

Sect Master 481

Chapter 481: Third-order spirit vein

Although the large group of people from the Flying Swan Sect has withdrawn, the small team left behind still dutifully carries out their assigned tasks. This time, the three forces invaded the Demon Wind Gobi and occupied a vast territory. Particularly, after defeating the Lion Demon General and conquering the Grand Lion Ridge, there are many spoils of war to be distributed. The main responsibility of the small team from the Flying Swan Sect is to handle these spoils.

Even though the Flying Swan Sect has already withdrawn its troops, Meng Zhang is not planning to violate the agreement and monopolize all the spoils. As a Gold Core Daoist Master, he doesn't need to lower his status and bicker with a group of juniors. He entrusted the task of dividing the spoils obtained by the Flying Swan Sect to his eldest disciple, Niu Dawei. Thanks to the previous agreement and mutual considerations, the process of dividing the spoils proceeded quite smoothly.

The Grand Lion Ridge was agreed to belong to the Taiyi Sect, and now that it's in their possession, there is no dispute over its ownership. Both Taiyi Sect and Flying Swan Sect basically retained their respective territories without significant changes. After the disastrous defeat of the Northern Desert Qi Family this time, with one Gold Core Daoist Master dead and another injured, most of their cultivator army was wiped out, and only a few managed to survive. Forced by the circumstances, the Northern Desert Qi Family withdrew its forces from the Demon Wind Gobi. Naturally, the territory they previously occupied was divided between the Taiyi Sect and the Flying Swan Sect.

As for the corpses of those demonic beasts and the resources looted along the way, they naturally belong to whoever took them, and there was no dispute over this matter.

Apart from occupying a large expanse of land, including the Grand Lion Ridge, Taiyi Sect also managed to expand southward and established a direct passage leading to the Jiuqu League. With this passage, Taiyi Sect's flying ships could now directly travel to Great Wind City without passing through the Flying Swan Sect's territory. This passage was of great strategic significance to Taiyi Sect. After defeating the Lion Demon General, Meng Zhang instructed the elders Yang Xueyi and the Guardian Spirit General Delicate Water to work together to achieve this strategic goal. Later, the Flying Swan Sect also noticed Taiyi Sect's intentions and sent a team of cultivators to compete for the territory and the passage.

As they couldn't easily turn against the Flying Swan Sect, Yang Xueyi and Delicate Water Spirit General used all means necessary to ensure the success of their mission. Despite facing some overt or covert interference and obstruction from the Flying Swan Sect, Yang Xueyi and Delicate Water Spirit General lived up to expectations and successfully opened the passage. They also led a team of cultivators to continually sweep the surrounding demonic beasts to ensure the safety of the passage.

With this narrow passage, Taiyi Sect's reliance on the Flying Swan Sect significantly decreased. Overall, Taiyi Sect's large-scale invasion of the Demon Wind Gobi was highly successful and yielded significant achievements. Particularly, obtaining the Third Rank spirit vein on the Grand Lion Ridge allowed Taiyi Sect to support its Gold Core Daoist Master.

However, after careful surveying, Deep Earth Spirit General brought Meng Zhang some less-than-ideal news. The Third Rank spirit vein on the Grand Lion Ridge had been utilized by Third Rank demonic beasts for many years. Unlike humans, these demonic beasts didn't understand the concept

of moderation. Each time it was their turn to use the spirit vein, they would greedily absorb the spiritual energy without regard for consequences, as if afraid of being taken advantage of.

As a result, the Third Rank spirit vein had suffered severe depletion and was on the verge of collapse. Fortunately, Deep Earth Spirit General, being an excellent Geomancer, was skilled at adjusting spirit veins. After a simple adjustment, the spirit vein could barely be used. However, to thoroughly solve the problem, he needed to go deep underground and spend a long time carefully adjusting the spirit vein.

For Deep Earth Spirit General, this was also a form of self-training. After informing Meng Zhang, he handed over all other matters and dedicated himself to the work. The three of them took turns using the Third Rank spirit vein, and there were no major issues. This was the first time Meng Zhang had practiced on the Third Rank spirit vein since forming his Gold Core. It provided abundant spiritual energy to meet his various needs.

Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye Daoist Master had not used the Third Rank spirit vein since entering the Endless Sea of Sand. Normally, they relied on Third Rank pills and consumed high-grade spirit stones to meet their daily needs for spiritual energy to sustain their cultivation. Although this method was not as effective as practicing on the Third Rank spirit vein, it was more affordable.

Now, with access to the Third Rank spirit vein, even with shared usage, it greatly reduced their burden. Meng Zhang had a considerable amount of spiritual marrow in his possession, enough to last for a long time. He was willing to consume more spiritual marrow and reduce his own time using the Third Rank spirit vein to allow Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye Daoist Master more time to use it.

Since Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye Daoist Master came to help him voluntarily, Meng Zhang, as the host, previously didn't have the means to accommodate their needs. But now, with the Third Rank spirit vein, he naturally prioritized meeting their requirements. After all, in times of war, he couldn't let the allied forces starve. It's not like it's the Ming Dynasty of another world, where guest soldiers had to bring their own provisions, and the host turned a blind eye to it.

With the assistance of Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye Daoist Master, Dark Crow Demon General had no choice but to remain trapped in the crow's nest. The Taiyi Sect's control over the newly occupied territory gradually stabilized. Cultivators from various forces, including the Qiaoshou Sect, who were conscripted, were all sent back to their respective places by Meng Zhang.

Meng Zhang and Niu Dawei, who helped him with daily affairs, were both straightforward individuals when it came to rewards and punishments. These cultivators had contributed significantly in this battle, and Taiyi Sect naturally did not forget that. Based on their merits, Taiyi Sect rewarded them generously. For those who died in battle, they also received ample compensation.

Although the newly acquired territory had not been developed yet, the spoils of war captured on the battlefield had already made Taiyi Sect quite wealthy. Being rich and powerful, Taiyi Sect was particularly generous with rewards, making the various cultivators exclaim that this trip was not in vain.

As for the rewards and punishments for the Taiyi Sect disciples, Meng Zhang also left them all to Niu Dawei's care. After the war ended, as the various cultivators were sent away, most of the Taiyi

Sect disciples gradually returned to their original territories. As for the development of the newly acquired territory, it was destined to be a long and complex process.

Due to limited manpower, Taiyi Sect could only conduct simple development for the time being. Even so, they reaped rich rewards. Especially now that Taiyi Sect's territory was directly connected to Great Wind City, their flying ships no longer needed to pass through the Flying Swan Sect's territory, completely freeing Taiyi Sect from its dependence on the Flying Swan Sect.

Chapter 482: The Old Friends Pass Away

Meng Zhang, Gu Yue Huaidie, and Luo Ye, a Daoist Master, would occasionally go outside the Crow's Nest to provoke the Dark Crow Demon General, preventing it from acting recklessly.

Without the interference of the Dark Crow Demon General, Meng Zhang's senior disciple, Niu Dawei, organized Taiyi Sect disciples to conduct initial construction and development in the Demon Wind Gobi. They first selected several Second Rank spirit veins and First Rank spirit veins to establish strongholds.

Relying on these strongholds, Taiyi Sect disciples stationed there took turns to launch attacks, eliminate scattered demons nearby, and exploit some easily accessible mineral deposits. They also slowly cultivated spirit fields on the spirit veins, planting spirit grain and spirit medicine. When the conditions were ripe, some of these spirit fields could be transformed into spirit medicine gardens.

Taiyi Sect also arranged some First Rank flying boats and flying mounts to travel between these strongholds. On the one hand, they were responsible for aerial patrols, and on the other hand, they provided support and supplies to various strongholds.

The flying boat network established by Taiyi Sect in the Endless Sea of Sand was also transplanted by Niu Dawei into the Demon Wind Gobi. Fixed routes were set up in the Demon Wind Gobi, directly connecting to the routes in the Endless Sea of Sand. Second Rank flying boats coming from the Endless Sea of Sand would rest and replenish supplies here before continuing to Great Wind City. The return journey of Second Rank flying boats from Great Wind City would bring a large number of resources that were scarce in the Endless Sea of Sand.

The establishment of the flying boat routes marked the complete integration of Demon Wind Gobi into the Taiyi Sect system. Taiyi Sect did not adopt a policy of exterminating the demon beasts in the Demon Wind Gobi. In the impoverished Endless Sea of Sand, demon beasts were valuable resources.

During this invasion of Demon Wind Gobi, Taiyi Sect, in alliance with Flying Swan Sect and Northern Desert Qi Family, killed countless demon beasts and captured a large number of demon beast corpses, including two Third Rank demon beast corpses. The resources harvested from these demon beast corpses were transported to Great Wind City in large quantities, almost affecting the prices of various demon beast products in the Great Wind City market.

Though Taiyi Sect gained immense benefits from this endeavor, it was just a one-time transaction, and continuous efforts were required for sustainable development. Therefore, besides capturing some demon beasts to bring back for domestication, Taiyi Sect intentionally preserved many wild demon beasts. Taiyi Sect disciples drove these demon beasts to remote areas, away from the strongholds and transportation routes, so as not to hinder Taiyi Sect's development. The demon

beasts driven to these secluded areas served as training objects for Taiyi Sect disciples, facilitating their practical combat training and also providing a steady supply of demon beast corpses, a win-win situation.

Of course, when Taiyi Sect periodically hunted these demon beasts, they did not exhaust their resources but rather allowed them to breed and multiply. Young beasts and pregnant mother beasts were intentionally protected.

Niu Dawei, along with several elders of the sect, formulated the initial development plan, which pleased Meng Zhang greatly. As long as they strictly followed this plan, Demon Wind Gobi would become a vast treasure trove, providing continuous wealth for Taiyi Sect. With the income from Demon Wind Gobi, Taiyi Sect could barely qualify as a qualified Gold Core sect.

Taiyi Sect still had a huge stake in the Endless Sea of Sand and could not easily give it up. However, the resources that could be invested in the Demon Wind Gobi were limited, leading to a slow but smooth development.

Of course, the news brought by Niu Dawei was not entirely good. Meng Zhang's senior brother, Tian Zhen, who used to be the General Affairs Elder of Taiyi Sect, passed away in his hometown during the invasion of Demon Wind Gobi by the three sects.

At the time of Tian Zhen's death, the situation in Demon Wind Gobi was tense. According to his last words, his family could only announce his death to the sect after the situation on this side had settled.

This senior elder, who made significant contributions to Taiyi Sect, was still concerned about the sect's overall situation even in his last moments. Meng Zhang received the news of Tian Zhen's passing with some disbelief at first, but then he found it quite natural.

As a Refining Qi stage cultivator, Tian Zhen was nearly a hundred years old. Passing away at this age could be considered a long life. Meng Zhang had deep feelings for this senior brother who had accompanied and supported him throughout his growth.

When Tian Zhen completely gave up on his cultivation path, Meng Zhang knew that this day would come sooner or later. However, when this day truly arrived, he was still reluctant to accept it.

Ever since Tian Zhen resigned from the position of elder and returned to his hometown for retirement, Meng Zhang's meetings with him had become fewer and fewer. The last time they met was during Meng Zhang's Gold Core ceremony. At that time, Tian Zhen appeared carefree, having fulfilled his wishes, which left a deep impression on Meng Zhang.

Tian Zhen's passing not only meant losing a loved one for Meng Zhang but also marked the end of an era. Before this, Daoist Clear Spirit and several other disciples had passed away. Now, with Tian Zhen gone, there were no more peers or seniors left in Taiyi Sect for Meng Zhang.

Tian Zhen's departure left Meng Zhang feeling low, and he took several days to recover emotionally. Entrusting the temporary care of Demon Wind Gobi to Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye, Meng Zhang personally returned to the Endless Sea of Sand.

Without alarming anyone, he returned alone to Sweetwater Oasis. This place was where he spent his childhood and where Tian Zhen was born and died. Among Tian Zhen's descendants, none had awakened their spiritual roots to embark on the path of cultivation.

Given Tian Zhen's identity, even after his passing, the Taiyi Sect disciples managing Sweetwater Oasis would take good care of his family. Tian Zhen's most valued junior, Tian Li, never fully recovered after failing to build his Foundation and retired to his hometown many years ago.

Meng Zhang didn't visit Tian Zhen's family or Tian Li. He only went to Tian Zhen's grave alone, offered incense, and remained silent for a long time. After a while, he sighed deeply and soared into the sky, flying back to the Demon Wind Gobi at high speed. Due to the presence of the Dark Crow Demon General, the situation there was not stable, and Meng Zhang couldn't afford to be away for too long. Once back at Grand Lion Ridge, he set aside all his emotions and focused all his energy on cultivation. Since reaching the Gold Core stage, Meng Zhang hadn't had the opportunity to interact with other Gold Core Daoist Masters. He had been practicing alone all this time.

Luo Ye, who recently entered the Gold Core stage, had limited experience, but Gu Yue Huaidie was an old-timer, a mid-Gold Core cultivator with abundant experience and many insightful perspectives.

Chapter 483: Rainbow Escape Method

Before this, Meng Zhang had received many pointers from Luo Ye, a Daoist Master. Not only did Luo Ye generously share her own cultivation experience with Meng Zhang, but she also revealed many cultivation experiences accumulated by her senior apprentices in the sect.

Of course, Luo Ye wouldn't dare to divulge the secrets of her own sect, the unique techniques, and inheritance of the sect.

Once leaked, it would not only bring her trouble but also endanger Meng Zhang.

What she shared with Meng Zhang were only some common experiences, without involving any sect secrets.

After spending time together and fighting side by side, Gu Yue Huaidie not only developed a deep bond with Meng Zhang but also had great expectations for this young Gold Core cultivator's future.

Without affecting her own interests, Gu Yue Huaidie was willing to befriend such a promising cultivator and provide some help.

As a Core Formation cultivator for many years, Gu Yue Huaidie had a wide network and rich experiences. Besides the Gu Yue Family's inheritance, she had also come into contact with other legacies.

When exchanging experiences with Meng Zhang, she offered him many pointers, exposing him to numerous new and unprecedented things.

As the saying goes, "Listening to one's advice is better than reading ten years of books," and this was not an exaggeration.

Sometimes, Gu Yue Huaidie's casual guidance could easily dispel the perplexities that had troubled Meng Zhang for a long time.

Meng Zhang, being a cultivator with extraordinary aptitude and intelligence, had not encountered any bottlenecks during the Refining Qi and Foundation Building stages. However, now that he had entered the Gold Core stage, he was beginning to feel some challenges.

In reality, any cultivator who could reach the Gold Core stage was undoubtedly a remarkable talent. Among these Gold Core cultivators, none were considered ordinary, and they were all geniuses in the eyes of others.

Among them, Meng Zhang's talents were not overly outstanding. If he wanted to stand out among them, he would need to put in even more effort.

As Meng Zhang's high-grade spirit root, after entering the Gold Core stage, gradually lost its advantage.

During the Gold Core stage cultivation, trying to progress alone would undoubtedly yield half the result with twice the effort.

Absorbing the experiences of senior cultivators and exchanging insights with peers would not only make up for his shortcomings but also save him time.

Of course, Meng Zhang was not someone who only received without giving back. When it didn't involve his sect's private inheritance, he was happy to share his own cultivation experiences with the two seniors.

Meng Zhang's experiences were valuable as well. His occasional flashes of inspiration often made Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye contemplate for a long time, gaining some insights.

During their exchanges, time passed quickly, and Meng Zhang didn't even realize it.

In this period of interaction, all three of them gained something, but Meng Zhang gained the most.

When Gu Yue Huaidie was about to leave, she bid farewell to her two friends reluctantly and returned to Great Wind City.

Before leaving, Meng Zhang asked her to help him buy a Third Rank mountain-protecting great formation. Without Gu Yue Huaidie, a mid Gold Core expert, Meng Zhang and Luo Ye alone wouldn't be able to withstand the Dark Crow Demon General.

If there was a Third Rank mountain-protecting great formation on Grand Lion Ridge, Meng Zhang would have the confidence to resist the Dark Crow Demon General.

Gu Yue Huaidie left quietly, but Meng Zhang occasionally showed himself outside the crow's nest.

The deterrent power of human cultivators was still effective, and the Dark Crow Demon General didn't dare to strike easily.

In fact, even if Gu Yue Huaidie left Demon Wind Gobi in front of Dark Crow Demon General, it would only consider it a ploy to lure it out and wouldn't pay much attention to it.

In the past, Dark Crow Demon General liked to stay in the crow's nest and rarely went out. Nobody knew what it did in there, but it was undoubtedly a true homebody.

Over the centuries, it rarely left the nest. Going to the small world of Purple Gold Sect with Golden Tiger Demon General was one of the rare occasions it left Demon Wind Gobi.

Staying in the crow's nest might be frustrating for other demon beasts, but for Dark Crow Demon General, it didn't have much impact.

During these days, it acted as usual, doing whatever it pleased.

Poison Sand Demon General even had the illusion that unless it was destroyed by an external force, Dark Crow Demon General would stay in the crow's nest forever.

Meng Zhang was somewhat relieved by Dark Crow Demon General's behavior, as it greatly reduced the pressure on him.

Although Deep Earth Spirit General and the other two Guardian Spirit Generals had not fully regained all their memories of the Gold Core stage, as their Cultivation Base gradually recovered, more and more memories appeared in their minds, including many things related to Gold Core cultivation.

Before becoming Guardian Spirit Generals, all three of them were excellent Gold Core cultivators of Taiyi Sect. The information in their minds was of great value.

After communicating with each other, Delicate Water Spirit General sorted it out, and Shocking Thunder Spirit General handed two jade slips to Meng Zhang.

One jade slip contained information about Gold Core cultivation. It included many cultivation experiences, some points to note, and several difficulties encountered during Gold Core cultivation.

Although Meng Zhang had already learned a large part of this information through exchanges with Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye, the remaining small portion would still be helpful to him as a new Gold Core cultivator.

The other jade slip contained a technique called the "Rainbow Escape Method," a high-level escape technique that could only be practiced during the Gold Core stage.

The Rainbow Escape Method was renowned for its speed, and once cultivated, it could provide Meng Zhang with an extremely high-speed escape ability, compensating for his weakness in this area.

Regardless of one's main cultivation attribute, this technique could be practiced.

The Rainbow Escape Method required a high level of aptitude, especially intelligence, from the practitioner.

Chapter 484: Metal Wind Violent Flame Formation

To cultivate the Rainbow Escape Method, you need some external items to assist. Among the most important aids is to ascend deep into the high clouds and absorb the essence of the heavenly light.

This process is incredibly troublesome and dangerous. The gusts above the Nine Heavens are almost invincible. If you fly too high and carelessly get swept by those gusts, even a Gold Core Daoist Master would be in danger.

No matter how many difficulties he faces, Meng Zhang must practice this supreme escape technique. All dangers can be overcome gradually.

With the Rainbow Escape Method, not only will Meng Zhang's survival ability greatly increase, but his tactics will also become more diverse.

After Gu Yue Huaidie's departure, the Dark Crow Demon General, who is difficult to discern for human cultivators, did not easily venture outside.

Most of the time, the Dark Crow Demon General is relatively rational. Without strong provocation, it will carefully consider its actions.

It was the death of the Golden Tiger Demon General last time that angered the Dark Crow Demon General and prompted it to launch an attack.

Meng Zhang and Luo Ye occasionally appeared outside the Raven's Nest, maintaining an oppressive posture.

The Dark Crow Demon General and the Poison Sand Demon General did not respond, allowing the human cultivators to display their prowess.

Having confirmed that the Dark Crow Demon General has no intention of easily going to war, Meng Zhang finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Of course, necessary precautions are still needed. Strengthening the Taiyi Sect's combat power is an urgent task.

If Taiyi Sect could produce one more Gold Core cultivator, many problems would be easily resolved.

Unfortunately, among the younger generation disciples, Yang Xueyi, with the highest cultivation base, is only at the mid Foundation Building stage.

Although Deep Earth Spirit General and Shocking Thunder Spirit General have recovered to the late Foundation Building stage of Cultivation Base, reaching the strength of the Gold Core stage still requires a long journey.

Meng Zhang also knows that such matters cannot be rushed. Taiyi Sect has just started its recovery, and the disciples are still very young, with not enough time for them to grow. At this time, these disciples cannot be relied upon.

Meng Zhang's greatest hope is to obtain some special Third Rank Heaven and Earth Spiritual Objects to help Deep Earth Spirit General and the others recover their Cultivation Base as soon as possible.

Although Meng Zhang asked Gu Yue Huaidie for help and instructed Taiyi Sect to pay attention to the merchant groups in Great Wind City, Third Rank items are quite precious. Especially Third Rank Heaven and Earth Spiritual Objects, they cannot be bought with spirit stones and often appear in places where goods are exchanged with items of the same level.

Meng Zhang has only done his best to make arrangements, but whether they will be effective remains uncertain.

Currently, Taiyi Sect cannot provide Gold Core stage combat power, but the growth of Taiyi Sect disciples is very rapid.

Not to mention their previous savings, just this invasion of Demon Wind Gobi allowed Taiyi Sect to obtain two Third Rank Inner Cores of demonic beasts.

For a long time, Taiyi Sect will not have to worry about a lack of Foundation Building Pills.

In addition, Taiyi Sect will regularly refine Lesser Foundation Building Pills. For cultivators with average aptitude and no higher aspirations, the drawbacks of taking Lesser Foundation Building Pills can be completely acceptable.

Under Meng Zhang's orders, Taiyi Sect controls the distribution of Lesser Foundation Building Pills strictly. Those favored by him or the upper echelons of the sect find it difficult to obtain Lesser Foundation Building Pills.

However, a considerable number of Lesser Foundation Building Pills produced by Taiyi Sect have leaked out. The surrounding cultivation forces, vassal families, and even loose cultivators can obtain Lesser Foundation Building Pills as long as they pay a sufficient price.

Over the years, the number of Foundation Building stage cultivators around Taiyi Sect has greatly increased.

Among Taiyi Sect disciples, many outstanding Foundation Building stage cultivators have emerged.

Meng Zhang's second disciple, An Xiaoran, and his third disciple, An Moran, came to Demon Wind Gobi after successfully achieving Foundation Building to help their eldest senior brother, Niu Dawei, develop the area.

An Xiaoran has always had exceptional talent in alchemy and practices the fire-wood attribute technique, "Fusang Sutra," which is highly suitable for alchemy. Shortly after reaching Foundation Building, she successfully advanced to the Second Rank Alchemist.

After arriving at Grand Lion Ridge, she established an alchemy workshop and extensively refined various pills using the collected materials of the demonic beasts.

Grand Lion Ridge possesses a Third Rank spirit vein, making it even more suitable as Taiyi Sect's main sect location. However, as long as the Dark Crow Demon General is not eliminated, Taiyi Sect cannot completely stabilize its territory in Demon Wind Gobi.

Therefore, despite Meng Zhang often being stationed at Grand Lion Ridge, the main sect of Taiyi Sect has not been moved there.

All the affairs on the Endless Sea of Sand side can only be handled by the elders and Hall Masters of the sect.

Not long after Gu Yue Huaidie returned to Gu Yue Family, she brought good news to Meng Zhang.

She helped Meng Zhang obtain a very good Third Rank mountain-guarding great formation - the Metal Wind Violent Flame Formation.

A Third Rank mountain-guarding great formation is a strategically important item, even in the Jiuqu League.

The few Third Rank mountain-guarding Formations sold in Great Wind City are expensive and of mediocre power.

Gu Yue Family's strength allows them to obtain top-tier Third Rank mountain-guarding great formations, but Gu Yue Huaidie helped Meng Zhang out of personal friendship, so she couldn't easily use the family's resources.

Previously, while in the small world of Purple Gold Sect, Daoist Master Angry Flame and Daoist Master Dark Flame of Fire Cloud Sect obtained several secret boxes left behind by Purple Gold Sect cultivators.

Daoist Master Dark Flame self-destructed, and the secret box on him naturally perished along with him. However, Daoist Master Angry Flame was killed by Meng Zhang and his group, so the secret boxes on him fell into their hands.

After leaving that small world, they tried to open these secret boxes and obtain the items inside.

They thought it would be an easy task, but it proved to be quite challenging.

Opening the secret boxes was not difficult for their Cultivation Base, but forcefully doing so might result in damaging the items inside.

Helpless, the three of them had to put these secret boxes aside temporarily.

When Gu Yue Huaidie returned to Great Wind City, she brought these secret boxes with her and prepared to seek help in opening them.

Back in the family, Gu Yue Huaidie contacted a familiar Gold Core Daoist Master from Clever Machine Sect, paid him a reward, and asked for his help.

Indeed, he was skilled in puppet techniques and had significant accomplishments in formation restrictions.

With little effort, the Clever Machine Sect's Gold Core Daoist Master effortlessly opened the secret boxes that had left Meng Zhang's group at a loss.

These secret boxes were from ordinary disciples of Purple Gold Sect, and originally, Meng Zhang and the others didn't attach much importance to them.

However, after opening them, two treasures inside the secret boxes made the Clever Machine Sect's Gold Core Daoist Master covet them.

Of course, he didn't have the courage to forcefully take Gu Yue Huaidie's belongings. Instead, he politely requested a trade, hoping to exchange for those items.

Considering that Meng Zhang currently needed a Third Rank mountain-guarding great formation, Gu Yue Huaidie proposed using these two treasures to acquire a high-quality Third Rank mountain-guarding great formation.

The Clever Machine Sect was adept at mechanical puppets and had great achievements in formations. After some negotiation, Gu Yue Huaidie finally fulfilled Meng Zhang's request and helped him obtain the Metal Wind Violent Flame Formation.

Chapter 485: Guest Official

Gu Yue Huaidie personally made a trip to Demon Wind Gobi and brought the Mountain Protection Great Formation to Meng Zhang.

Normally, placing such a high-level Mountain Protection Great Formation required a Formation Master familiar with the great formation to be present on-site, surveying the terrain, organizing manpower, and carefully setting it up.

The Formation Master of the Clever Machine Sect was unwilling to come to the Demon Wind Gobi. Besides, Meng Zhang believed that the details of setting up the great formation were Taiyi Sect's secrets and should not be entrusted to others.

Therefore, Taiyi Sect independently deployed this Third Rank Great Formation.

The Third Rank Great Formation had many diagrams and a large pile of array flags and plates, and it took quite some time just to organize these items.

As for the other items in those secret boxes, they were just ordinary spiritual objects, which the three Gold Core Daoist Masters casually divided among themselves.

After giving the items to Meng Zhang, Gu Yue Huaidie hurriedly left.

Deep Earth Spirit General, who had been cultivating the spirit vein, also temporarily stopped his work and carefully studied the great formation with Wen Qiansun.

Wen Qiansun's Cultivation Base had already reached the mid Foundation Building stage, and his formation skills had improved significantly. However, assisting Deep Earth Spirit General in researching this great formation still proved to be quite challenging for him.

After spending more than three years, Meng Zhang and Daoist Master Luo Ye had to make several moves under the command of Deep Earth Spirit General to barely complete the setup of this Mountain Protection Great Formation.

Deep Earth Spirit General explicitly informed Meng Zhang that, due to their and Wen Qiansun's current strength, the deployment of the great formation was not perfect. There were many details that could only be adjusted slowly when he regained his strength or after Wen Qiansun advanced to the Gold Core stage.

Nevertheless, this great formation could still be used, although it couldn't unleash its full power.

Furthermore, the spiritual energy provided by the Third Rank Spirit Vein of the Grand Lion Ridge was limited. Most of the functions of the Mountain Protection Great Formation remained closed during normal days and only activated at full power when facing strong enemy attacks.

Despite its many imperfections, at least Taiyi Sect now had the protection of a Third Rank Mountain Protection Great Formation.

In the worst-case scenario, Taiyi Sect could abandon all its bases on the Demon Wind Gobi and retreat with all members to the Grand Lion Ridge, relying on this Mountain Protection Great Formation to defend themselves.

With Meng Zhang leading many Taiyi Sect disciples to defend with the great formation, not even Dark Crow Demon General could hope to break through and attack the Grand Lion Ridge.

Having Meng Zhang as their reliance boosted their confidence.

A few more years passed, and Luo Ye, a Daoist Master, received a summon from the Dark Alliance and had to leave. She could no longer continue staying there and had to depart.

Luo Ye left quietly, but Meng Zhang still had to show himself outside the Crow's Nest to make it difficult for Dark Crow Demon General to discern the situation.

The intelligence capabilities of the monster beasts were far inferior to human cultivators, especially those like Dark Crow Demon General, who remained entrenched and never ventured out. Until now, they hadn't fully understood the specific situation on the human side.

Of course, the prolonged absence of Gu Yue Huaidie raised some suspicions in Poison Sand Demon General's mind.

Meng Zhang roamed outside the Crow's Nest but felt that this was not a viable long-term strategy. Relying solely on intimidation with insufficient strength wouldn't work.

The monster beasts weren't fools; sooner or later, they would figure out their true strength.

If they were forced to retreat to the Grand Lion Ridge, the promising situation of Taiyi Sect might completely collapse. Meng Zhang wouldn't make that choice unless absolutely necessary. The best outcome was to continue suppressing Dark Crow Demon General.

Since Taiyi Sect didn't have the possibility of producing Gold Core-level power in the short term, seeking external assistance was the only option.

Forget about the Endless Sea of Sand; they had to see if Jiuqu League had any good solutions.

After Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye returned, they still maintained contact with Meng Zhang through correspondence.

Every so often, a Taiyi Sect trading convoy would head to Great Wind City for business, with Foundation Building cultivators as the main escorts, many of them from Taiyi Sect.

Meng Zhang used these Taiyi Sect cultivators to relay letters between him, Gu Yue Huaidie, and Luo Ye.

Meng Zhang separately sent letters to Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye, requesting their help in keeping an eye out for a suitable Gold Core Daoist Master that Taiyi Sect could temporarily hire.

After receiving Meng Zhang's letters, Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye did their best to help him inquire.

Gu Yue Huaidie had a wide network of contacts and quickly contacted several Gold Core Daoist Masters.

However, these Gold Core Daoist Masters either immediately refused upon hearing about going to the Demon Wind Gobi or demanded an exorbitant hiring price that Taiyi Sect couldn't afford.

Luo Ye, having served in the Dark Alliance for many years, was well-informed. After some efforts, she found a suitable candidate for Meng Zhang.

This person was named Qin Hongying, a Supreme Elder of a cultivation family within the Jiuqu League, and the only Gold Core cultivator in that family.

Qin Hongying's Cultivation Base had already reached the peak of the early Gold Core stage, but she was stuck and couldn't advance to the mid Gold Core stage.

At over 500 years old, her remaining lifespan was estimated to be less than a century.

At this point, she had completely given up on her path of cultivation. Now, the only thing she cared about was her family's standing.

While Jiuqu League appeared peaceful on the surface, competition was fierce, and various open and hidden struggles never ceased.

After Qin Hongying died during meditation, the Qin Family would inevitably lose many benefits and fall from being a Gold Core family.

Such examples had occurred many times in the history of the Jiuqu League.

After the Qin Family declined, they could only lie low and wait for a chance to rise again in the future.

If they could cultivate another Gold Core Daoist Master in the future, the Qin Family might regain its former glory.

However, Qin Hongying had made many enemies over the years, including a narrow-minded Gold Core Daoist Master.

While Qin Hongying was alive, her enemies couldn't do much to the Qin Family. But once she died during meditation, the Qin Family would face significant trouble.

Of course, there were rules within the Jiuqu League. Even if one hated the Qin Family, they wouldn't openly massacre their members.

But as a Gold Core Daoist Master with enough ability, someone could create trouble secretly, causing the Qin Family to decline and eventually perish.

With people and favors, fortunes rise and fall. After Qin Hongying died during meditation, relying solely on past reputation and favors wouldn't protect the Qin Family for long.

Qin Hongying was troubled about her legacy and had considered many ways to deal with her affairs, but none were entirely appropriate and couldn't completely resolve the problem.

After learning about this matter, Luo Ye took the initiative to visit Qin Hongying and spent a lot of effort persuading her.

Then, Luo Ye took Qin Hongying to Demon Wind Gobi and found Meng Zhang at the Grand Lion Ridge.

After discussing and reaching an agreement, Qin Hongying became a guest official of Taiyi Sect and would serve the sect for thirty years.

Chapter 486: Imposing Manner

In order to hire Qin Hongying as a temporary guest elder, Taiyi Sect had to pay a considerable price. While stationed at Grand Lion Ridge, Qin Hongying required a Third Rank spirit vein to sustain her daily cultivation and ensure that her Cultivation Base wouldn't greatly decline.

Taiyi Sect had to provide a substantial amount of cultivation resources to the Qin Family, including tens of thousands of lower-grade spirit stones and various other minerals and spiritual herbs.

Considering Taiyi Sect's current financial situation, it was challenging to provide everything at once.

Fortunately, Qin Hongying was reasonable and agreed to receive staggered payments from Taiyi Sect, alleviating the immediate burden. The most crucial term in the agreement was that after Qin Hongying's death during meditation, Meng Zhang and Luo Ye Daoist Master should protect the Qin Family's heritage and prevent its extinction at the hands of their enemies.

Taiyi Sect was a relatively unknown small sect situated far away in the Endless Sea of Sand, and Meng Zhang was still a newcomer to the core ranks. Qin Hongying didn't place too much hope in Meng Zhang; instead, she relied more on Luo Ye Daoist Master.

As a Gold Core Daoist Master with origins in the Jiuqu League, Qin Hongying was familiar with forces like the black market and the Dark Alliance. She knew that Luo Ye Daoist Master had an extraordinary background and formidable strength. As long as Luo Ye Daoist Master agreed to help, safeguarding the Qin Family wouldn't be a problem.

However, Luo Ye Daoist Master couldn't stay at Grand Lion Ridge for an extended period. Meng Zhang truly needed Qin Hongying's Gold Core combat power. Thus, Luo Ye Daoist Master promised Qin Hongying that in the future, if the Qin Family encountered insurmountable difficulties, she would personally step in to assist them.

By agreeing to this condition, Luo Ye Daoist Master had done Meng Zhang a great favor, and once again, he owed her a huge debt of gratitude. With the terms settled, all three of them pledged to uphold the agreement through a soul oath.

Afterward, Luo Ye Daoist Master hurriedly left Demon Wind Gobi and returned to the Jiuqu League.

During the agreement, Qin Hongying emphasized that she was only helping Meng Zhang deal with demonic beasts and had no intention of getting involved in the entanglements within the Cultivation World. Meng Zhang understood Qin Hongying's thoughts well. As her time was limited, she didn't want to create unnecessary troubles and leave future problems for the Qin Family.

While Meng Zhang understood her reasoning, he still had some reservations. The price he paid to hire Qin Hongying as a guest elder for thirty years was substantial. However, as Gold Core Daoist Masters were scarce in the Jiuqu League, they held considerable power in the market, making them in high demand. Taiyi Sect's appeal to Gold Core Daoist Masters was close to none, requiring either a high price or accepting stringent conditions to secure their services.

Since he had invested so much to secure Qin Hongying as a guest elder for thirty years, Meng Zhang intended to make the most of her and at least recover his investment.

After Qin Hongying settled the affairs of the Qin Family at Grand Lion Ridge, Meng Zhang took her with him to the area outside Yachao.

It had been quite some time since Gu Yue Huaidie and Luo Ye Daoist Master appeared. Since Meng Zhang appeared alone outside Yachao, it had been a while.

While Dark Crow Demon General remained calm and composed, Poison Sand Demon General was becoming impatient. Unlike Dark Crow Demon General, Poison Sand Demon General wasn't as patient and had been staying in Yachao for quite some time.

It decided to go out and probe the strength of human cultivators in the area.

Although it wasn't particularly fast, Poison Sand Demon General had made adequate preparations. It believed it could retreat safely even if faced with two or three human Gold Core cultivators.

As luck would have it, just as Poison Sand Demon General left Yachao and headed toward Grand Lion Ridge, Meng Zhang and Qin Hongying happened to arrive.

As the employer had paid a high price to hire her, Qin Hongying wanted to show her abilities and prove that she was indeed worth the price. Even before getting close to Poison Sand Demon General, she boldly released her aura.

Being a peak Gold Core cultivator in the early stage, Qin Hongying's cultivation base was only slightly lower than Gu Yue Huaidie's. Although they were both female cultivators, Qin Hongying was not as reserved as Gu Yue Huaidie.

From the displayed aura alone, Qin Hongying's strength seemed to surpass Gu Yue Huaidie's in every aspect. Faced with a powerful aura from an unknown human Gold Core expert, Poison Sand Demon General didn't hesitate and quickly fled back to Yachao, eluding Meng Zhang's pursuit.

Meng Zhang looked at Qin Hongying with a smile that wasn't entirely genuine, understanding her intentions well. As Qin Hongying's remaining lifespan was short, each battle with a cultivator of the same level would consume a significant amount of her spiritual energy. If she spent too much energy and couldn't recover in time, it would greatly affect her remaining lifespan. In such a situation, Qin Hongying tried to avoid direct confrontations with opponents of the same level whenever possible.

Releasing her aura and intimidating her enemies to retreat became a practical way to avoid unnecessary battles.

Meng Zhang couldn't demand much from a senior with limited lifespan, nor could he force her into anything. He simply noted this in his mind and resolved to train a new Gold Core Daoist Master for Taiyi Sect as soon as possible.

Hiring external help at such a high price wasn't ideal, especially when they couldn't rely on them during critical moments.

However, cultivating new talents couldn't be rushed either.

While there were several possibilities for Taiyi Sect's next generation to break through to the Gold Core stage, they still required sufficient time to grow.

The three Guardian Spirit Generals weren't dependable either, at least not for now.

After the defeat in Demon Wind Gobi, Northern Desert Qi Family had withdrawn entirely to their stronghold, retreating completely after suffering casualties, including the death and severe injury of their two Gold Core Daoist Masters, and countless other casualties among their cultivators.

Even if Flying Swan Sect were to free up their hands, they could easily wipe out Northern Desert Qi Family. However, Meng Zhang was wary of the presence of Qi Mingyuan True Monarch, who stood behind Northern Desert Qi Family. A Primordial Spirit True Monarch could exert influence on Gold Core sects in various ways, and given Taiyi Sect's current strength, they couldn't afford to offend such a powerful figure.

Since attacking Northern Desert Qi Family wasn't a feasible option, Taiyi Sect had to hold its ground firmly in Demon Wind Gobi. To some extent, Taiyi Sect had become a barrier, helping Flying Swan Sect fend off threats from Demon Wind Gobi.

Chapter 487: Vast Sea Dao Alliance

After the withdrawal of Flying Swan Sect from Demon Wind Gobi, Taiyi Sect has been closely monitoring Flying Swan Sect's movements. As a rising Gold Core sect in the Endless Sea of Sand, Taiyi Sect has a lot of catching up to do, and intelligence capability is one crucial aspect.

Compared to the well-established Flying Swan Sect, Taiyi Sect is far behind in this regard. However, Flying Swan Sect is not without weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

Having ruled over the Endless Sea of Sand for many years, Flying Swan Sect has accumulated numerous potential enemies. Some dissatisfied cultivators from Flying Swan Sect gradually started to communicate with Taiyi Sect in secret.

After much effort, Taiyi Sect gradually uncovered some of Flying Swan Sect's movements. Just as Meng Zhang had speculated, the information Flying Swan Sect provided during their withdrawal from Demon Wind Gobi was all lies, with the Fire Cloud Sect's disturbance being nothing more than an excuse.

While minor conflicts and skirmishes continue along the borders of Fire Cloud Sect and Flying Swan Sect, no large-scale battles have erupted. The three severely injured Gold Core Daoist Masters of Fire Cloud Sect have yet to recover, and Daoist Master Scarlet Flame alone cannot overcome Daoist Master Fei Shi.

After the return of Daoist Masters Fei Yu and Fei Jiang with their armies, they began a lengthy period of recuperation. With Lion Demon General, the major threat from Demon Wind Gobi, taken care of, and Taiyi Sect acting as a barrier against threats from Demon Wind Gobi, Fire Cloud Sect remains weak and cannot pose a significant threat to Flying Swan Sect.

Seizing this rare period of calm, Flying Swan Sect swiftly recovers its strength. With considerable hidden reserves despite the heavy consumption in recent years, Flying Swan Sect can still provide substantial resources.

The lost disciples are gradually being replenished, and new Refining Qi and Foundation Building stage disciples are emerging. As long as Flying Swan Sect can enjoy a few hundred years of stable development, they should be able to replenish their ranks with Refining Qi and Foundation Building stage cultivators.

Flying Swan Sect's actions this time were not due to any grudges against Taiyi Sect, but rather a natural caution toward Taiyi Sect as a ruler in the Endless Sea of Sand, prompting them to take instinctive actions.

Meng Zhang, who is constrained in Demon Wind Gobi, knows that he cannot antagonize Flying Swan Sect right now. With his temperament, he won't remain idle either.

After Qin Hongying settled in Grand Lion Ridge two years ago, the situation in Demon Wind Gobi remained relatively stable. Under Meng Zhang's instructions, Taiyi Sect made significant moves.

Taiyi Sect led the way and brought together surrounding cultivation forces to establish a grand alliance named "Vast Sea Dao Alliance." This alliance includes traditional allies of Taiyi Sect such as Qiaoshou Sect and Land Walk Sect, which had long submitted to Taiyi Sect.

In Meng Zhang's view, directly annexing or making these forces Taiyi Sect's vassals would not be a good approach. Unifying them under an alliance in a more gentle manner would present a more favorable image.

Within the alliance, all members are considered equal, and their status is that of allies. Each sect and family can preserve their own heritage.

In addition to these cultivation forces, Taiyi Sect also welcomed qualified loose cultivators into the alliance. In the eyes of those who are discerning, Meng Zhang is a rising star, and Taiyi Sect will become the new dominant power in the Endless Sea of Sand.

It may be too late to jump on the bandwagon now, but timely cooperation can still bring benefits. Including Taiyi Sect's original vassal families, nearly thirty cultivation forces joined the Vast Sea Dao Alliance, and many loose cultivators eagerly joined as well.

Among them, the remnants of Earthfire Sect, which had openly resisted Flying Swan Sect and came close to extinction, joined the alliance under the name of the newly rebuilt Earthfire Sect. After Meng Zhang had let them go, they remained loyal and diligently maintained their heritage, guarding a First Rank spirit vein.

By publicly bringing Earthfire Sect back, Meng Zhang not only shows contempt towards Flying Swan Sect but also sends a message to other cultivation forces. Even the sect that Flying Swan Sect extremely hated, Earthfire Sect, can be protected and its heritage preserved by Taiyi Sect.

If Earthfire Sect remains loyal to Taiyi Sect and serves the alliance faithfully, it may have a chance to thrive again.

The establishment of the Vast Sea Dao Alliance was not a spontaneous decision by Meng Zhang but a long-standing idea and plan. The goal is to unify all the cultivation forces in the area, consolidate resources, grow the alliance, and compete with other sects, including Flying Swan Sect.

As the only Gold Core sect among these cultivation forces, Taiyi Sect takes the leading position. Meng Zhang, as the Gold Core Daoist Master and the Sect Master, is the most suitable candidate for the alliance's leader.

Since Meng Zhang needs to stay in Demon Wind Gobi for the long term, he doesn't have the time to oversee everything. Therefore, he entrusted Niu Dawei, his senior disciple, to handle the specific affairs of establishing the Vast Sea Dao Alliance.

Niu Dawei is already very capable, and after years of experience, he is fully capable of taking charge and handling this matter properly.

Meng Zhang's third disciple, An Moran, shortly after his sister An Xiaoran reached the Foundation Building stage, also went into seclusion to break through to the Foundation Building stage. Once his Cultivation Base was solidified, he, too, came to Grand Lion Ridge to serve under Meng Zhang.

Realizing Taiyi Sect's intelligence shortcomings and anticipating the increase in enemies both within and outside the alliance due to the establishment of the Vast Sea Dao Alliance, Meng Zhang had long planned to set up a special branch dedicated to gathering intelligence and handling tasks that Taiyi Sect couldn't openly engage in. He named this branch "Secret Hall," a crucial and sensitive branch to be managed by someone he trusts deeply.

An Moran has been under Meng Zhang's tutelage for many years. He has a stable and unusually calm personality, making him a capable young man. Meng Zhang entrusted An Moran with the task of setting up the Secret Hall, providing full support and access to Taiyi Sect's resources.

Additionally, Meng Zhang sent a special message to Daoist Master Luo Ye, requesting the assistance of his old friend Jue Ying to come to Demon Wind Gobi.

Jue Ying and Meng Zhang share a genuine old friendship, having fought side by side in the past. Even after becoming a Gold Core Daoist Master, Meng Zhang hasn't forgotten this bond and doesn't hold a condescending attitude towards her.

Upon receiving the message, Jue Ying quickly arrived in Demon Wind Gobi to meet with Meng Zhang. After years apart, Jue Ying's Cultivation Base has reached the late stage of Foundation Building. It probably won't be long before she faces the threshold of advancing to the Gold Core stage.

After catching up, Meng Zhang entrusted her with an important task. He hoped that Jue Ying would help An Moran establish the Secret Hall and provide guidance to him. Jue Ying's background in the Dark Alliance makes her an excellent assassin and spy, perfectly suited for this role.

Chapter 488: Secret Hall

The organization Dark Alliance itself excels in training assassins and spies, and it has its unique cultivation system. Meng Zhang never had direct contact with Dark Alliance, but they had many dealings with the black market under Dark Alliance's control.

The black market's exceptional intelligence capabilities left a deep impression on Meng Zhang. The market's expertise in gathering and analyzing information comes from Dark Alliance.

After the conflict between Meng Zhang and the black market in Endless Sea of Sand, although the black market tried to mend their relationship, Taiyi Sect could never go back to the way things were, and Meng Zhang could no longer trust the black market's intelligence system.

Upon Meng Zhang's return to the core, the black market repeatedly tried to show goodwill. They treated Gold Core Daoist Master with sincerity and respected both Meng Zhang's strength and Taiyi Sect's rising prominence.

Although Meng Zhang appeared magnanimous and forgiving on the surface, deep down, he remained cautious of the black market.

Jue Ying naturally couldn't disclose Dark Alliance's internal secrets, nor could she simply transplant Dark Alliance's system to Taiyi Sect. However, with her extensive experience and insight, even a slight guidance could benefit An Moran greatly, and Taiyi Sect could avoid many detours.

In fact, Jue Ying lived up to Meng Zhang's trust and wholeheartedly assisted in establishing the Secret Hall for Taiyi Sect. Apart from some secret techniques and confidential matters, she shared everything with An Moran without holding back.

With Jue Ying's assistance, Meng Zhang ensured that Taiyi Sect would provide ample resources. The formation of the Secret Hall went smoothly, and An Moran quickly adapted to his new role.

However, structures like the Secret Hall go through a complex process from establishment to development and effectiveness, requiring significant time and accumulation to become truly proficient.

Though Meng Zhang planned to gradually shift Taiyi Sect's focus to Demon Wind Gobi, especially the Grand Lion Ridge area, Endless Sea of Sand held numerous interests and housed the primary headquarters of the Desert Sea Alliance.

Given the current situation, apart from Meng Zhang personally overseeing Grand Lion Ridge, Taiyi Sect's main strength still concentrated in Endless Sea of Sand.

The internal organizational structure of Taiyi Sect continued to improve as various Halls expanded and new ones were established. As the number of Foundation Building cultivators in the sect grew, most Hall Masters were from this stage. Elderly cultivators ranging from the mid to late stages of Foundation Building also gained prominence.

Before Niu Dawei left Demon Wind Gobi, Meng Zhang provided him with many pointers. He followed Meng Zhang's plan and established a rough framework. Through negotiations and discussions with various cultivation forces, Taiyi Sect played a leading role in establishing the internal systems of the Desert Sea Alliance.

The purpose of the Desert Sea Alliance was simple: all member forces would be under Taiyi Sect's leadership, working together to face challenges and grow stronger.

If faced with external threats, all members of the Desert Sea Alliance would unite against them. When dealing with internal enemies, there would be no mercy.

At least on the surface, all members of the alliance were considered equal in status. Niu Dawei established an institution called the "Council of Matters" where numerous participants engaged in discussions. Major matters within the Desert Sea Alliance could be brought to the council for deliberation and consultation.

Each force within the alliance had seats in the council and could send cultivators to participate as council members. The number of seats was calculated based on a clear formula, generally depending on the strength of the respective forces.

Although the Council of Matters sounded grand, it mainly served as an organization to appease various cultivation forces and didn't hold much real power. The true core governing body of the Desert Sea Alliance was the Senate.

The Senate held significant authority and was the true core of the Desert Sea Alliance. Currently, only Foundation Building cultivators with exceptional skills and the ability to sway others could enter the Senate. Taiyi Sect had more Foundation Building cultivators than all the other forces combined, and the majority of Senators were from Taiyi Sect.

A few other sects, such as Qiaoshou Sect and Land Walk Sect, also had a few Senators. Among them, Meng Zhang attached great importance to Qiaoshou Sect.

Jin Li, a Daoist Master of Qiaoshou Sect, had a deep connection with Taiyi Sect and even accepted Jin Qiao'er as her personal disciple. With full support from Jin Li, Qiaoshou Sect could stand on equal footing with Taiyi Sect.

Fortunately, Jin Li showed no interest in the specific affairs of Qiaoshou Sect and couldn't directly interfere in Endless Sea of Sand. Moreover, Qiaoshou Sect was well aware of its position and never took advantage of its relationship with Jin Li.

Jin Qiao'er was a reserved individual, focusing primarily on her own cultivation and seldom involving herself in the specific matters of Qiaoshou Sect. Of course, this was also with the consent of Jin Li.

Qiaoshou Sect had always been a traditional ally of Taiyi Sect and a loyal supporter and follower when forming the Desert Sea Alliance. Meng Zhang valued Qiaoshou Sect for the sake of Jin Li's face and also considered their valuable contributions.

Taiyi Sect even granted Qiaoshou Sect more benefits and made efforts to support them. While other members of the alliance received Lesser Foundation Building Pills from Taiyi Sect, Qiaoshou Sect received a small number of Foundation Building Pills.

Currently, Qiaoshou Sect boasted a considerable number of outstanding cultivators, with six Foundation Building cultivators among them. Their territory expanded significantly, making their strength unprecedented. Under the guidance of the Senate, all forces within the Desert Sea Alliance had their obligations. To some extent, the entire alliance acted as a tool to support Taiyi Sect's rule.

Of course, with the powerful protection of Taiyi Sect as a Gold Core sect, these forces had sufficient security. In the ruthless world of cultivation, being part of the alliance allowed them to join forces and depend on Taiyi Sect.

Compared to the Jiuqu League, the newly established Desert Sea Alliance was full of vitality and on the rise. In contrast, the seemingly much stronger Jiuqu League had lost some of its vigor due to internal struggles and wasted resources.

Chapter 489: Indifferent

Meng Zhang sat high above on the platform, accepting the greetings and salutations from various cultivators below.

This was a grand celebration to mark the official establishment of the Hanhai Alliance. The event was of immense scale, with numerous guests, creating a bustling and lively atmosphere.

Over the years, Niu Dawei had become increasingly astute and capable through various experiences. After receiving Meng Zhang's instructions, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the formation of the Hanhai Alliance.

Taiyi Sect had a dominant position, leaving no room for resistance among the surrounding sects. Moreover, all cultivation forces in the Endless Sea of Sand were, in name, vassals of the Flying Swan Sect. Transitioning from being a vassal of one Gold Core sect to an ally of another seemed like a significant advancement.

Regardless of the actual situation, from an outsider's perspective, the surrounding cultivation forces were eager and enthusiastic to join the Hanhai Alliance.

After more than two years of preparation, the Hanhai Alliance was officially established just a moment ago.

Prior to this, the Hanhai Alliance had already begun its operations. Key institutions such as the Senate and the Council of Affairs were established, and all cultivation forces that joined the alliance followed its commands.

Today's grand celebration was not just a mere formality; it also held a subtle challenge towards the Flying Swan Sect, which had ruled over the Endless Sea of Sand for many years. The Flying Swan Sect had reluctantly recognized the existence of Taiyi Sect as a Gold Core sect due to external pressures.

However, the current Meng Zhang was not content with this position. Apart from the sect itself, Taiyi Sect had gathered various cultivation forces, aiming to rival the Flying Swan Sect in terms of influence.

Holding this celebration not only aimed to impress and awe the various cultivation forces within the alliance but also subtly challenged the Flying Swan Sect.

Having accepted the respectful greetings of the cultivators below, Meng Zhang was quite satisfied with the effect of the celebration.

As the Sect Master of Taiyi Sect and the only Gold Core Daoist Master in the Hanhai Alliance, Meng Zhang was undoubtedly the rightful candidate for the position of the Alliance's leader. With the authority of a Gold Core Daoist Master, he easily gained the reverence of the cultivators below.

Furthermore, in the past few months, two families and one sect experienced internal upheavals. The old leadership was swept away, and new members were promoted to higher positions. Behind the change of power in these three forces, the shadow of Taiyi Sect could be faintly discerned. Although the reason why Taiyi Sect targeted these three forces was unknown, it had demonstrated its ability to control the life and death of the cultivators within the alliance.

All the cultivation forces within the newly established Hanhai Alliance respected and feared Taiyi Sect, and none dared to disobey its orders.

In addition to the key figures from various cultivation forces within the alliance, there were also many guests from Great Wind City present at the celebration.

Over the years, Taiyi Sect had sent numerous trading caravans to Great Wind City. With the direct route between Taiyi Sect and Great Wind City, their interactions became increasingly frequent.

Because of the close relationship with the Gu Yue Family, especially after Taiyi Sect became a Gold Core sect, the sect's status changed significantly. Many cultivation families in Great Wind City were eager to establish connections with Taiyi Sect.

Though Gu Yue Huaidie couldn't attend the celebration in person, Gu Yue Family sent envoys to extend their congratulations. Along with them came guests from many cultivation families in Great Wind City.

Meng Zhang was naturally delighted with this situation.

Taiyi Sect was no longer a vassal of the Flying Swan Sect and had to engage with external cultivation forces independently. Just like the Flying Swan Sect's ability to sell various cultivation resources from the Endless Sea of Sand to Jiuqu League, Taiyi Sect could also provide these resources to the outside world.

As a newly established Gold Core sect, Taiyi Sect needed to expand its network and open up new trade routes. Thanks to the relationship with Gu Yue Huaidie, Gu Yue Family had provided significant assistance, helping Taiyi Sect avoid many obstacles.

The absence of representatives from Northern Desert Qi Family at this celebration was not surprising. Taiyi Sect and Northern Desert Qi Family had never interacted much, and after their significant defeat in Demon Wind Gobi, Northern Desert Qi Family had retreated and practically isolated themselves from the outside world.

Flying Swan Sect also didn't send envoys to the celebration, which didn't surprise Meng Zhang either. By establishing the Hanhai Alliance, Taiyi Sect had made it clear that they wanted to stand independently from the Flying Swan Sect. As the ruling power in the Endless Sea of Sand, the Flying Swan Sect had already shown remarkable tolerance towards Taiyi Sect's existence. However, the formation of the Hanhai Alliance, which had a somewhat provocative undertone, naturally didn't sit well with them, leading to a visibly frosty attitude.

In reality, the Hanhai Alliance had already been established and operational before this celebration. Flying Swan Sect's response had been cold and indifferent, indicating their dissatisfaction.

Flying Swan Sect proactively severed ties with the Hanhai Alliance and suspended all trade between the two factions. While there had been a complementary aspect to the resources between the two sects, Taiyi Sect's increasing development and talent pool allowed them to achieve self-sufficiency in terms of pills, magic tools, talismans, and other resources. Therefore, the impact of cutting ties with the Flying Swan Sect was minimal.

Taiyi Sect's trade caravans no longer needed to pass through the Flying Swan Sect's territory to reach Great Wind City; they could travel directly. If they needed any specific resources, they could simply purchase them directly from Great Wind City.

As a response, Taiyi Sect ceased its regular flights to Flying Swan Sect's territory and established outposts and patrol teams at the border between the two sects. Interaction between the two territories came to a halt, and any cultivators needing to travel between them had to find their way through the boundaries of both factions.

With the establishment of the Hanhai Alliance, the relationship between Taiyi Sect and the Flying Swan Sect, once temporary allies, had plummeted and reached a freezing point. Nevertheless, the two sides maintained enough restraint and only exhibited a slight hostility. Given their respective situations, neither side wanted to add another enemy at this time. Taiyi Sect had only recently risen, and there was still a significant gap in strength between them and the Flying Swan Sect. The latter was also facing pressure from Fire Cloud Sect and had no desire to invite further trouble.

Both sides might be displeased with each other, but they were keeping sufficient restraint.

Chapter 490: Disgruntled

After the establishment ceremony of the Grand Sea Alliance, Meng Zhang received several distinguished guests, engaged in warm conversations, and then took the initiative to bid farewell and returned alone to the back. The remaining matters would naturally be handled properly by Senior Disciple Niu Dawei. Dealing with the affairs between the members of the alliance was Niu Dawei's responsibility.

As Taiyi Sect gradually developed and constructed the Grand Lion Ridge, various buildings on the ridge became more complete. Meng Zhang looked at a nearby mountain peak, his face showing slight displeasure.

On this day of celebration, Meng Zhang had personally invited Qin Hongying to participate long ago, but Qin Hongying politely declined. According to her, she had stated beforehand that she would not involve herself in the conflicts among the Cultivation World; she was only here to help Taiyi Sect resist the monsters.

As a guest of Taiyi Sect, Qin Hongying had been supported by them for quite some time, but she didn't give any face to Meng Zhang. Naturally, Meng Zhang was not happy about it.

Thanks to the efforts of Deep EarthSpirit General over the years, the Third Rank spirit vein in the Grand Lion Ridge had recovered by a large extent. However, this Third Rank spirit vein was inherently insufficient, and its consumption was severe. Most of its spiritual energy was supplied to Qin Hongying, except for what was needed for maintaining the Third Rank Mountain Protection Great Formation – Metal Wind Violent Flame Formation.

As the sect's master, Meng Zhang ironically did not receive a sufficient supply of spiritual energy from the Third Rank spirit vein.

As a Gold Core Daoist Master, Meng Zhang needed to absorb a large amount of spiritual energy daily, or else he couldn't sustain his original Cultivation Base. On the other hand, Qin Hongying, who had cut ties with the Dao, had made rapid progress in her Gold Core stage.

If it wasn't for a piece of spiritual marrow in his possession that had supplemented a considerable part of his spiritual energy needs during his breakthrough to Gold Core stage, he would have struggled to maintain his Cultivation Base, let alone make progress. However, that piece of spiritual marrow had been mostly depleted during his Gold Core breakthrough, and over the years, it had been continuously diminishing. It wouldn't be long before it was completely exhausted.

When that happened, the insufficient spiritual energy from the Third Rank spirit vein would force Meng Zhang to consume high-grade spiritual stones constantly to continue his cultivation.

Though Taiyi Sect seemed to possess vast territory and abundant resources, it also faced significant expenses. Just the employment of Qin Hongying as a Gold Core guest required a substantial price. The promised spiritual stones and resources to the Qin Family were still not fully delivered.

If Taiyi Sect had to continue supporting Meng Zhang's needs, it would burden the sect heavily and even affect its development.

Thinking about these matters, Meng Zhang grew more dissatisfied with Qin Hongying.

Hiring this Gold Core guest had not been cost-effective. Initially, it was due to the pressure from Dark Crow Demon General that Meng Zhang reluctantly agreed to Qin Hongying's conditions. At times, he even felt like he had been tricked by her.

If there were other candidates available, Meng Zhang would genuinely consider hiring a new Gold Core guest.

Shaking his head, Meng Zhang put aside these vexing issues and returned to his usual residence.

Not long after he came back, Deep EarthSpirit General and Delicate WaterSpirit General came to pay their respects to him. Meng Zhang received the two Guardian Spirit Generals in the courtyard.

With the goal of cultivating Gold Core-level combat power for Taiyi Sect as soon as possible, the sect had been collecting various suitable Heaven and Earth Spiritual Objects over the years for the three Guardian Spirit Generals to absorb and use.

After absorbing these Heaven and Earth Spiritual Objects, Deep EarthSpirit General and Shocking ThunderSpirit General had already restored their Cultivation Base to the completion stage of Foundation Building. It seemed like they were just one step away from reaching the Gold Core stage.

However, crossing this last step was uncertain and could take an unknown amount of time. The spiritual items that could help Deep EarthSpirit General and others reach the Gold Core stage were beyond the current capability of Taiyi Sect to access. All the sect could do was explore and develop their own territory in the hope of encountering such treasures.

This was a matter of luck, something they couldn't actively seek.

Of course, Meng Zhang wasn't entirely helpless. After entering the Gold Core stage, he continued to cultivate various Divine Abilities and secret techniques, including his insights into the Grand Evolving Fortune.

He had a faint feeling that his Grand Evolving Fortune technique would soon have a breakthrough. When that happened, he would be able to use it to deduce the whereabouts of the sought-after treasures.

Grand Evolving Fortune had helped Meng Zhang solve many problems before and rarely let him down. Now, he pinned his hopes on this technique.

Of course, Grand Evolving Fortune was different from other secret techniques. Sometimes, even if he felt a breakthrough was imminent, there might still be obstacles to overcome.

Meng Zhang wasn't sure when his Grand Evolving Fortune technique would enter the next stage.

Delicate WaterSpirit General, who came together with Deep EarthSpirit General to visit Meng Zhang, was quite a rare guest. Although she showed respect on the surface, there was a hint of disdain in her attitude towards Meng Zhang.

Normally, she seldom interacted with Meng Zhang and rarely took the initiative to visit him. It was normal for capable individuals to have a certain temperament, and Meng Zhang was not someone who lacked tolerance.

Delicate WaterSpirit General excelled in various aspects and had her unique strengths, making her extremely valuable to the sect. After awakening just a few years ago, she had only been at the Refining Qi completion stage, but now she had already reached the late stage of Foundation Building.

Though it was due to the sect's continuous supply of various water-system spiritual items, Delicate WaterSpirit General's personal efforts should not be overlooked. She recovered her Cultivation Base at a faster rate compared to Deep EarthSpirit General and Shocking ThunderSpirit General.

Especially in terms of combat strength, she often displayed power beyond her current Cultivation Base realm. Challenging higher-level opponents in the Cultivation World was not common, but Delicate WaterSpirit General had this ability.

During the invasion of Demon Wind Gobi by Taiyi Sect and the great battle with the army of monsters, Delicate WaterSpirit General had displayed immense prowess, killing many powerful Second Rank monsters. Her contributions were crucial in securing victory alongside the Gold Core cultivators like Meng Zhang.

Moreover, Delicate WaterSpirit General had extensive knowledge and expertise in various cultivation arts. She was particularly adept at Spirit Plant Technique, with great insights into cultivating spiritual herbs.

The most crucial medicinal gardens of Taiyi Sect were constructed by Delicate WaterSpirit General after Deep EarthSpirit General had adjusted the spirit veins. She personally cultivated and transplanted various spiritual herbs, significantly improving the quality and quantity of the sect's medicinal output.

Delicate WaterSpirit General was also well-versed in the rare Spirit Water Conceiving Dan Art, allowing her to refine some special elixirs. She had a profound understanding of the seldom-seen water refinement technique in artifact forging as well.