building cultivation base, making him one of the strong cultivators in the nearby area. Even though he refrained from revealing his true abilities to conceal his identity and didn't resort to his signature techniques, he was still beyond the capability of Bamboo Spear Elder to withstand.

If he wished, he could easily pay the price and kill Bamboo Spear Elder on the spot. However, he would never do such a thing. He had only agreed to act upon the request of his employer, Meng Zhang, who had offered a reward. Gu Tanghai had no grudges with Bamboo Spear Elder, and killing him would serve no purpose.

Meng Zhang's demand was simple – he wanted Gu Tanghai to entangle a cultivator from Green Bamboo Mountain at the Foundation Building stage. Gu Tanghai was content with doing just that, never going beyond the requirements.

With his disguise intact, Gu Tanghai easily restrained Bamboo Spear Elder, leaving him unable to break free.

On the other side, Old Man Bamboo Stick faced Deep Earth Spirit General, who immediately went all out, making Old Man Bamboo Stick seem weaker in comparison. Due to his age and declining vitality, Old Man Bamboo Stick's cultivation base had already slipped from its peak, and among Foundation Building cultivators at the early stage, he was considered relatively weak.

Deep Earth Spirit General, on the other hand, relied on a secret technique to temporarily elevate his Refining Qi completion cultivation base to the early Foundation Building stage. Despite having some gaps in his memory, he was once a Gold Core Daoist Master, and his experience and insight remained. With just a few moves, he easily suppressed Old Man Bamboo Stick.

The fight involved close-quarters combat, which Old Man Bamboo Stick was unfamiliar with. Having lived a comfortable life for many years, he had never engaged in life-or-death struggles like this before. Deep Earth Spirit General completely controlled the pace of the battle, forcing Old Man Bamboo Stick into a defensive stance.

After just a few hard clashes, Old Man Bamboo Stick couldn't hold on any longer, spewing blood and retreating continuously. Deep Earth Spirit General relentlessly pursued, his punches getting stronger with each strike. He fully tapped into every bit of his potential with the aid of secret techniques.

Unable to match Deep Earth Spirit General and with his declining physical condition, Old Man Bamboo Stick couldn't sustain the fight. Eventually, he fell to the ground, killed by Deep Earth Spirit General's brutal blows.

Old Man Bamboo Stick, despite being a seasoned Foundation Building cultivator with various secret techniques and hidden cards, was caught off guard by Deep Earth Spirit General's sudden attack, leaving him with no time to react.

Bamboo Spear Elder didn't have an easy time either. Despite using all his abilities, he couldn't escape Gu Tanghai's entanglement. If it weren't for Gu Tanghai intentionally going easy on him, Bamboo Spear Elder would have suffered even more.

Not being a fool, Bamboo Spear Elder knew that the other party didn't unleash their full strength for unknown reasons. He could only defend and counterattack cautiously, hoping not to gain any merits but also not to make any mistakes.

After witnessing Deep Earth Spirit General kill Old Man Bamboo Stick so quickly, Bamboo Spear Elder was frightened. To think that his peer had been dispatched so easily, leaving him with no time to come to his aid, showed how terrifying his opponent was.

Once Deep Earth Spirit General's gaze turned toward him after killing Old Man Bamboo Stick, Bamboo Spear Elder's soul seemed to escape his body. He braced himself to withstand Gu Tanghai's techniques, even if it meant being injured, just to escape as quickly as possible.

Bamboo Spear Elder's body soared into the air, rapidly fleeing into the distance.

Gu Tanghai made no attempt to stop him and let Bamboo Spear Elder escape.

Deep Earth Spirit General, somewhat annoyed, glanced at Gu Tanghai, displeased with his apparent lack of effort. Nevertheless, the outburst of strength had depleted him, and he could no longer maintain his Foundation Building stage power.

To prevent Gu Tanghai from seeing through his true abilities, Deep Earth Spirit General used an Earth Escape Spell to disappear underground, vanishing from Gu Tanghai's sight.

The remaining Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators who were struggling for their lives saw their two Foundation Building elders either dead or escaping. Their morale plummeted, and some even lost their will to fight.

After a bitter battle, the cultivators who had barely survived Mirage Secret Realm all perished in Taiyi Sect's ambush.

Meng Zhang and his group swiftly completed the steps of looting the spoils, erasing all traces of the battle, and then promptly fled the scene.

Gu Tanghai barely said a word before hastily leaving as well.

Unaware of the unfolding events, a great storm was already brewing in Green Bamboo Mountain.

With only four Foundation Building cultivators, the loss of one and injury of another had severely weakened the sect's foundation.

The Refining Qi stage cultivators who entered Mirage Secret Realm were all the elite of Green Bamboo Mountain. Many of those who managed to survive would have grown into crucial pillars of the sect. But now, all had perished, shaking the very roots of the sect.

Even more serious was the fact that Green Bamboo Mountain could occasionally purchase Foundation Building Pills from Flying Swan Sect at a friendly price of ten thousand low-grade spirit stones when Flying Swan Sect's Foundation Building Pills were abundant.

Of course, this method alone couldn't sustain Green Bamboo Mountain with several Foundation Building stage elders. There were two other ways for them to obtain Foundation Building Pills.

The first involved Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators collecting various spiritual materials with great effort to exchange for Foundation Building Pills from Flying Swan Sect. However, the Endless Sea of Sand was already under Flying Swan Sect's direct control, making the gathering of spiritual materials a pure gamble of luck.

The second method was the most crucial one. When Mirage Secret Realm opened every hundred years, Green Bamboo Mountain would send its elite disciples inside to collect or seize various spiritual herbs, especially the primary and auxiliary herbs needed to refine Foundation Building Pills. Only with these herbs could they exchange for Foundation Building Pills from Flying Swan Sect.

But now, all the disciples who came out of Mirage Secret Realm had been ambushed and killed, and the spiritual herbs on them had naturally become someone else's spoils. The consequences were dire.

Chapter 159: The Efficacious Medicine Succeeds in Obtaining

In order to win over the support of friendly forces like Green Bamboo Mountain, approximately every hundred years or so when the Flying Swan Sect's Foundation Building Pill becomes slightly abundant, Green Bamboo Mountain can exchange for one. In this past century, Green Bamboo Mountain has already made such an exchange once.

Among the several Foundation Building cultivators of Green Bamboo Mountain, the youngest have already surpassed a hundred years of age. The opening of the Mirage Secret Realm also occurs approximately every hundred years. The theoretical maximum lifespan of a Foundation Building cultivator is four cycles of the ten Heavenly Stems, which is two hundred and forty years. However, in reality, most Foundation Building cultivators in the Endless Sea of Sand do not live beyond two hundred years.

This means that if they cannot obtain Foundation Building Pills from the Flying Swan Sect through other means, Green Bamboo Mountain's Foundation Building cultivators are likely to face a break in the succession. Flying Swan Sect is not a charitable organization, and even they do not have an abundance of Foundation Building Pills. There are numerous Refining Qi completion cultivators in Flying Swan Sect, and they are patiently waiting in line to receive their Foundation Building Pills. Without sufficient benefits or reasons, Flying Swan Sect will not easily release extra Foundation Building Pills.

In other words, Green Bamboo Mountain either has to desperately gather spiritual items that can impress Flying Swan Sect to exchange for extra Foundation Building Pills or pray every day, hoping that talented disciples who do not need Foundation Building Pills will appear naturally.

Otherwise, Green Bamboo Mountain may fall into a difficult situation where they lack Foundation Building cultivators after a hundred years, and without the protection of Foundation Building cultivators, the once prosperous and mighty Green Bamboo Mountain would not be able to hold onto their ancestral legacy, let alone maintain their own inheritance.

Meng Zhang's proactive attack has put Green Bamboo Mountain in a crisis of discontinuation of their legacy. Compared to the survival of the sect, the grudges between Taiyi Sect and Green Bamboo Mountain are insignificant and not worth mentioning. Green Bamboo Mountain, with its hands full dealing with its own situation, has no spare energy to deal with Taiyi Sect.

On one hand, Green Bamboo Mountain is doing its best to investigate the true culprit behind the ambush of their disciples and trying every possible means to recover the stolen spiritual medicines. On the other hand, Green Bamboo Mountain must strive to obtain extra Foundation Building Pills from the Flying Swan Sect.

Meng Zhang's actions were not perfect, but they left no obvious evidence nor any trace to be followed. Even if Green Bamboo Mountain had thought of Taiyi Sect, the most powerful cultivator publicly known in Taiyi Sect is Meng Zhang at the Refining Qi Ninth Layer. Even the Refining Qi completion-level Deep Earth Spirit General rarely appears in front of outsiders. Deploying two Foundation Building cultivators is something Taiyi Sect could never achieve. Furthermore, the black market has explicitly stated that they did not assist Meng Zhang.

Foundation Building cultivators are not easy to find in this region, and all of them have their names and identities known. Green Bamboo Mountain is currently conducting a meticulous investigation of all known Foundation Building cultivators in the surrounding areas, hoping to find some clues.

The number of Foundation Building cultivators in the surrounding areas is not small. If the investigation list includes foreign Foundation Building cultivators, the scope becomes even larger. Green Bamboo Mountain will have to take it step by step. As long as they can delay enough time and let Meng Zhang successfully reach Foundation Building, Taiyi Sect will have the power to contend with Green Bamboo Mountain. Even if the truth is exposed later, it won't matter.

While Green Bamboo Mountain is in panic, Meng Zhang has already returned to Taiyi Sect and begun counting the loot. The Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators who entered the Mirage Secret Realm naturally did not carry a large number of spirit stones on them, let alone precious treasures. The pills and talismans they carried were mostly depleted within the Mirage Secret Realm. The most valuable items they brought back were various spiritual medicines.

After careful counting, the most crucial items were the primary ingredient for refining Foundation Building Pills, the Eight-Leaf Knotweed with over five hundred years of maturity, and the auxiliary ingredients for refining Foundation Building Pills. According to the exchange rules set by Flying Swan Sect, these spiritual medicines were enough to exchange for two Foundation Building Pills.

It seems that the disciples of Green Bamboo Mountain had a bountiful harvest in the Mirage Secret Realm. However, Meng Zhang benefited from their hard work.

Jue Ying played a big role this time, and Meng Zhang certainly wouldn't treat her unfairly. He promised to give Jue Ying one Foundation Building Pill if he could obtain two.

Jue Ying naturally accepted it happily as any Refining Qi cultivator wouldn't reject the opportunity to receive a Foundation Building Pill.

Considering the close relationship between the Flying Swan Sect and Green Bamboo Mountain, Meng Zhang wasn't planning to exchange the Foundation Building Pills from the Flying Swan Sect. After all, Taiyi Sect suddenly producing these spiritual medicines would be too suspicious.

Flying Swan Sect has always promised to keep the identities of all exchange participants confidential. Over the centuries, Flying Swan Sect's reputation in this regard has been good.

However, Meng Zhang decided to hand over these spiritual medicines to Shi Weiming instead. It wasn't mainly because of the extra spirit stones he could get, but rather as a precaution.

When Meng Zhang brought the promised five-hundred-year-mature profound ginseng to Shi Weiming, his face lit up with joy. When he saw the primary and auxiliary ingredients for refining Foundation Building Pills, Shi Weiming was even more ecstatic.

After Meng Zhang handed over these spiritual medicines to Shi Weiming, he inquired about when he could receive the promised Foundation Building Pill. At this point, Shi Weiming became evasive.

Meng Zhang activated Mind Reading and carefully read his mind while Shi Weiming's thoughts were unstable. The information he obtained nearly infuriated Meng Zhang.

It turned out that Shi Weiming was just an empty promise. The wild Alchemist behind him had not collected all the necessary spiritual medicines for refining Foundation Building Pills, nor did he have prior experience in refining them.

Meng Zhang realized that he had been deceived by Shi Weiming this time. However, the situation had come to this point, and he couldn't go back on his word.

The only fortunate thing was that Shi Weiming still intended to honor his promise. He assured Meng Zhang that once the Foundation Building Pill was successfully refined, he would prioritize supplying it to him. With the spiritual medicines Meng Zhang provided, most of the ingredients needed for refining Foundation Building Pills had already been collected. The remaining portion was also being collected by Shi Weiming. He had blind confidence in the Alchemist behind him, firmly believing that he would successfully refine the Foundation Building Pill.

In the matter of refining the Foundation Building Pill, Shi Weiming was more urgent and focused than Meng Zhang. Although he did not immediately provide the promised Foundation Building Pill, he did pay Meng Zhang the additional spirit stones as promised.

Meng Zhang reminded himself not to trust these people too much. Many years of trade relationships didn't necessarily warrant complete trust.

Of course, at least for now, they were still allies on the same boat, each having their own needs from the other. Shi Weiming knew about Meng Zhang's ambush on Green Bamboo Mountain, but having accepted Meng Zhang's spiritual medicines, they were more eager to keep this secret. If the secret were exposed to Green Bamboo Mountain, reclaiming the spiritual medicines needed to refine Foundation Building Pills would become Green Bamboo Mountain's top priority instead of seeking revenge against Taiyi Sect.

Chapter 160: Chasing Lightning and Colored Glaze

After leaving Shi Weiming, Meng Zhang felt very unhappy. He, who had always been cautious, was unexpectedly deceived by this familiar old friend, Shi Weiming.

Over the years, they had maintained a trading relationship, and Shi Weiming had helped Meng Zhang several times, causing him to lower his guard. However, Meng Zhang became vigilant,

reminding himself that the Cultivation World was full of deception, and he must be more careful and alert in the future.

Back at Taiyi Sect, a joyful event occurred. Two little creatures that had been in deep slumber finally awakened. Since the last time they received benefits from Meng Zhang, they had been in a deep sleep. Fortunately, during their slumber, they absorbed spiritual energy from the outside world, replenishing their bodies' consumption and avoiding starving to death.

After sleeping for so long, the two little creatures finally woke up. Feeling Meng Zhang's aura, they affectionately rushed towards him. The little bird flew to the top of Meng Zhang's head, circling around ceaselessly, while the small cat pounced at Meng Zhang's feet, tugging on his pants.

These two lively and cute little creatures improved Meng Zhang's initially gloomy mood considerably. When he used his Deception Breaking Eye to observe them, he found that he could no longer fully see through their potential. They had grown significantly and had promising futures. Moreover, the two little creatures displayed remarkable intelligence, much smarter than ordinary human children.

For low-level demon beasts, intelligence was a crucial trait, even more important than combat strength. After the warm reunion, the two little creatures started playing and fooling around.

It seemed that the bird still held a grudge against the cat for stealing its glow ball. Whenever it had the chance, it would run away from the cat, and the cat, in turn, chased after it.

Meng Zhang thought for a moment and gave each of them a name. The bird, being male and extremely fast, was named Zhui Dian (Chasing Lightning). The green-colored female cat, with shiny fur and particularly charming emerald eyes, resembled a piece of Colored Glaze, so she was named Liu Li (Colored Glaze).

Having understood the names Meng Zhang gave them, the two little creatures rolled around happily on the ground. At that moment, Meng Zhang made a final decision to make them his spirit pets.

Meng Zhang felt that he was already powerful enough and didn't need any more impressive spirit pets. Only those who were not powerful enough would need extraordinary spirit pets. As long as the master was formidable, even if the pets were only cute, it wouldn't matter much.

After forming a spiritual bond with them, the two little creatures officially became Meng Zhang's spirit pets. From then on, they were no longer just demon beasts but spirit beasts with a master. As Meng Zhang gained influence, they could also benefit from it. If Meng Zhang became an immortal and obtained Dao, they could ascend to immortality as well and become immortal beasts.

After taking care of the two little creatures, Meng Zhang resumed his cultivation. Already at the ninth level of Refining Qi, he began refining true qi and adjusting his physical body, aiming to complete the Refining Qi stage as soon as possible.

While Meng Zhang was in seclusion, major changes occurred outside. Several significant events took place.

When Meng Zhang had previously ambushed the cultivators from Green Bamboo Mountain outside the Mirage Secret Realm, he hadn't entered the realm himself and was unaware of what happened inside.

Cultivators from Twin Success Valley who entered the Mirage Secret Realm faced attacks from various forces. Flying Swan Sect organized cultivators from different factions to target and surround the Twin Success Valley cultivators, conducting multiple ambushes.

As Flying Swan Sect held a high status in the Endless Sea of Sand, no other force dared openly oppose it. Flying Swan Sect's cultivators had strong appeal and could easily gather cultivators from various factions.

Although Twin Success Valley's cultivators fought back fiercely in the Mirage Secret Realm, they were outnumbered and overpowered. After a series of battles, nearly all of them were wiped out, with only a few escaping.

Green Bamboo Mountain cultivators reaped substantial gains from the Twin Success Valley cultivators they encountered, thus benefiting greatly from the situation.

Fortunately, Twin Success Valley wasn't as desperate for the resources inside the Mirage Secret Realm as Green Bamboo Mountain, thanks to their ability to refine Lesser Foundation Building Pills. Even if they couldn't exchange for Foundation Building Pills from Flying Swan Sect, the cultivation sect's Foundation Building stage cultivators wouldn't suffer a bottleneck.

Upon learning of Twin Success Valley's situation inside the Mirage Secret Realm, Meng Zhang sighed but had no way to help.

Subsequently, Flying Swan Sect's actions against Twin Success Valley escalated. They first blocked all the trading routes used by Twin Success Valley's caravans. Initially, Twin Success Valley's caravans were not allowed to enter Flying Swan Sect's territories directly. Later, under Flying Swan Sect's orders, other nearby cultivation forces such as Liu Family, Green Bamboo Mountain, and even Forest Spring Watch were prohibited from allowing Twin Success Valley's caravans to pass through their territories.

In addition, all forces that had traded with Twin Success Valley ceased all transactions. Even the usually aloof Earthfire Sect was no exception.

As a result, Twin Success Valley lost all its external trading channels. Matters worsened when Flying Swan Sect's cultivators, along with cultivators from Green Bamboo Mountain, Liu Family, and Forest Spring Watch, approached Singing Sand City and blocked all approaches to it. Not only were Twin Success Valley's caravans forbidden from approaching the city, even other cultivators traveling to Singing Sand City were forcibly driven away.

This sudden change turned the once bustling Singing Sand City into a desolate place. Twin Success Valley lost its important financial resource, losing vast amounts of spiritual stones and cutting off almost all of its logistics routes.

As Flying Swan Sect kept pressing Twin Success Valley, the noose around their necks tightened. Currently, Flying Swan Sect was somewhat considerate of their prestigious reputation among the orthodox sects and refrained from taking direct action. However, once their patience wore thin and the masks came off, it would spell a calamity for Twin Success Valley.

The reason behind Flying Swan Sect's relentless pressure on Twin Success Valley, a vassal power, had already spread throughout the Cultivation World. Twin Success Valley harbored ambitions of challenging Flying Swan Sect and cultivating their own Gold Core Daoist Master to gain independence and break free from the rule of Flying Swan Sect.

