

## Sect Master 31

### Chapter 31: Sell

Meng Zhang carefully inspected the lump of Hundred Refinements Fine Gold, gaining a general understanding of the tool refiner's intentions. The Thousand Jun Peak was a crude and powerful magic tool that relied on brute force to attack. However, due to its rough nature, it was prone to damages and dents during intense collisions. To address this weakness, the ingenious tool refiner embedded a set of runes crafted from Hundred Refinements Fine Gold inside the Thousand Jun Peak. These runes not only enhanced the power when wielding the Thousand Jun Peak but also enabled it to automatically repair damages. With this improvement, the Thousand Jun Peak compensated for its vulnerability and gained increased power.

In Meng Zhang's opinion, this tool refiner must have been either a profligate spender or a clueless fool who didn't understand the hardships of the mortal world. Not to mention the cost of crafting those runes, the lump of Hundred Refinements Fine Gold alone was worth close to a thousand pieces of low-grade spirit stones. Even a First Rank top-grade Thousand Jun Peak would cost no more than a hundred spirit stones. The tool refiner's extravagant gesture left Meng Zhang envious, as he himself was quite impoverished.

After some hesitation, Meng Zhang decided to keep the lump of Hundred Refinements Fine Gold. The outer shell, melted away by the medicinal solution, was now entirely useless. With such a valuable item worth over a thousand spirit stones, the few dozen spirit stones for the Thousand Dust Sand no longer caught Meng Zhang's attention.

However, if it weren't for the layer of Thousand Dust Sand obscuring the Hundred Refinements Fine Gold inside, Meng Zhang wouldn't have had the opportunity to claim this windfall. His Divine Ability, Deception Breaking Eye, played a pivotal role, allowing him to see through the magic tool's internal structure.

Afterward, Meng Zhang expended a considerable amount of energy and blood to refine the two damaged magic tools he had purchased, the small sword and the white bead, according to the requirements of the Blood Refining Martyr Art. Once done with these tasks, Meng Zhang finally rested.

Early the next morning, he left the inn and headed towards the center of Singing Sand City. Singing Sand City primarily belonged to Twin Success Valley, and nearby powers like Forest Spring Watch and Liu Family also held some shares. However, the best and most spacious shops in the market were owned by Flying Swan Sect.

While Twin Success Valley was a dominant force in the Foundation Building realm, known as one of the top ten Foundation Building sects, they still deferred to the likes of Gold Core sects like Flying Swan Sect.

Although Twin Success Valley had worked hard to establish Singing Sand City, a significant portion of the market's profits had to be handed over to Flying Swan Sect. The prime shops in the market were also first picked by Flying Swan Sect before being distributed among the other powers, including Twin Success Valley.

Thankfully, Flying Swan Sect was a Daoist sect and relatively amicable in their approach. They didn't impose excessive demands on their vassal powers like Twin Success Valley.

Meng Zhang's destination was Flying Swan Building, a comprehensive commercial place established by Flying Swan Sect. Besides selling pills, magic tools, and talismans, the building also bought various spiritual materials.

Flying Swan Building was a six-story high building, standing out among the smaller ones nearby.

As Meng Zhang approached the reception area, a steward led him to the place specifically designed to purchase refining materials.

Flying Swan Building did business fairly and could barely be accused of being overbearing.

Meng Zhang emptied several storage bags, taking out all the Scarlet Copper he had purchased. Although the Scarlet Copper looked substantial, it only cost a little over a hundred low-grade spirit stones. This was because the steward in charge of the purchase saw that this batch of Scarlet Copper was relatively pure and abundant in Yang Flame Qi, so he offered a favorable price. Since Scarlet Copper was a common commodity, this amount of quantity wouldn't create any ripples in Flying Swan Building.

Of course, if Flying Swan Building knew that Meng Zhang possessed an entirely new Scarlet Copper vein, the situation might be entirely different.

After selling the Scarlet Copper, Meng Zhang felt that the transaction at Flying Swan Building was fair and then took out the lump of Hundred Refinements Fine Gold. He had previously erased all the runes on it using his knowledge, making it look like an ordinary lump.

The steward in charge of the purchase brightened up immediately when he saw the Hundred Refinements Fine Gold. After a thorough inspection, he purchased it at a high price of 1,200 low-grade spirit stones.

Meng Zhang was delighted. Unexpectedly, the Hundred Refinements Fine Gold fetched such a high price, making it a big profit for him. After toiling for a whole year, Taiyi Sect could only earn a few spirit stones. Yet, he gained such a substantial sum just by browsing through the stalls in the market.

However, he knew that such good fortune wouldn't be a daily occurrence. Regardless, with this unexpected fortune, not only would he be more financially comfortable, but Taiyi Sect's days would also improve significantly.

"Little brother, do you have any other good things? Don't worry, no matter how much merchandise you have, Flying Swan Building can accommodate it all," the steward casually asked, seemingly unguarded.

Meng Zhang's heart tightened, but he put on a dejected look and replied, "No, I don't have anything else. This is all the gain I made this time. We risked a lot and lost several people to explore a cultivator's cave. Unexpectedly, besides these refining materials, there was nothing else of value. If it weren't for selling these materials at a good price, we would have suffered losses and wouldn't even have enough compensation for the deceased brothers."

## **Chapter 32: Employment**

After leaving Flying Swan Building, Meng Zhang took a stroll outside and entered a teahouse called Four Seas Building. In the Endless Sea of Sand, almost every market had a Four Seas Building. It was a renowned commercial intermediary agency established by the prestigious You Family, a big merchant family. Four Seas Building provided information on all kinds of material purchase and

sale, as well as facilitated cooperation among various cultivation forces. It also published various hiring information and tasks, allowing loose cultivators and even sect cultivators to seek suitable employers.

The secrets of You Family were unknown even to many Cultivation World insiders. According to the information released by You Family, it was an extensive influence that covered the entire Endless Sea of Sand and even had connections to the vast Middle-Earth Continent's giant trading companies. In the Endless Sea of Sand, You Family held a special position, and even Flying Swan Sect showed deference to them. Other powers wouldn't dare to provoke You Family easily.

In Singing Sand City, Four Seas Building was the second most magnificent building after Flying Swan Building. The first floor was a spacious hall with walls covered in layers of rippling light screens. Various peculiar pieces of information were displayed clearly on the screens. Information about material purchase, requests for purchase, task postings, and employment opportunities were continuously updated.

When Meng Zhang entered, the hall was already crowded with people. It took him some effort to find a place to stand while he read the information displayed on the light screens. The information on the screens covered a wide range, and its accuracy was guaranteed by Four Seas Building.

Meng Zhang thought to himself, "Unexpectedly, this cultivation world also has such intermediary agencies and a commercial concept like this. It does make things much more convenient, and I won't have to run around as much."

According to the information on the light screens, Meng Zhang contacted several loose cultivators through Four Seas Building. These cultivators were all spirit farmers who had provided their information to Four Seas Building, hoping to find suitable employers through the agency.

After talking with these spirit farmers individually, Meng Zhang used Mind Reading to understand their thoughts. In the end, he didn't choose any of them. Some had restless minds, which Meng Zhang considered to be too unstable. Some boasted too much but had poor skills in Spirit Plant techniques.

More outrageously, among them, there was even a professional spy who specialized in gathering information about potential employers and selling it.

Meng Zhang couldn't help but smile bitterly. It seemed that Four Seas Building's reputation didn't quite match up with the reality.

The plump steward who had received Meng Zhang sensed his dissatisfaction. Although the saying "the customer is God" didn't exist in this world, as a successful Shang Family, meeting the reasonable demands of customers and making them happy was their duty.

"Sect Master Meng is not satisfied with these candidates?" the plump steward tentatively asked.

"Such a renowned place as Four Seas Building can't even find a decent spirit farmer," Meng Zhang said displeased.

The plump steward hesitated for a moment before saying, "There are two candidates, but their situation is a bit special."

Under Meng Zhang's inquiry, the plump steward revealed the special circumstances of these two candidates.

Wang Shitou was originally a farmer who worked in the fields before awakening his spiritual roots at the age of sixteen. Unfortunately, his lower-grade spiritual roots were too poor, and he couldn't be accepted into any local sects. Later, he became a servant for a loose cultivator and received instruction in cultivation techniques, gradually entering the Cultivation World. Although his spiritual roots were extremely poor, he had a natural talent for Spirit Plant techniques. Relying on various makeshift Spirit Plant spells and years of planting experience, he became a decent spirit farmer. After marrying and having a son with similarly poor spiritual roots, Wang Shitou passed on his knowledge to his son, Wang Shenjie, who also became a spirit farmer. Three years ago, Wang Shitou and his son were hired by Liu Family to take care of a spirit field. It was said that a certain reckless disciple of Liu Family caused trouble, resulting in a bad harvest in the spirit field. However, Liu Family blamed Wang Shitou and his son for it, and they were severely beaten. To escape, the Wang family had to compensate Liu Family for their losses with all their savings.

Now, the destitute Wang family urgently needed to find a new employer. However, their reputation had been tarnished by Liu Family, and no other employer was willing to hire two spirit farmers who had caused a bad harvest.

Although Meng Zhang was about to harvest the spirit field in Taiyi Sect, he couldn't delay too much and decided to hire them.

Wang Shitou looked like a simple and honest farmer, while Wang Shenjie was a bit shy and timid in front of strangers. After a brief conversation, Meng Zhang judged that the father and son's Spirit Plant techniques were indeed good. Both of them had a Refining Qi Triple cultivation base, and though their cultivation bases were a bit weak, it wasn't a big deal.

The Mind Reading information confirmed that they were honest people without any hidden motives. In the nearby Foundation Building families, Liu Family was notorious for their maliciousness and was known as a venomous snake. However, Meng Zhang estimated that hiring two spirit farmers wouldn't be considered a significant offense. Besides, as a subsidiary of Twin Success Valley, Taiyi Sect paid its yearly tribute, and Liu Family wouldn't want to offend the domineering Twin Success Valley for no reason.

Thinking of this, Meng Zhang no longer hesitated and decided to employ the father and son in front of him.

The two desperate individuals had no other choice and were extremely grateful to Meng Zhang. Under the witness of the plump steward from Four Seas Building, they signed a contract that specified their rights and obligations.

Meng Zhang didn't take advantage of the situation to lower the price; instead, he offered a fair price to hire the two.

After employing them, Meng Zhang still had other tasks to attend to. He brought the father and son back to the inn where he was staying and let them rest for the time being.

### **Chapter 33: Agreement**

After settling the Wang family, Meng Zhang continued to wander around the market. Besides purchasing various cultivation materials, his main focus was on buying mortal servants.

The surrounding sects, whether it be Flying Swan Sect, Twin Success Valley, Forest Spring Watch, or others, all claimed to be righteous and opposed human trafficking. However, they found ways to

have a group of servants and enjoy their privileges. As high and mighty cultivators, how could they not have mortal servants to serve them?

In each market, there were Shang Families that sold mortal servants. They would only sell a small quantity to the cultivators, and the group would include a mix of the elderly, the infirm, women, children, and young adults to make it a well-rounded package.

While the larger sects and families looked down on such a small number of mortal servants, they governed thousands of mortals. But for smaller sects like Taiyi Sect, these mortals were a beneficial addition, as they could also produce disciples with spiritual roots.

Meng Zhang bought a group of mortal servants from a Shang Family. These servants were not sold individually, but in a group of one hundred. Each person could only purchase one group at a time. This group consisted of various individuals, and it cost him fifty pieces of low-grade spirit stones.

After finishing the shopping, Meng Zhang once again contacted the plump steward from Four Seas Building and received good news. A caravan carrying white hidden earth ore would depart from Singing Sand City the day after tomorrow. The route of this caravan would pass near Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang paid the necessary spirit stones and arranged for the caravan to take his servants and goods along with them.

Busy with his tasks, Meng Zhang finally returned to his inn to rest. When night fell, he arrived at the pre-arranged location to meet Shi Weiming.

Meng Zhang had actually set out early, but to his surprise, Shi Weiming had been waiting for him at the location. Without much ado, Meng Zhang handed over the pre-counted spirit stones to Shi Weiming.

After confirming the spirit stones, Shi Weiming lightly whistled. From a dark corner, a middle-aged man appeared and ran over to Meng Zhang, handing him over a dozen jade bottles.

After carefully inspecting the contents, Meng Zhang nodded, indicating that the deal was successful.

Just as Meng Zhang was about to leave, Shi Weiming suddenly asked, "I heard that Taiyi Sect also cultivates some medicinal herbs?"

Taiyi Sect's spirit field mainly cultivated Spirit Grain - Snow Fragrant Rice. The cultivation of medicinal herbs required higher requirements in Spirit Plant Technique and manpower. Therefore, Taiyi Sect didn't have many medicinal herbs.

As soon as the other party spoke, Meng Zhang understood the intention. He then informed Shi Weiming about the types and approximate quantity of medicinal herbs grown in Taiyi Sect.

Shi Weiming made a proposal: Meng Zhang could exchange the medicinal herbs produced by Taiyi Sect for finished pills. In addition, he could also purchase Taiyi Sect's medicinal herbs at a premium.

From their brief interaction, Meng Zhang understood that the wild Alchemist behind Shi Weiming had considerable expertise in alchemy technique and had a powerful force under him. Having more friends meant having more paths. Meng Zhang didn't object to establishing a connection with such a

wild Alchemist. Moreover, having another channel to sell Taiyi Sect's medicinal herbs was a good thing.

"If you're interested in Taiyi Sect's medicinal herbs, it's a great thing," Meng Zhang said.

The two parties made a simple agreement on future contact and trade details before bidding farewell to each other.

After parting ways, Meng Zhang strolled around the ghost market but didn't find any valuable loot. Such opportunities were not something that could be encountered every day.

Back at the inn, Meng Zhang spent the night without incident.

The next day, having reached a new deal with Shi Weiming, Meng Zhang once again toured the market and bought some low-level spiritual medicine seeds. Daoist Clear Spirit had made significant progress in Spirit Plant Technique after learning the new knowledge provided by Meng Zhang. So he decided to try growing some medicinal herbs within the sect. Although the difficulty of cultivating medicinal herbs was higher, the profit was also greater compared to simply cultivating Spirit Grain.

On Meng Zhang's shopping list was also an Earth Escape Spell talisman. To explore underground ruins or use it as a life-saving measure in critical situations, Earth Escape Spells were very useful in the Endless Sea of Sand. However, they were not only expensive but also in high demand, making them difficult to find in the market. After visiting several shops, Meng Zhang managed to buy ten First Rank high-quality Earth Escape Spell talismans.

Meng Zhang had originally planned to purchase a more powerful flying sword, but after looking around at various shops in the market, he couldn't find one that met his expectations due to some kind of compulsion. Either they were too expensive or not powerful enough. After a day of searching, Meng Zhang was still unsatisfied with his choices.

In the evening, Meng Zhang continued to stroll through the ghost market. Fortunately, he got lucky and managed to buy a good protective magic tool at a low price.

#### Chapter 34: .....

This protective magic tool had the appearance of a heart-guarding mirror. Apart from a few small notches, its overall structure was in good condition. However, there was a large groove behind the mirror, empty except for a gap.

The first cultivator who unearthed this heart-guarding mirror at some ruins attempted to refine it but failed to do so. He believed that the groove should be filled with spirit stones to serve as the source of the mirror's power. However, no matter what type of spirit stone he used, he couldn't activate the magic tool.

This heart-guarding mirror changed hands several times but remained unusable. Eventually, it ended up on a vendor's stall in the ghost market, considered a piece of scrap.

In the ghost market, many magic tools had intact exteriors but were damaged internally, rendering them unusable. As such, the vendor sold it to Meng Zhang at a slightly higher price than scrap value.

In the knowledge of crafting that Meng Zhang obtained in the Trial Ground, there was information about this magic tool. It was called the Billowing Sea Mirror, and its crafting method originated from the East Sea. It was unclear how one ended up in the Endless Sea of Sand.

The groove behind the mirror should not be filled solely with spirit stones, but with a mixture of sea blue stones and water-system spirit stones.

After obtaining the magic tool, Meng Zhang went to the Flying Swan Building first, but it was in vain. Since the sea blue stones were rare and produced only near the sea, which was tens of thousands of miles away from the Endless Sea of Sand, they were almost never used in this area.

Eventually, Meng Zhang found luck at the Four Seas Building. There was a steward who came from another region and happened to have two pieces of sea blue stones in his storage bag. Meng Zhang purchased them at a high price and placed an order for more sea blue stones, as they were consumables.

Since the distance between the Endless Sea of Sand and the sea was vast, the sea blue stones were quite expensive, and Meng Zhang felt like he had hit the jackpot. However, when considering the cost of the sea blue stones, he realized that his investment in this magic tool was not small.

Back in his inn, Meng Zhang mixed the two sea blue stones with a water-system spirit stone in a special way and placed them in the groove behind the mirror. Refining this magic tool was effortless and required very little effort.

After refining, Meng Zhang only needed to gently activate it, and the Billowing Sea Mirror would release a layer of sea blue light, providing complete protection to his entire body.

Meng Zhang had Wang Jia and his son attack him, but even with their full strength, they couldn't create the slightest ripple on the protective layer.

Satisfied with the defensive power of the Billowing Sea Mirror, Meng Zhang felt that he hadn't made a loss in acquiring it.

The next day, early in the morning, Meng Zhang and his party arrived at the gate of Singing Sand City. The pre-arranged caravan also arrived around the same time.

The caravan consisted of twelve humped sand lizard beasts that were easy to tame, had gentle temperaments, and were easy to care for. They were generally found in deserts and well-adapted to the climate and terrain of the area.

Each adult humped sand lizard beast had a body length of over ten zhang and a width of over one zhang. Their backs were a vast, flat space where simple bamboo and wooden structures were built. These structures could carry both cargo and passengers.

In the Endless Sea of Sand, humped sand lizard beasts were often used to transport bulk materials at low prices. The owner of the caravan, Lao Bulu, came from a family with ties to the Flying Swan Sect, making his family an external force related to the sect.

Flying Swan Sect was the dominant force in the region, but not everyone associated with the sect could rule and dominate outside; not everyone was showered with wealth from the heavens. In Flying Swan Sect, there were countless disciples who were less fortunate and fallen, let alone the peripheral forces of the sect. Members of these forces had to work hard to have a good life.

Lao Bulu was hardworking, diligent, and able to endure hardships, which had led him to achieve some success over the years.

Located over a thousand li north of Taiyi Sect, there was a massive white hidden earth mine belonging to the Flying Swan Sect. This mineral was essential in refining most magic tools and had special uses for cultivators of the Flying Swan Sect.

White hidden earth was not extremely rare, and its mining was not difficult. It was relatively cheap, with one low-grade spirit stone being enough to buy 10-20 jin of it. It was a bulk commodity with a high demand on the market.

Transporting white hidden earth from the mine was typically done on the ground since using a flying vessel would not be cost-effective. Due to the difficulty and inconvenience, Flying Swan Sect often outsourced the transportation to various caravans.

Lao Bulu, with some connections within Flying Swan Sect, took on this job and was now transporting supplies to the white hidden earth mine and returning with a full load of the mineral.

Businessmen were meticulous and efficient, so the caravan was not fully loaded on the way to the mine. It would take up extra transportation tasks along the way to avoid wasting carrying capacity and resources.

Humped sand lizard beasts were big eaters, and feeding them well came at a considerable cost. So, having a client like Meng Zhang and his cargo was a big help for Lao Bulu. Without this deal, the caravan would have had to transport a significant amount of goods and gradually sell them along the way, which would not only waste a lot of time but also increase risks. For a customer who came to them, Lao Bulu was very welcoming. He not only had some connections with Flying Swan Sect but also had a cultivation base of Refining Qi Ninth Layer in his fifties, making him not particularly concerned about a young person like Meng Zhang from a small sect.

Whether it was in his nature as a businessman or his genuine personality, Lao Bulu personally received Meng Zhang and was very approachable, developing a friendly relationship with him.

After Meng Zhang's purchased servants were placed on the backs of the humped sand lizard beasts and the cargo was loaded, Wang Jia and his son were arranged to take care of the mortal servants during the journey.

Meng Zhang rode on his Wind Chasing Horse and set off with the caravan.

## Chapter 35: Meets on the way sand monster

The caravan set off with twelve enormous humped sand lizard beasts, forming a long line as they passed through the gates of Singing Sand City and headed northwards.

Though the humped sand lizard beasts were massive and appeared clumsy, their speed in the desert was not slow. With their broad feet thumping on the sand, they left deep footprints and steadily moved forward, seemingly slow but fast.

Controlling the humped sand lizard beasts was not a complicated task; simple commands were enough for them to obediently proceed in the designated direction. This kind of simple work could be done by ordinary mortals.



Each humped sand lizard beast had several mortal handlers, taking turns to drive them forward. There were over ten Cultivators serving as guards for the caravan, all of them in the Refining Qi middle or late stages. They rode various mounts, most of which were riding demonic beasts.

Once they left Singing Sand City and entered the vast desert, they no longer needed to march in a single line. Due to the openness of the desert, the humped sand lizard beasts formed two columns, advancing side by side. The guards, each on their own mounts, spread out around the caravan to provide vigilance and protection.

Meng Zhang rode on his Wind Chasing Horse, staying at the left side of the caravan. As the host, Lao Bulu, also rode a demonic beast and accompanied Meng Zhang.

"Senior Lao is really too kind. I feel somewhat overwhelmed by your favor," Meng Zhang said.

"Sect Master Meng is a distinguished leader of Taiyi Sect. Perhaps, in the future, I might have a chance to cooperate with you," Lao Bulu replied with a smile.

Having traveled far and wide and being a businessman for many years, Lao Bulu was well-versed and witty, making him an interesting old man who was easy to get along with. Meng Zhang, who was recently appointed as Taiyi Sect's Sect Master, had already developed a dignified aura fitting of his position. He showed no fear while conversing with Lao Bulu.

Before long, the two found themselves engaged in pleasant conversation, feeling an inexplicable connection with each other. They both had a genuine desire to build a good relationship.

Lao Bulu was mostly driven by his instincts as a businessman – the more friends he had, the more opportunities he might gain. As for Meng Zhang, he was considering that besides the spirit field's output, Taiyi Sect had no other steady source of income. To expand and grow the sect, they needed to explore more financial resources. This realization led him to plan stricter financial management within the sect upon his return.

During the conversation with Lao Bulu, apart from inquiring about some general news, Meng Zhang hoped to gain some business opportunities. Although the conversation didn't lead to any specific opportunities, the relationship between the two became even more harmonious.

Such business opportunities were not easily obtained, Meng Zhang thought.

Despite the relatively slow speed of the caravan, they managed to cover over a hundred li during the day, taking breaks every half day to rest. In the evening, they found a place to camp against a large sand dune to spend the night.

For a slow-moving caravan like theirs, the night in the vast desert was more dangerous than the day.

During the first two days, nothing unexpected happened, and they journeyed smoothly and safely. No one felt bored, as the caravan sought nothing more than a safe journey during their travels.

On the morning of the third day, before the sky had fully brightened, the caravan set off again. Not long after, a streak of light flew from a distance. It was a message talisman that flew directly into Lao Bulu's hand.

After reading the information in the message talisman, Lao Bulu's expression changed drastically. Without bothering to converse with Meng Zhang, he immediately called all the guards together.

"The situation is not good. Our scouts have found a group of sand monsters approaching from the front," Lao Bulu said with a stern expression, unlike the kind old man from before.

Sand monsters were as terrifying to Cultivators in the Endless Sea of Sand as the plague was to mortals. No one knew the exact origin of sand monsters or how they were born. They had appeared not long after the arrival of Cultivators in the Endless Sea of Sand and displayed an extreme hatred towards them, relentlessly chasing and killing them.

In the vast desert, nests of sand monsters often appeared in hidden places. As time went on, the number of sand monsters born in these nests would increase. When the population reached a certain threshold, they would leave the nest in groups to hunt and kill Cultivators.

Numerous Cultivators had attempted to communicate with sand monsters, but all efforts had been in vain. Sand monsters were creatures without individual intelligence, driven solely by instinct. Their strongest instinct was to hunt and kill Cultivators.

Sand monsters had ravaged the Endless Sea of Sand for a long time, and the number of Cultivators they had killed and the cultivation families and sects they had destroyed were countless.

Fifteen years ago, a large group of sand monsters had appeared in the vicinity of Taiyi Sect, causing numerous families and sects to suffer. Twin Success Valley had gathered their affiliated forces to exterminate these sand monsters, but in the ensuing battles, Taiyi Sect suffered heavy losses, losing all their elders in the Refining Qi late stage. Zhao Family, who had always been at odds with Taiyi Sect, lost their only Foundation Building cultivator.

The reason Meng Zhang became Taiyi Sect's Sect Master at such a young age was that Taiyi Sect's previous Sect Master, Daoist Profound Spirit, died in the war against the sand monsters.

For Taiyi Sect, sand monsters were a recurring nightmare. When they received news of sand monsters, even Meng Zhang, who had been calm, turned somewhat pale.

In the Cultivation World, there had been large sects and organizations that organized massive campaigns to exterminate sand monsters, but they were like cockroaches, never completely wiped out. Even after destroying their nests, new ones would soon be born.

Of course, while sand monsters couldn't be eradicated entirely, whenever they appeared in the Endless Sea of Sand, the surrounding cultivation forces would immediately organize operations to avoid disaster spreading.

## Chapter 36: sand monster besieges

Next to them, a guard asked with bitterness, "Can't we avoid this group of sand monsters?" "No time. The sand monsters are already ahead of the caravan, and there's no time to turn and escape," Lao Bulu's expression was grim. The surrounding guards began considering whether to abandon the caravan and run away, but Lao Bulu's reputation within the caravan prevented anyone from doing so.

The primary targets of the sand monsters were the Cultivators. As for ordinary people and demonic beasts, they would not show mercy when encountered, but they wouldn't actively hunt them either. It was the presence of Cultivators within the green oases breached by the sand monsters in the Endless Sea of Sand that attracted their attacks. However, in the Endless Sea of Sand, which oasis

didn't have Cultivators? A green oasis without Cultivator protection would have disappeared long before the sand monsters arrived.

At that moment, a message talisman flew over as a streak of light. After receiving the message, Lao Bulu's expression relaxed slightly. "According to the scout, this group of sand monsters is not large. Most of them are small sand monsters, with only a few being at the rank of soldiers."

Hearing this, everyone felt relieved. Small sand monsters were not very powerful and relied on their numbers for victory. Even fully armed ordinary people could handle individual small sand monsters. The soldier-ranked sand monsters were only equivalent to a few Cultivators at the Refining Qi stage.

Knowing the specific strength of the sand monsters, Lao Bulu regained his confidence. Singing Sand City was not far away. He sent a message talisman to inform the city about the appearance of the sand monsters before making arrangements.

"The number of sand monsters is not significant, and their strength isn't strong. We should take the initiative and attack," Lao Bulu made the right decision. "All Cultivators will join me in the attack, while the ordinary people and the camels stay here."

Lao Bulu's decision would minimize the losses to the caravan. The sand monsters' primary target was the Cultivators. By leading the Cultivators to actively confront them, the sand monsters wouldn't attack the humped sand lizard beasts and the ordinary people until they had dealt with all the Cultivators.

Lao Bulu felt a bit embarrassed as he said to Meng Zhang, "Sect Master Meng, I feel apologetic as a guest, having to trouble you to fight at the front. It's impolite of me."

"No need to feel guilty, Senior. The sand monsters are the enemies of all Cultivators, and it's every Cultivator's responsibility to eliminate them," Meng Zhang replied.

Facing the sand monsters, Meng Zhang and the others were both expectant and anxious. Lao Bulu's Cultivation Base was much higher than Meng Zhang's, and Meng Zhang couldn't read his thoughts using Mind Reading Divine Ability. However, he could be reasonably sure that Lao Bulu had no ill intentions toward him. So, when facing the sand monsters, Lao Bulu and his group could be trusted allies.

To avoid the sand monsters charging into the caravan, even Wang and his son, who had been staying with the ordinary people, were brought by Meng Zhang to his side. Once Lao Bulu made up his mind, he acted decisively. He immediately urged his demonic beast mount and led all the caravan guards to charge forward.

Wind chasing horses were large and broad-backed, barely accommodating Meng Zhang and the others.

The caravan's guards, riding specially selected demonic beast mounts known for their speed, could keep up with the main force without falling behind.

After advancing a few miles, the Cultivator scouts spotted the target. Dust and sand billowed in the distance, and smoke rose to the sky.

The three scouts were desperately urging their demonic beast mounts, trying to reach the main force as fast as possible, with the sand monsters in hot pursuit.

Though still far away and obscured by sand, Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye allowed him to see through the yellow sand and discern the true faces of the sand monsters. They were tall and fierce-looking, even the so-called small sand monsters being taller than regular adults. The soldier-ranked sand monsters were like small giants compared to humans.

The sand monsters' bodies were entirely composed of rough sand, living up to their name.

The sand monsters were numerous but maintained discipline, forming neat formations under the leadership of the soldier-ranked sand monsters. As they marched, they raised a whirlwind of sand around the formation, enhancing their defense and speed.

Lao Bulu, though a merchant, displayed some commanding qualities when facing the sand monsters' charge. With his order, all the guards urged their mounts to catch up and successfully intercepted the three scouts before the sand monsters could reach them.

Once the guards regrouped, under Lao Bulu's command, they dismounted, formed a horizontal line, and confronted the incoming sand monster formation head-on.

In large-scale battles involving Cultivators, formations were crucial. Formations could fully unleash their side's strength and even allow weaker cultivators to contend against stronger ones. Some major sects possessed specialized war formations for large-scale battles in the Cultivation World. Using these formations, Cultivators at the Foundation Building stage could challenge and even harm Gold Core Daoist Masters.

Of course, the caravan guards couldn't employ such formations, and they only arranged a simple formation that suited their cooperation. Perhaps Lao Bulu was concerned that Meng Zhang, an outsider, wasn't familiar with their cooperation, so he kept him outside the formation, at the tail of the serpent-like formation.

Meng Zhang led Wang and his son to follow the instructions. Though somewhat uneasy, he couldn't be considered nervous. On the other hand, Wang and his son, who rarely participated in Cultivation World conflicts, felt their lips dry and their limbs weaken in the face of such a massive scene. However, due to Meng Zhang's prior warning, they didn't dare to flee during the battle.

### Chapter 37: Breaking through the formation

If they had fled before making contact with the sand monsters, it might have been forgivable. But if they ran away just before the battle, people's scornful words could drown them. At that time, not only the Wang family, even their employer, the Taiyi Sect, might find it difficult to establish themselves in the Cultivation World.

Meng Zhang understood this, and so did Wang Shitou, who had been mingling in the Cultivation World for many years. Despite their nervousness and fear, the father and son bravely stood beside the formation.

Meng Zhang didn't expect the father and son to contribute significantly in combat; he just hoped they wouldn't flee and cause chaos.

Seeing the enemy already prepared and the approaching sand monsters adjusting their positions, the sand monsters' combat instincts, especially their fighting instincts, were quite astonishing in the eyes of the Cultivators.

The charging sand monsters slowed down, but the sandstorm surrounding their formation became more intense, blocking the view of their formation with thick layers of sand, making it almost impenetrable.

Although their speed had decreased, the sand monster formation quickly entered the attack range.

Upon Lao Bulu's command, the Cultivators released one talisman after another.

Talismans were valuable, requiring no true qi consumption or spellcasting yet unleashing powerful effects. Especially for Refining Qi stage Cultivators with limited true qi and slow spellcasting speed, talismans were essential.

Attacks like flames, ice arrows, and earth dragons surged forward, bombarding the sand monster formation.

The sandstorm outside the sand monster formation played a significant role at this moment. Most attacks were blocked by the sandstorm, and only a few managed to inflict limited damage to the sand monster formation.

Even after Lao Bulu's order, the talisman attacks from the Cultivators didn't stop.

Various types and attributes of spells continued to bombard the sand monster formation. This made Meng Zhang feel uneasy. So many talismans were consumed in an instant, wasting countless spirit stones. Such extravagant behavior might be typical of these wealthy merchants, but smaller sects like Taiyi Sect would be on the verge of bankruptcy after a single battle.

Meng Zhang didn't have many attacking talismans and didn't participate in this assault. Instead, he activated his Deception Breaking Eye to discern the enemy's formation.

On the other hand, Wang and his son mustered their courage and displayed their wooden arrow technique, shooting arrows towards the front, even though their attacks were weak and contributed little to the battle.

Although Meng Zhang didn't expect Wang and his son to perform exceptionally well in combat, at least their presence added to the spectacle. Even if they were just putting on a show, it still made a difference.

Lao Bulu, while commanding, kept an eye on Meng Zhang, who appeared calm despite being a guest in this situation. He couldn't help but mutter to himself, "This young man seems decent, but in times like this, has he been frightened by the sand monsters?"

Lao Bulu's impression of Meng Zhang declined a little.

Though the sand monster formation was covered by the yellow sand, blocking enemy observations, Meng Zhang's Deception Breaking Eye still saw through the enemy, identifying their weaknesses.

Meng Zhang finally found an opportunity to strike.

Due to the talisman attacks from the Cultivators, the sand monsters' speed slowed down, and the surrounding sand became sparser, revealing some openings.

Meng Zhang knew much about the sand monsters since the information about them, including their weaknesses, had been widely circulated among Cultivators in the Endless Sea of Sand, including through various pamphlets distributed by dominant sects on how to deal with sand monsters.

After years of passing down these pamphlets through word of mouth, almost everyone knew their contents. When Meng Zhang took action, he targeted the weakness of the sand monster formation.

He gathered a long-saved Lesser Yang True Fire, forming a flaming ball that shot out like lightning, easily piercing through the yellow sand and hitting one of the particularly large sand monsters in the formation. This soldier-ranked sand monster was one of the leaders of the group, and its position was at a critical node in the sand monster formation.

The violent fireball hit the soldier-ranked sand monster, blasting its body into scattered sand.

After releasing this powerful attack, Meng Zhang felt his inner true qi nearly depleted, as he was still just a mid-Refining Qi Cultivator, and his true qi had limitations, no matter how strong he was.

Without waiting to recover, he struck again, this time not relying on his own power but tossing out a damaged short sword he bought from a stall. After being blood-refined by the Blood Refining Martyr Art, this first-class upper-grade short sword exploded with power similar to a Refining Qi stage Cultivator's full-strength strike.

With the explosion, two adjacent soldier-ranked sand monsters were blown away, and critical nodes were destroyed.

With two important nodes destroyed, the sand monster formation immediately became somewhat stagnant, and the sandstorm surrounding the guard formation began to subside.

Lao Bulu felt ashamed of underestimating this young man. As an experienced commander, he didn't miss the opportunity Meng Zhang created and ordered his subordinates to go all out.

Lao Bulu released his most powerful magic tool first, a first-class upper-grade earth-attributed flying sword. The flying sword transformed into an earth dragon and flew directly into the sand monster formation, slaughtering those soldier-ranked sand monsters and continuing to disrupt the enemy's formation nodes.

The Cultivators no longer used talismans to attack haphazardly; instead, they brought out their ultimate skills.

For a moment, various magic tools and spells were launched into the sand monster formation.

After releasing the short sword, Meng Zhang quickly recovered his true qi at the fastest speed.

Seeing their attacks overwhelming the sand monsters and knowing the sand monsters' defeat was inevitable, Meng Zhang didn't want to waste any more time. He threw out his first-class lower-grade trash flying sword, merely for show, to appear involved in the battle.

With the sand monster formation broken, their strength significantly decreased. The few soldier-ranked sand monsters were no match for the Cultivators on the other side. The small sand monsters were not too numerous, not yet reaching a critical number to bring about a qualitative change. Even the small sand monsters, which ordinary people could kill, were reduced to dust when faced with the Cultivators' spells.

Sand monsters, being monstrous creatures, lacked the normal instinct to cherish their lives and avoid danger. When facing the Cultivators, it became a battle of life and death with no room for retreat.

Not a single sand monster fled in battle; they were all annihilated by the Cultivators. The caravan guards were mostly injured, and a couple of unfortunate individuals suffered severe injuries. Fortunately, the caravan's prompt medical attention prevented any casualties.

## Chapter 38: After the war

The battle was over, but no one bothered to clean up the battlefield. There was nothing worth cleaning up anyway, except for the sand scattered all over the ground. This was one of the reasons why Cultivators despised sand monsters. They fought desperately against the sand monsters but gained no benefits. Sand monsters were composed entirely of various types of sand and stones. After their deaths, their bodies returned to being ordinary sand and had almost no value. Sand monsters didn't have magic tools, and their weapons were also made of sand and stone. When the sand monsters died, their weapons naturally turned back into sand and stone as well.

Killing a Cultivator allowed one to plunder their storage bag; killing a demonic beast could yield valuable fur and flesh, but killing sand monsters, one couldn't even get a single hair from them. It was purely a losing deal.

Although the caravan guards won against the sand monster group, when accounting for the loss of talismans and the consumption of various healing and recovery pills after the battle, the caravan suffered a significant loss.

However, there was nothing they could do about it; it was just bad luck that they encountered a sand monster group.

After comforting the guards, Lao Bulu walked over to Meng Zhang, expressing concern for him. The pivotal moments in the battle were the two times Meng Zhang took action. Both his timing and power were extraordinary, breaking the sand monster formation's nodes and laying the foundation for its complete collapse. Lao Bulu believed that this couldn't be achieved solely through luck; it demonstrated Meng Zhang's exceptional combat talent and his ability to seize the key to victory.

After this battle, Lao Bulu had a higher opinion of Meng Zhang in his heart.

Before they could exchange many words, a blue flying boat approached from the direction of Singing Sand City. The flying boat hovered over the battlefield, and two Cultivators flew out of it, landing in front of everyone. They exhibited the ability to fly without external help, a skill possessed only by Foundation Building stage Cultivators.

Meng Zhang had already recognized one of them; he was an elder from the Twin Success Valley's Foundation Building stage.

Of course, although Meng Zhang knew them, they might not know him, a lowly Cultivator. He naturally didn't approach them proactively to avoid being unwelcome.

It was said that Singing Sand City often had several Foundation Building stage Cultivators stationed there, with the Twin Success Valley Cultivators leading the group. They should be the reinforcements sent by Singing Sand City after receiving news about the sand monsters.

"It's just like watching a movie from my past life; the police always show up after the gunfight," Meng Zhang couldn't help but comment in his heart.

Lao Bulu saw the reinforcements arriving and, acting as the leader of the merchant group, went forward to negotiate with them. Despite being just a mid-Refining Qi stage Cultivator, Lao Bulu's status as an affiliate force of the Flying Swan Sect still carried some weight, and the Foundation Building stage Cultivators didn't adopt a condescending attitude towards him.

Although this sand monster group was eliminated, no one knew if there were still other sand monster groups nearby. Especially important was the possibility of sand monster nests in the vicinity. If they couldn't destroy the nests before the sand monsters grew in numbers, it would be a massive problem. If they were unlucky, Singing Sand City might face a catastrophe.

In the Endless Sea of Sand, matters concerning sand monsters were significant affairs.

After hearing Lao Bulu's account and carefully inspecting the battlefield, the two Foundation Building stage Cultivators sent several message talismans.

The flying boat ascended again and flew towards the direction from which the sand monster group had come. Out of consideration for the Flying Swan Sect's face, the two Foundation Building stage Cultivators didn't recruit the guards of the merchant group to join in searching for the sand monster nest. Instead, they gathered additional manpower from Singing Sand City.

Lao Bulu also didn't dare to linger here any longer. He was afraid of encountering sand monsters again or being involved in the war to eliminate sand monsters in Singing Sand City.

After joining up with the humped sand lizard beast from behind, they didn't even take a break and set off again.

After this battle, Lao Bulu's attitude towards Meng Zhang became better. Along the way, he deliberately befriended Meng Zhang and engaged in several conversations with him. It seemed that their bad luck had been exhausted in that battle.

During the rest of the journey, they experienced a peaceful trip without encountering any new accidents or troubles.

After ten days of traveling, the merchant group finally arrived near Sweetwater Oasis. Instead of entering Sweetwater Oasis directly, the merchant group stopped about ten miles away from it. Originally, according to the original route, the merchant group should have stopped at a location much farther from Sweetwater Oasis. However, because of the pleasant interactions with Meng Zhang along the way, Lao Bulu made a slight detour.

Having gone through the sand monster incident, Lao Bulu was eager to reach the white hidden earth mine and worried about encountering any other unexpected delays.

If they missed the deadline, it wouldn't only result in financial losses, but they would also face punishment from the Flying Swan Sect.

Therefore, Lao Bulu declined all of Meng Zhang's repeated invitations to visit Taiyi Sect.

Having received Meng Zhang's message talisman, Tian Zhen brought a group of people from Sweetwater Oasis, riding camels and waiting for them early on.

After unloading all the cargo, Lao Bulu urged the merchant group to set off without paying much attention to Meng Zhang's repeated warm invitations.



The Sweetwater Oasis team brought back the goods Meng Zhang purchased and the mortal servants to Sweetwater Oasis.

After arranging these matters, Meng Zhang finally finished his busy work. He then quickly gathered Tian Zhen and Daoist Clear Spirit to discuss the next arrangements for the sect.

Meng Zhang returned all the spirit stones he took from the sect's treasury, including compensating for the previous consumption in the Trial Ground with the gains from this adventure. From now on, he handed over the management of the sect's treasury to Tian Zhen. It was essential to distinguish between his personal wealth and the sect's public wealth. Including the Sect Master himself, no one in the sect could freely withdraw from the sect's treasury.

After discussing with the two, Meng Zhang set the supply standard for the sect's disciples and re-established the sect's merit system. Compared to before, the supplies for the disciples were increased once again.

Originally, Taiyi Sect had followed the common merit system prevalent in the Cultivation World. However, when Meng Zhang took over as the Sect Master, the number of sect disciples was too small, and he temporarily abandoned the original merit system.

But now, Meng Zhang felt that the sect should be on the right track.

Including Meng Zhang, everyone in the sect needed to gain merits to exchange for various items from the sect's treasury.

In Hidden Scripture Pavilion, various books, including cultivation techniques, were mostly free for sect disciples to read after Meng Zhang organized them. Only a small portion of the content was temporarily hidden by Meng Zhang.

### Chapter 39: Friendly merit system

Meng Zhang concealed these books not out of selfishness but because they would be harmful rather than beneficial for disciples whose Cultivation Base was not yet sufficient. Additionally, certain techniques couldn't be casually imparted. Some introductory techniques could be directly taught to disciples, but to gain access to more advanced techniques, these disciples needed to contribute to the sect, demonstrating their loyalty and willingness to integrate with it.

The original merit system of Taiyi Sect was already relatively complete, and Meng Zhang and his group made only some minor adjustments. They also established a corresponding task system to complement the merit system. As the Sect Master, Meng Zhang, Tian Zhen, and Daoist Clear Spirit, both of whom held the positions of elders, received a fixed amount of merit each month. Additionally, they could obtain merit by contributing to the sect, such as by taking care of the spirit fields or patrolling the mountain gate.

With these systems in place, issuing tasks, granting merit, and exchanging merits for items in the sect's treasury were all handled by Tian Zhen, the General Affairs Elder. Although it appeared that there was more work to be done, the number of disciples in Taiyi Sect was not large, so Tian Zhen managed to handle it all.

Meng Zhang entrusted the medicinal plant seeds he bought in Singing Sand City to Daoist Clear Spirit and asked him to try planting them after the autumn harvest in the spirit field.

After handling internal matters, Meng Zhang had no time to rest. He called Tian Zhen and Daoist Clear Spirit, rode wind-chasing horses, and left Taiyi Sect. They arrived at the place where Meng Zhang encountered the sandworms previously.

When leaving last time, Meng Zhang carefully erased the surface traces but left the marks of the sandworms' underground passages. While asking Tian Zhen and Daoist Clear Spirit to wait, Meng Zhang used the purchased earth-escape talisman.

The First Rank top-grade earth-escape talisman allowed Meng Zhang to travel underground to a depth of fewer than ten zhang and within a distance of ten li.

Soon, Meng Zhang discovered the marks left by the sandworms' underground passage. Following these traces, he traveled while using four earth-escape talismans and found a sandworm nest not far from the surface.

Meng Zhang returned to the surface and gathered Tian Zhen and Daoist Clear Spirit. Utilizing his experience in hunting sandworms, he lured the sandworms to the surface using the Earthshaking Technique. Five sandworms, divided into two waves, emerged on the surface. The three of them worked together and expended considerable effort to eliminate all three sandworms.

With no time to clean the battlefield, Meng Zhang used the earth-escape talisman again to enter the sandworm nest. However, there was no harvest inside the nest, only a large number of sandworm eggs, all of which Meng Zhang destroyed without leaving a single one.

Before the ten earth-escape talismans were depleted, Meng Zhang finally discovered a scarlet copper vein less than ten li away from the sandworm nest.

Meng Zhang roughly estimated that there should be a considerable quantity of scarlet copper ore in this vein. Currently, Taiyi Sect lacked the ability to mine the underground scarlet copper ore and didn't have the capability to conduct a comprehensive survey of the vein. Meng Zhang could only remember the location of the vein and then returned to the surface.

The bellies of the five sandworms contained, unsurprisingly, a large number of undigested scarlet copper ores. After cleaning all the ore and collecting them, Meng Zhang stored them in his storage bag. He then destroyed all the traces of the battle on the surface and the sandworm corpses, making sure not to leave any evidence.

Lastly, just to be cautious, Meng Zhang repeatedly used the Earthshaking Technique to destroy the underground sand structure where the sandworms had passed, completely erasing the traces.

Having done everything that could be done, the three of them returned to Taiyi Sect. In their hearts, they silently prayed that the news of the scarlet copper vein would remain secret until Taiyi Sect had the ability to mine it.

Meng Zhang decided that after refining the harvested scarlet copper ore, he would sell it in Singing Sand City several times. Half of the proceeds would go to the sect's treasury, and the other half would be divided among the three of them, with Meng Zhang receiving the most significant share.

In the following days, Meng Zhang focused on his personal cultivation. He not only diligently practiced the Lesser Yang Qi Art but also studied many new spells. Among the spells obtained from the Trial Ground, many were highly practical and had significant cultivation value.

The hired Wang family father and son quickly adapted to life in Taiyi Sect. Although they hadn't received systematic teachings, they had considerable knowledge of Spirit Plants. Years of experience enabled them to handle various tasks in the spirit fields.

With the Wang family father and son around, Daoist Clear Spirit also found himself with more free time to study new Spirit Plant knowledge. The Wang family father and son were quite satisfied with their life in Taiyi Sect. The sect was not overly demanding and was, in fact, quite generous. They received their remuneration promptly according to the employment agreement, and Daoist Clear Spirit even occasionally offered guidance on Spirit Plant Technique to the two of them.

Although Taiyi Sect had been in decline for a long time, it still had some foundation. Daoist Clear Spirit's Spirit Plant Technique had a systematic inheritance and was well-established.

Especially after obtaining knowledge from Meng Zhang in the Trial Ground, Daoist Clear Spirit made significant progress in his Spirit Plant Technique, showing a new look. Time passed quickly, and before they knew it, autumn arrived, and it was time to harvest the spirit fields.

This time, they harvested the Spirit Grain planted in the spirit fields. Taiyi Sect had a dedicated fifteen mu of spirit fields where they grew First Rank Spirit Grain Snow Fragrant Rice. Snow Fragrant Rice was as white as snow and exuded a unique fragrance. Its spiritual power was also gentle and easy to absorb, making it the most widely consumed spirit rice in the Endless Sea of Sand.

If it were in the mundane world, fifteen mu of land could easily be harvested by a few strong laborers. However, Spirit Grain was different; it was not only challenging to grow but also difficult to harvest. The stems of Spirit Grain were as tough as iron, and ordinary people couldn't cut them. Only Cultivators wielding specially made scythes infused with True Qi could easily sever them.

All the members of Taiyi Sect, including Meng Zhang, had to work tirelessly for several days to finish harvesting the Spirit Grain. After the harvest, there were still many chores to attend to. If it weren't for Meng Zhang hiring the Wang family father and son, Taiyi Sect's original workforce would have been overwhelmed.

After completing the Spirit Grain harvest, Daoist Clear Spirit didn't find himself idle either. The remaining low-level medicinal herbs planted in the remaining spirit fields were harvested one by one.

After finishing these tasks, there were still new medicinal herb seeds to be planted at a selected time.

Taiyi Sect couldn't sustain itself without Daoist Clear Spirit's hard work. According to the usual practice, most of the Spirit Grain harvested by Taiyi Sect each year would be transported to Singing Sand City for sale in exchange for spirit stones to maintain the sect's operation.

However, Meng Zhang decided not to continue doing this. He chose to keep the harvested Spirit Grain within Taiyi Sect for the disciples' consumption. As for the sect's expenses, the spirit stones in the treasury could still sustain it for the time being.

Chapter 40: The rookies cross the threshold

In the past, Taiyi Sect had a somewhat stingy attitude, trying to reduce expenses and save every spirit stone, storing them away to increase the sect's reserves. This approach of building up the sect's savings was not without merit. After experiencing several calamities, both the upper and lower echelons of Taiyi Sect lacked a sense of security and needed to strengthen the sect's foundation to deal with various complex situations.

When Meng Zhang became the Sect Master, he felt that instead of letting the resources gather dust in the treasury, they should be used to cultivate disciples. The biggest problem in Taiyi Sect now was the scarcity of disciples and their low Cultivation Base. Once the sect had grown to a certain size, then they could consider increasing the sect's reserves.

Though Meng Zhang kept his personal wealth separate from the sect's treasury, he didn't hesitate to subsidize the latter. With his talents, he could have pursued a more promising path outside of Taiyi Sect, and to some extent, the sect did hold him back. However, Meng Zhang had a unique attachment to Taiyi Sect, and the previous Sect Master, Daoist Profound Spirit, regarded him as the hope for the sect's revival, a hope he wouldn't disappoint.

While dedicating himself to the sect, Meng Zhang also gained significant rewards. Taiyi Sect had both self-serving individuals like Fang Meng and Zhen Ling, and loyal ones willing to make sacrifices for the sect. People like Daoist Clear Spirit, despite having average Cultivation Base, could thrive outside, thanks to his exceptional Spirit Plant Technique. However, he preferred to work tirelessly within the sect, wholeheartedly contributing to its operation.

Tian Zhen, despite his poor talents, was extremely loyal to the sect and willing to take on responsibilities. With all these considerations, Meng Zhang was willing to spend time on Taiyi Sect's expansion and development, even if it meant delaying some of his personal cultivation.

After the autumn harvest, Sweetwater Oasis brought more good news. Two young individuals awakened their spiritual roots and were accepted into Taiyi Sect. One was Li Kang, and the other was a descendant of the Meng family, Meng Yi.

The Meng family used to be a moderately well-known cultivation clan in the vicinity, with multiple cultivators, possessing a First Rank spirit vein, and their oasis. However, fifteen years ago, during the sand monster rampage, several forces in the area suffered heavy losses. The Meng family's oasis was also breached during that time. Most of the Meng family members, including their cultivators, perished in the attack. Only a few mortals managed to escape during the chaos, and they were taken in by Taiyi Sect, who had a good relationship with the Meng family.

Meng Zhang, as an infant, was also rescued by Taiyi Sect cultivators, along with some of his fellow clansmen. He lived in Sweetwater Oasis until the age of six when he awakened his spiritual roots. His spiritual root was detected to be a top-grade one, but the Sect Master, Daoist Profound Spirit, kept this information confidential and adopted Meng Zhang as his personal disciple, raising him personally.

With new disciples joining Sweetwater Oasis, including one from the Meng family, Meng Zhang was pleased. Although both Meng Zhang and Meng Yi's spiritual roots were detected to be bottom-grade, the lowest grade possible, the sect urgently needed manpower, and their addition was essential.

After a simple initiation ceremony, two more disciples were added to Taiyi Sect. The sect's previously planted spirit herbs began to be harvested gradually. Although the grade of these herbs

was not high, and the quantity was limited, Shi Weiming, the person responsible for trading with Meng Zhang in Singing Sand City, was still very satisfied.

Meng Zhang felt that Shi Weiming's wild Alchemist background must have created a significant demand for various spirit herbs. Singing Sand City was only a little over seven hundred li away from Taiyi Sect, and without any obstacles, Meng Zhang could reach there in half a day riding a wind-chasing horse and return to Taiyi Sect the next day.

When not cultivating, Meng Zhang made several trips to Singing Sand City to sell the batch of refined scarlet copper. He exchanged over two hundred low-grade spirit stones and brought them back to the sect.

He often spent the nights in Singing Sand City and would visit the Ghost Market during such times. However, he hadn't encountered any good fortune like the first time he went there. Most of the time, he returned empty-handed, wasting time in vain. Occasionally, he would succeed in finding a good item or two, but the gains were not significant.

Meng Zhang considered these trips as a way to relax and unwind. If he treated it as a serious venture, he wouldn't be able to sustain it. He didn't consume the elixirs he obtained for the sect. After taking elixirs to enhance his Cultivation Base, he would need time to slowly dissolve the pill toxins, during which he couldn't cultivate. For someone with Meng Zhang's top-grade spiritual root talent, using that time to absorb spiritual qi from heaven and earth was much more efficient than taking elixirs.

Daoist Clear Spirit and Tian Zhen, who had inferior spiritual root talents, used the sect's merit to exchange for elixirs to improve their Cultivation Base. With the availability of elixirs and sufficient cultivation resources, their Cultivation Base significantly improved. Especially for Daoist Clear Spirit, who had reached the bottleneck of Refining Qi Sixth Layer, it would be quite difficult for him to break through to the Refining Qi Seventh Layer due to his bottom-grade spiritual root. It would require more resources and a long period of time.

At fifty years old, Daoist Clear Spirit's Cultivation Base had already reached its peak, but he didn't care much about breaking through to higher realms. His main focus remained on Spirit Plant Technique. If not for some Spirit Plant Techniques that imposed limits on the cultivator's Cultivation Base, he might not even spend time on cultivation.

Improving his Spirit Plant Technique allowed Daoist Clear Spirit to cultivate more spirit herbs, and the seeds Meng Zhang brought back were put to good use. As the year passed, Meng Zhang turned seventeen, and his Cultivation Base reached Refining Qi Sixth Layer.

Refining Qi Sixth Layer to Refining Qi Seventh Layer was a bottleneck in the middle stage of Refining Qi, but given his top-grade spiritual root, there was no real bottleneck for him. As long as he continued to cultivate step by step, his realm would naturally break through when the time was right.

After spending so much time in Taiyi Sect, Wang Shenjie and his father developed a certain attachment to the sect and had some aspirations toward sect life. With the willingness of both Taiyi Sect and the Wang family, Wang Shenjie formally left his guest status and became an official disciple of Taiyi Sect. As for Wang Shitou, he was already too old and had no intention to join the sect formally, preferring to retain his guest status.

To show sincerity, Wang Shitou brought all his family members from the mortal world to live in Sweetwater Oasis. The migration of mortals in the Endless Sea of Sand was quite troublesome, but Meng Zhang personally handled the matter, resolving it successfully.